On June 9, 2008, at approximately 11:50 am MTA New York City Transit (NYCT) bus #6206 was traveling westbound on Victory Boulevard when the bus driver claimed that the bus lost steering and pulled to the right. The bus driver honked the horn and applied the brakes in an attempt to avoid a collision. However, the right front of the bus struck the left rear of an unoccupied parked auto. The bus driver and the driver of the parked auto, who was standing near his auto, claimed various injuries, were transported to a local hospital, treated and released. The bus sustained slight damage with extensive damage to the auto.

In the vicinity of the accident site, Victory Boulevard is a 45 foot wide, two way road divided by a full barrier yellow pavement marking, accommodating one eastbound and one westbound travel lane. Parking is permitted at the curbs. The roadway is straight, asphalt paved and it has a slight downgrade in the western direction. At the time of the accident the weather was dry and clear. The area speed limit is 30 mph.

Bus #6206 is a 1999 Orion V transit type bus with a seating capacity of 40 passengers. A review of the bus records indicated that Preventive Maintenance Inspections (PMI) at Castleton Depot are performed at regular 6,000 mile intervals or 90 days, whichever comes first. The most recent PMI was performed on May 29, 2008 and the bus had traveled 868 miles. There were no safety or recurring defects noted in the 45 days prior to the accident. A post accident inspection of bus #6206 was conducted by the Public Transportation Safety Board (PTSB) staff in conjunction with MTA-NYCT staff on June 10, 2008. The post accident inspection revealed that the Pitman arm separated from its connection to the steering box shaft. Further investigation revealed that the Pitman arm securement nut was found 400 feet from the point of impact. The inspection of the parts indicated that the lock retainer tabs were broken and the steering shaft splines were worn and rusty. Staff reached a conclusion that the failure was progressive in nature and that the condition existed for a period of time. The most recent PMI performed on May 29, 2008 did not discover any steering related defects. Further investigation confirmed the mechanical failure and the separation of the Pitman arm from the steering shaft occurred due to a pre-existing condition.

The bus driver was hired by the MTA NYCT on January 12, 2004, and completed the standard “New Bus Operator Training Program”. A review of the bus driver’s Department of Motor Vehicles records 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 NYCT records for the last three years showed one non-preventable collision accident. The post accident drug and alcohol test administered to the bus driver 3 hours and 26 minutes after the accident was negative. The delay in administering the drug and alcohol test was due to the bus driver being transported to a local hospital and treated.

In an interview with the PTSB staff, the bus driver indicated that he made a relief at 10:28 a.m. and did not have any problems with the bus until 11:50 a.m. (time of the accident). The bus was traveling westbound on Victory Boulevard. The bus driver stated that he made a service stop at mid block of Clove Road and continued forward on the route. When the bus was passing Ontario Avenue (approximately 200 feet from the point of impact) the bus driver heard a noise like something dropping off, but due to the noise on the bus he did not realize that it was related to the steering. At that time the bus was not moving fast and when the bus was about 100 feet from the auto the bus driver realized that something was wrong with the steering. The bus driver honked the horn and applied the brakes. However, the right front of the bus struck the left rear of a parked auto.

In an interview with the PTSB staff the auto driver stated that he was standing at the rear of his auto removing something from his trunk, when he noticed that the bus was headed towards him. He jumped to the right and fell to the ground.

Based on physical evidence, review of the maintenance records and mileage traveled since its last PMI, MTA NYCT made a conclusion that the bus maintainer who performed the most recent PMI failed to identify the damaged locking retainer tabs (which keep the securement bolt in place), preventing the Pitman arm from loosening.

The Public Transportation Safety Board staff was unable to determine the most probable primary cause of the accident.

The MTA NYCT reviewed the accident on August 25, 2008 and found it to be non-preventable on behalf of the bus operator. The bus driver performance was evaluated and he was returned to passenger service. Office of System Safety has determined that the most probable cause of this collision was a progressive failure of the pitman arm lock retainer assembly. Contributing to the accident was the failure of the bus maintainer to identify this pre-existing condition during the bus’s most recent PMI. The maintainer was given progressive discipline in line with his record. All SO inspectors and maintainers were instructed to pay special attention to the Pitman arm retainer.

INVESTIGATOR: Mikhail Palanker

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CHIEF, ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION SECTION

DATE

DIRECTOR, PCSB, NYSDOT

DATE