PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
ABBREVIATED BUS ACCIDENT REPORT

1. CASE: 9861
2. PROPERTY NAME: Capital District Transportation Authority
3a. ACCIDENT TYPE: Fire
3b. Accident Severity Index: 0.0
4a. DATE: August 14, 2008
4b. TIME: 11:45 am
5. ACCIDENT LOCATION: Consaul Road, Latham, NY
6. TOWN/CITY/BOROUGH: Colonie, NY
7. SUMMONS: None
8. BUS NUMBER: 200
8a. YEAR: 2005
8b. MAKE Ford F-450
9. NUMBER OF INJURIES: None
10. FATALITIES: None
11. HOURS OF SERVICE: Not Related
12. SYNOPSIS:

At approximately 11:45 am, the operator of Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) bus #200 was traveling southbound on Balltown Road when the operator felt the engine jerk and about to stall. The bus operator turned onto Consaul Road and called dispatch for a bus change. The bus operator secured the bus and opened the driver’s door. The bus operator noticed smoke and flames coming from under the rear of the bus. The operator evacuated the only single passenger and called dispatch to inform them of the fire. Local police and fire departments responded to the scene and extinguished the fire. The bus was not equipped with a fire suppression system. The bus was transported on a flat bed to CDTA maintenance facility at the Albany Division and secured.

The environment did not play a role in this incident.

Bus #200 is a 2005 Ford F-450 bus with a seating capacity for sixteen passengers. Preventive Maintenance Inspections (PMI’s) are conducted every 6,000 miles in accordance with the System Safety Program Plan and the manufacturer’s recommended service intervals. The most recent PMI was completed on August 7, 2008 and the bus had traveled 726 miles at the time of the fire. There were no safety sensitive defects noted in the last sixty days prior to the accident that were considered causative to the accident.

A post fire inspection was performed on August 14, 2008, with the PTSB staff and CDTA maintenance staff. The most probable cause of fire was a direct electrical short of the positive battery cable which chafed and caused arcing against the battery compartment door. It was determined that the cause of the arcing was due to the cable vibrating loose and not being properly routed and secured.
In response, CDTA management instituted a battery campaign for twenty seven similar buses to ensure batteries and trays are properly secured and that cables are clean and routed correctly. Management also issued letters of discipline to the involved mechanics who were responsible for conducting proper repairs and PMI’s on the batteries and cables of this bus. Also, management will post a procedural reminder on the proper inspection and maintenance of batteries, battery cables, and battery trays.

The bus operator was hired by CDTA on June 23, 2008 and completed the standard bus operator training program. A review of the driver’s New York State Department of Motor Vehicle’s records showed no violations or suspensions. New York State Vehicle & Traffic Law, Article 19-A records were complete and up-to-date. The bus operator had no previous accidents with the company. A post accident drug and alcohol test was not administered to the bus driver due to the nature of the incident.

In an interview with the PTSB staff, the bus operator indicated he was traveling southbound on Balltown Road, and felt the bus jerk. The bus operator said it felt like the engine was about to stall. The operator said he turned onto Consaul Road and called dispatch for a bus change. The bus operator noticed smoke on the driver’s side of the bus and he stopped and secured the bus. The bus operator evacuated one passenger then called dispatch to inform them of a fire and put his safety triangles on the road. Local police and fire departments responded to the scene and extinguished the fire.

The Public Transportation Safety Board staff finds that the most probable cause of the fire was a direct electrical short of the positive battery cable which had vibrated loose and, overtime, chafed and arced against the battery compartment door.

CDTA reviewed the incident and found the bus fire to preventable. The bus fire was found to be an isolated incident.

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

INVESTIGATOR: M. F. Gluskin

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CHIEF, ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION SECTION  DATE

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DIRECTOR, PCSB, NYS DOT  DATE