PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
ABBREVIATED BUS ACCIDENT REPORT

1. CASE: 9169
2. PROPERTY NAME: Inter County Motor Coach

3a. ACCIDENT TYPE: Bus Fire
3b. Accident Severity Index: 0
4a. DATE: November 7, 2006
4b. TIME: 10:20 am
5. ACCIDENT LOCATION: New York Avenue at Walt Whitman Mall
6. TOWN/CITY/BOROUGH: Huntington
7. SUMMONS: None
8. BUS NUMBER: 9916
8a. YEAR: 1999
8b. MAKE: Orion
9. NUMBER OF INJURIES: 0
10. FATALITIES: 0
11. HOURS OF SERVICE: 3 hrs and 35 min in last 24 hrs/43 hrs and 35 min in last 7 days
12. SYNOPSIS:

At approximately 10:20 am, Inter County Motor Coach Incorporated (ICMC) bus #9916 traveling northbound on New York Avenue was entering the Walt Whitman Mall parking lot when an unidentified passing motorist notified the bus driver of smoke in the rear of the bus. The bus driver secured the bus, alighted all passengers, notified the dispatcher and started to spray the fire with the bus’s fire extinguisher. The local fire department responded to the accident and extinguished the fire. No injury claims were reported. The bus sustained extensive damage to the engine compartment.

In the vicinity of the accident site, New York Avenue is a two-way road divided by a grass median, accommodating two northbound and two southbound travel lanes. The roadway 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 35 mph.

Bus # 9916 is a 1999, 35 foot length, Orion transit bus with a seating capacity of 34 passengers. A review of the bus records indicated that Preventive Maintenance Inspections (PMI) are performed at ICMC at regular 6,000 mile intervals and the most recent was completed on October 28, 2006. The bus had traveled 592 miles at the time of the accident. A post accident inspection of bus #9916 was conducted by the PTSB staff in conjunction with the ICMC personnel on November 8, 2006. The inspection of the bus revealed that the fire started in the engine compartment. The alternator’s D.C. output terminal was found loose causing the battery cable to heat due to increased electrical resistance in the connection. The heat damaged the output stud’s seal rubber rings causing an oil leak. Then the heated cable melted the cable insulation causing a short with the grounded P-clamp. The arcing initiated a fire that was fed by the leaking oil. A review of the bus maintenance record showed that during the last PMI (on October 28, 2006, 9 days prior the accident) no cable defects were found, giving indication that the maintainer failed to identify the loose battery cable - alternator connection during the inspection.
The bus driver was hired by ICMC on December 12, 2004, and completed the new bus operator training program. A review of the 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 ICMC record revealed one non-preventable collision accident on 05/02/06. 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 driver indicated that while he was driving into the Walt Whitman Mall, an auto driver next to the bus, notified the bus driver that there was a lot of smoke coming out the rear of bus. The bus driver pulled the bus into the mall parking lot, away from any other autos, evacuated all passengers and called the base. The driver tried to use the onboard fire extinguisher, but the fire was already too great.

The Public Transportation Safety Board staff finds that the most probable cause of the fire was the failure of the maintainer to identify a loose battery cable - alternator connection during the last PMI and repair it.

The Inter County Motor Coach Incorporated reviewed the accident on November 20, 2006, and found it to be preventable. The mechanic who performed the last PMI was issued a warning. He was re instructed on the proper procedure to inspect the electrical system on a PMI.

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

INVESTIGATOR: Mikhail Palanker