PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
ABBREVIATED BUS ACCIDENT REPORT

1. CASE: 9066
2. PROPERTY NAME: Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA)
3a. ACCIDENT TYPE: Fatality  3b. Accident Severity Index: 9.5
4a. DATE: August 12, 2006  4b. TIME: 4:51 p.m.
5. ACCIDENT LOCATION: River Road
6. TOWN/CITY/BOROUGH: Wheatfield
7. SUMMONS: None
8. BUS NUMBER: 8012  8a. YEAR: 2002  8b. MAKE: Cable Car Concepts
9. NUMBER OF INJURIES: 4  10. FATALITIES: 1
11. HOURS OF SERVICE: 8 hrs 32 min in the last 24 hrs/ 58 hrs 9 min in last 7 days
12. SYNOPSIS:

At approximately 4:51 p.m., the operator of NFTA trolley bus #8012, was traveling northbound on River Road when it struck the right rear of an auto which was stopped in traffic attempting to make a left turn across the southbound lane into a driveway. The auto was forced into the oncoming southbound travel lane where the passenger was ejected (not wearing seat belt) when the auto was struck by a another oncoming vehicle. She was pronounced dead by the Erie County Medical Examiners Office. The bus came to final rest in a grassy ditch off River Road. There were no passengers were on board the trolley bus at the time of the accident. The bus sustained moderate damage, with extensive damage to both autos. The Niagara County Sheriff’s Department, Buffalo FD, and NFTA Transit PD responded to the scene. The bus operator, and occupants of both vehicles were transported to various hospitals.

In the vicinity of the accident site, River Road is a 21.9 foot wide, two way road divided by a double yellow pavement marking, accommodating one northbound and one southbound travel lane. The road is 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 45 mph.

Bus #8012 is a 2002 trolley bus with a seating capacity for twenty-one passengers. Preventive Maintenance Inspections (PMI) are conducted every 3,000 miles in accordance with the NFTA’s System Safety Program Plan and the manufacturer’s recommended service intervals. In addition, all NFTA buses undergo a critical safety inspection every 3,000 miles. The last PMI was completed on July 3, 2006 and the bus had traveled 2,284 miles at the time of the accident. A post accident inspection of bus #8012 was conducted by the Public Transportation Safety Board (PTSB) staff in conjunction with NFTA maintenance staff on August 14, 2006. No defects were found that would be considered causative to the accident. Decelerometer tests were performed on the braking system and showed stopping distances that met the NFTA adopted standards for passenger vehicles of the NYSDOT Regulations (Title 17of NYCRR, Article 3, Part 720).
The bus operator was hired by NFTA on October 26, 1998 and completed the standard bus operator and defensive driving training. A post accident drug and alcohol test was administered to the bus operator 3 hrs 23 min after the accident was negative. The delay in administering the drug and alcohol test was due to the bus operator being treated at the hospital. A review of the driver's New York State Department of Motor Vehicle's records showed no violations or suspensions. Article 19-A records were found in order and up to date. A review of the driver's NFTA record for the last three years revealed one preventable accident on 1/23/06 (Operator backed into pole).

In an interview with the PTSB staff the operator stated he was heading north on River Road. The bus operator stated he checked his mirrors looked up and noticed the top of a car. He stated that he had braked the trolley bus, pulled left, then he steered hard right to avoid a white or silver car. The driver said he blacked out and ended up in a ditch. He stated there were no passengers on board.

The Public Transportation Safety Board staff finds that the most probable cause of the fatal accident was the failure of the bus operator to establish and maintain a sufficient following distance between vehicles to safely stop. If the bus operator had utilized his skills and training he should have avoided the collision.

NFTA reviewed the accident on July 22, 2007 and determined that the accident was preventable. On July 24, 2007 the operator was terminated.

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

INVESTIGATOR: Mike Gluskin

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CHIEF, ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION SECTION

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DIRECTOR, PCSB, NYSDOT