April 18, 2007

Mr. Thomas Savage, President
MTA Bus Company
128-15 28th Avenue
Flushing, NY 11354

RE: PTSB CASE #8958

Dear Mr. Savage:

The Public Transportation Safety Board received notice of a mechanical failure bus accident involving the MTA Bus Company, which occurred on Beach 19th Street at Brookhaven Avenue, Queens, NY, on May 22, 2006.

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

Sincerely,

Brian O. Rowback
Executive Director
Public Transportation Safety Board.

Enclosure
At approximately 9:51 am, MTA Bus Company (MTA BC) bus #5954 was traveling northbound on Beach 19th Street when the left rear outer wheel separated from the rear axle. The wheel rolled off the bus and struck two parked autos. No injury claims were reported. The bus and the two involved autos sustained slight damage. The bus driver claimed a mechanical failure. The NYC Police responded to the accident and no summonses were issued.

In the vicinity of the accident site, Beach 19th Street is a 32 foot wide, one way road with no pavement marking, accommodating one northbound travel lane. Brookhaven Avenue is 34 foot wide, accommodating one eastbound travel lane. Parking is permitted at the curbs. Both streets are straight, level and asphalt paved. At the time of the accident it was daylight and the weather was dry and clear. The posted area speed limit is 30 mph.

Bus #5954 is a 1997 Orion transit bus with a seating capacity of 40 passengers. A review of the bus records indicated that Preventive Maintenance Inspections (PMI) are performed at JFK Depot at regular 4,000 (+500) mile intervals. The most recent PMI was completed on January 4, 2006. The bus had traveled 5,757 miles at the time of the accident (overdue 1,257 miles). A post accident inspection of bus #5954 was conducted by the Public Transportation Safety Board (PTSB) staff in conjunction with NYCT and MTA BC staff on May 22, 2006. The inspection revealed that the left rear outer wheel of the bus separated from the rear axle and rolled away from the bus. The flange part of the rim and all lug nuts remained on the hub and were secured. Further inspection indicated that the outer part of the rim broke off the flange part of the rim. It was noted that a pre-existing fatigue crack was found near one of the hand holes. It was determined that the left rear inner tire was partially flat and increased the load on the outer wheel and contributed to the failure.

The PMI inspection sheet used in the depot requires the examination for any wear and rim cracks. According to the inspection it is most probably that the “rim condition” existed for a period of time and, therefore, the defect could have been identified during the last inspection had it been performed within the established mileage interval.
The bus driver was initially hired by Green Bus Lines on April 4, 1980, and completed the company’s new bus operator training program. A review of the bus driver’s Department of Motor Vehicles records for the last three years showed no violations or suspensions. New York State Vehicle & Traffic Law, Article 19-A records were complete and up-to-date. A review of the driver’s MTA BC record for the last three years showed two minor collision accidents on 1/07/2004 and on 3/23/2005, resulting in a verbal warning. A post accident drug and alcohol test administered to the bus driver 3 hours and 9 minutes after the accident was negative. The delay in administering the drug and alcohol test was due to the bus driver being detained at the scene for the purpose of investigation.

In an interview with the PTSB staff the bus driver indicated that he was driving the bus on Beach 19th Street at Brookhaven Avenue. He stated as the bus moved across the intersection of Brookhaven Avenue he heard a “thump” and stopped the bus. He exited the bus and observed that the left rear wheel of the bus came off and struck two parked autos.

The Public Transportation Safety Board staff finds that the most probable cause of the accident was a failure of the loading capacity of the left rear outer rim due to a pre-existing fatigue crack condition.

Contributing to the accident was the failure of the maintenance staff to perform an established PMI on time that would have identified the existing defects on the rim and prevent the accident from occurring.

MTA BC reviewed the accident on June 22, 2006 and found it non-preventable on the driver’s side. The bus driver performance was evaluated as satisfactory and he was returned to passenger service.

MTA BC campaigned the entire bus fleet and issued a Maintenance Directive to all depot regarding wheels, rims, tires and torque pointers.

Since this accident, a new management team has been instituted at the JFK Depot. A new AGM has been appointed as well as a new General Superintendent of Maintenance. The new General Superintendent of Maintenance has created a database for mileage on buses to be entered nightly which he reviews weekly to schedule buses for PMI.

Based on the action taken by the MTA BC regarding this accident, the Public Transportation Safety Board staff makes no recommendations.

INVESTIGATOR: Mikhail Palanker