September 20, 2006

Mr. Ray Melleady  
Interim Executive Director  
Capital District Transportation Authority  
110 Watervliet Avenue  
Albany, NY 12206

RE: PTSB CASE #8792

Dear Mr. Melleady:

The Public Transportation Safety Board received notice of a bus fire involving the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA), which occurred on State Street and Lawnwood Street, Schenectady, NY, on January 13, 2006

Based on a review of the enclosed Abbreviated Report, no further action is necessary.

Sincerely,

John F. Guinan  
Executive Director  
Public Transportation Safety Board

Enclosure
At approximately 11:35pm, Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) bus # 2037 was traveling westbound on State Street when bus #2037 lost power and the transmission warning light came on. The operator stopped the bus, and safely evacuated the 46 passengers, pulled the master battery switch. The operator walked to the rear of the bus and noticed small flames and oil dripping from the rear engine compartment. The Schenectady fire department responded to the scene and extinguished the fire. The bus was not equipped with a fire suppression system. There were no reported injuries. The left side upper engine compartment sustained severe damage. The bus was towed to the Albany Division and secured.

The environment did not play a role in this incident.

Bus #2037 is a 1998 Orion 6 transit type bus with a seating capacity for thirty two passengers. Preventive Maintenance Inspections (PMI's) are conducted every 6,000 miles in accordance with the System Safety Program Plan and the manufacturer’s recommended service intervals. In addition, all CDTA buses undergo a critical safety inspection every 3,000 miles. The most recent PMI was completed on December 7, 2005 and the bus had traveled 5,269 miles at the time of the accident. There were no safety sensitive defects noted in the last sixty days prior to the accident that were considered causative to the accident.

A post fire inspection was performed on March 14, 2006. The inspection found the most probable cause of the fire was the failure of two hydraulic lines connected to the hydraulic cooling fan motor. The 1” metal braided return line was ruptured due to intense heat. The second 3/8” metal braided flow control line (3300 psi) separated from the coupling of the fan motor, causing hydraulic fluid to be sprayed through the engine compartment then came in contact with either the turbo charger or the exhaust system, igniting the hydraulic fluid causing the engine fire.
The bus operator was hired by the CDTA on December 03, 2001 and completed the standard “New Bus Operator Training Program”. A review of the driver’s New York State Department of Motor Vehicle’s records showed no violations or suspensions. New York State Vehicle & Traffic Law, Article 19-A records were complete and up-to-date. The bus operator had no previous accidents with the company. A post accident drug and alcohol test was not administered to the bus driver due to the nature of the accident.

In an interview with the PTSB staff the bus operator indicated that the transmission warning light came on, the bus lost acceleration, the operator rolled the bus to the side of the road, shut the engine down and pulled the master battery shut off switch. The operator stated he walked to the rear of the bus and noticed small flames and transmission fluid leaking in the rear engine compartment. The bus operator evacuated 46 passengers and told them to go across the street for there safety. Three of the passengers called 911. The operator stated he had no time to call dispatch. The operator of a CDTA eastbound bus witnessed the fire and called dispatch.

The Public Transportation Safety Board staff finds that the most probable cause of the fire was a separation of the fitting from the fan motor end of the 3/8” hydraulic hose which was unlikely detected prior to failure.

CDTA reviewed the accident on January 20, 2006 and found the bus fire to be non-preventable, additionally the maintenance department conducted a fleet wide campaign looking for defective hydraulic hoses. None were found to be in need of replacement.

Based on the actions taken by CDTA in this case, the Public Transportation Safety Board staff makes no further recommendations.

INVESTIGATOR: M. F. GLUSKIN

CHIEF, ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION SECTION
DATE

DIRECTOR, PCSB, NYSDOT
DATE