

# Bus crash in New York City kills three and leaves others injured

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Two buses collided on Monday morning in the crowded downtown Flushing neighborhood of the New York City borough of Queens. Three people were confirmed dead and 16 were injured, several of them critically.

A surveillance video from area shows a Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) bus, the Q20, making a right-hand turn at the intersection of Northern Boulevard and Main Street, and then being struck from behind by a charter bus, owned and operated by Dahlia Travel and Tours, which reportedly was traveling at a high speed.

The Dahlia bus crashed into a fast food restaurant, causing a small fire and significant damage to the corner building. The fatalities in the crash included the driver of the charter bus, a pedestrian who was trapped under one of the buses, and a passenger in the MTA bus. The accident scene was one of extraordinary devastation at a very busy and well-known intersection.

The area is near the terminus of the number 7 subway line, one of the most overcrowded lines in the city, and the only line to service the predominantly working-class area of eastern Queens. The intersection is in a busy commuter and shopping area, where many thousands of subway riders transfer to or from buses as part of their commute. The accident took place at about 6:15 a.m. Had it occurred an hour or two later, during the peak of the rush hour, or even later in the day, when the area remains packed with shoppers and commuters, the casualties could have been much greater in number.

Further details on what caused the crash are not yet available, and the National Transportation Safety Board has indicated it will investigate the accident. The driver of the charter bus had been terminated two years earlier from his job as a bus operator for the MTA, after he fled the scene of a highway accident between his own

car and two others. He was later convicted of driving while intoxicated and evading arrest, and was sentenced to 18 months' probation.

Early reports indicate that the Dahlia bus may have been speeding, with one published source reporting the speedometer was stuck at 60 mph. The video from a surveillance camera also suggests the Dahlia bus was traveling at an excessive speed. The default speed limit on NYC streets is 25 mph.

More is undoubtedly involved than the possible culpability of this particular driver, however. Private carriers are driven primarily to maximize profit, which regularly puts the safety of customers and employees at risk.

The *New York Daily News* reported that Dahlia has a history of safety issues. In 2003, two people were killed and 28 injured when a bus operated by the company ran off the roadway on the Garden State Parkway and flipped over while on its way to the Taj Mahal casino owned by Donald Trump. In February 2016, a Dahlia bus traveling from New York City to a casino in Connecticut rolled over, injuring 14.

The company has been red-flagged by federal officials for having many moving violations. As far back as the 2003 incident, the *New York Times* noted that Dahlia, along with other private carriers, had "frequent violation of parking and safety rules, with infractions including broken lights and windshield wipers and missing fire extinguishers."

An examination of Yelp reviews for Dahlia Travel shows dire warnings by patrons that a major accident is inevitable. One commenter from Connecticut said in March, "GET DAHLIA BUS COMPANY OFF THE ROAD NOW!!! ... We fear for everyone's safety."

A 2010 study, "Type of Motor Carrier and Driver History in Fatal Bus Crashes," from the Transportation

Research Institute at the University of Michigan, examined data from 1999 to 2005 involving accidents on American roadways. According to this report, about 63,000 buses (of all kinds) are involved in at least one accident each year; about 14,000 result in at least one injured person; and 325 result in a fatal injury.

This latest accident also points to broader problems in urban transportation in the US. The decrepit railroad system has made car or bus travel the only alternative for much inter-city and regional transportation. One aspect of the social counter-revolution that began about four decades ago was the deregulation of transportation, creating what remains a fiercely competitive market, particularly for inter-city travel by bus, although other sectors, such as pupil transportation for public and private schools, are also deeply impacted, as was evidenced in the 2013 attack by New York City's then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg on the wages and benefits of 9,000 school bus drivers who worked for several private companies.

Driver wages, health care, bus maintenance and government oversight have all gone by the wayside, and the development of needed public transportation is dependent on bribing private operators, as is the case in the northern exurbs of New York City, an area whose population is expanding because of the crisis in affordable housing. Local communities find that they must foot the bill for park-and-ride facilities along private bus routes, if they seek any option for getting residents to and from work besides cars.



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