PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
ABBREVIATED BUS ACCIDENT REPORT

1. CASE#: 9180
2. PROPERTY NAME: MTA Bus Co
3a. ACCIDENT TYPE: Fire
3b. Accident Severity Index: 0.00
4a. DATE: November 20, 2006
4b. TIME: 2:25 p.m.
5. ACCIDENT LOCATION: Forest Avenue at Greene Avenue
6. TOWN/CITY/BOROUGH: Queens, NY
7. SUMMONS: No
8. BUS NUMBER: 7148
8a. YEAR: 1993
8b. MAKE: TMC/RTS
9. NUMBER OF INJURIES: 0
10. FATALITIES: 0
11. HOURS OF SERVICE: 12 hr 3 min in last 24 hrs/63 hrs 23 min in last 7 days
12. SYNOPSIS:

At approximately 2:25 p.m., MTA Bus Company (MTABC) bus #7148 was moving north on Forest Avenue and approaching the intersection with Greene Avenue when the bus driver was informed by a bus passenger that smoke was entering the bus from under the rear bench seat. The bus driver stopped the bus, safely evacuated the bus passengers and called for assistance. The fire department responded and extinguished the fire. There were no reported injuries. The bus sustained extensive damage within the engine compartment.

The environment played no part in the fire.

Bus #7148 is a 1993 TMC/RTS-06 transit type bus housed and maintained at the La Guardia Depot with a seating capacity of 45 passengers. A review of the bus records showed that Preventive Maintenance Inspections are performed at regular 4,000 mile intervals (±500miles), the most recent was completed on October 20, 2006 and the bus had traveled 2,365 miles since then. There were no safety or recurring defects noted in the 45 days prior to the accident. A post incident inspection of the bus was conducted on November 22, 2006. The inspection found that a braided stainless steel high pressure power steering line had chaffed against an engine compartment bulkhead which caused it to rupture and spray hydraulic oil into the engine compartment where it made contact with a hot exhaust component and caught fire. As the fire spread throughout the engine compartment it gained intensity due to the failure of an “O” ring seal on the AC compressor, consumed by the fire, which allowed pressurized refrigerant and lubricating oil to escape and catch fire. Due to fire damage no decelerometer tests were performed on the bus braking systems. Due to the age of the bus and the damage sustained in the fire, the bus was scrapped.

The bus driver was hired by Triboro Coach Corp. on February 20, 2005, completed their New Bus Operator Training Program and was retained in the takeover of Triboro Coach Corp. by the MTA BC. A review of the driver's Department of Motor Vehicles records for the past three years showed no violations, convictions or suspensions. NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law, Article 19-A records were reviewed and found to be complete, in-order and up-to-date. A review of the driver's NYCT accident record since his date of hire showed one non-preventable collision accident (07/15/06). Post accident drug and alcohol tests performed on the bus driver upon his release from the accident scene, 2 hours and 40 minutes from the time of the accident, were negative.
In an interview the bus driver indicated that while traveling north on Forest Avenue near the intersection with Green Avenue he was informed by a bus passenger that smoke was entering the bus from under the rear bench seat. The bus driver safely curbed the bus, evacuated the 25 passengers and called for assistance. The driver also indicated that the fire department arrived within minutes of his call for assistance and extinguished the fire.

MTA Bus Company maintenance personnel are required, while performing a Preventive Maintenance Inspection (PMI), to be especially vigilant in looking for chafed wiring or hoses – especially in older buses such as the one involved in this fire. As such, the rupturing of the braided stainless steel covered power steering line, which caused the fire, had to have been chafing for an extended period of time. Evidence of that chafing should have been found by the maintainers who performed the PMI.

Public Transportation Safety Board staff finds that the probable cause of this fire was the catastrophic failure of a chafed braided stainless steel covered high pressure power steering line which sprayed oil into the engine compartment where it made contact with hot engine components and caught fire. Contributing to the fire was the failure of maintenance personnel to identify the chafed line during the most recent Preventive Maintenance Inspection.

The MTA Bus Company found that the maintainers who performed the most recent Preventive Maintenance Inspection contributed to the fire by failing to identify the chafed power steering line and issued them a written warning, which was appealed.

Based on the action taken by the MTA Bus Company regarding this fire the Public Transportation Safety Board staff makes no recommendation in this case.

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