

Metro ▾

	SECTIONS	0 MY SAVED	▾
NEWS ▶	METRO		🔍
ARTS ▶	BUSINESS ▶		
SPORTS ▶	OPINION ▶		
LIFESTYLE ▶	MAGAZINE ▶		
INSIDERS ▶	TODAY'S PAPER ▶		
LOTTERY ▶	OBITUARIES ▶		
GLOBE NORTH ▶	GLOBE SOUTH ▶		
GLOBE WEST ▶	GETTING IN ▶		

Metro

MBTA bus driver attacked by youths in Dorchester

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MARCH 10, 2013

ARTICLE COMMENTS (12)

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Tow-truck driver Karris Barrow said he was heading down a Dorchester street early Saturday morning when he saw more than a dozen teens at a bus stop assaulting an MBTA driver, who struggled to defend himself.

“It was crazy,” said Barrow, 24, of Roxbury.

He said he saw another 40 to 50 teens standing around the bus, which was stopped on Columbia Road near its intersection with Geneva Avenue. Some threw objects at the bus and taunted the driver, but he was able to fend the attackers off and close the doors and windows, Barrow said.

“They were 15, 16, 17 years old,” Barrow said. “They didn’t even look old enough to smoke.”

At a press conference Sunday afternoon, Transit Police Superintendent-in-Chief Joseph O'Connor said the 53-year-old driver was transported to Boston Medical Center, where he was treated for "minor injuries" and released.

But the nature of the assault was troubling, he said.

"This is a very unusual crime," O'Connor said. "We have seen an uptick in assaults on operators. However, those are generally over fare and they usually involve one or two individuals at most. This is the first time in a long time that I can remember that a group assaulted an operator."

The alleged assault happened shortly after 1 a.m. Saturday on a Route 16 bus coming from Forest Hills Station that had stopped to pick up passengers, officials said. The bus was headed toward Andrew Station.

Between 15 and 20 teenagers punched the bus driver and tried to pull him from the driver's-side window, O'Connor said.

The attack happened just after a passenger threw her paper Charlie Ticket at the driver after they had a fare-related dispute, O'Connor said, but authorities do not know if the two incidents are related.

Just after the passenger threw the ticket, the group of male teens walked in front of the bus, stopping it from going forward and attacked the driver, O'Connor said.

Some who were outside the bus tried to pull him from the window; others boarded the bus, O'Connor said. The driver was punched several times.

At some point, authorities believe the bus driver activated emergency lights and an alarm to signal that the bus was in trouble, O'Connor said, and the teens ran in several directions before Boston police and MBTA Transit police arrived.

Emergency medical technicians treated the driver at the scene before he was hospitalized.

No arrests have been made. Police do not believe any weapons were used in the attack.

O'Connor said the attack lasted "a brief amount of time," but did not know exactly how long.

Detectives found the Charlie Ticket that was thrown at the driver just before the attack and are checking to see if that can help them track down the passenger.

“We’re very early on in the investigation,” O’Connor said. “This is certainly a very serious event.”

The driver, who has been with the T since May 2010, will be interviewed again, he said.

“He’s very shaken up from what I’m told right now,” O’Connor said. “He’s not working as we speak but I’m sure that he will get the assistance he needs and hopefully return to work in the near future.”

Police have interviewed “some witnesses,” including an unknown number of bus passengers, he said. The bus did not have surveillance cameras on it.

Transit police ask that anyone who witnessed the attack or with information about it to contact detectives by calling 617-222-1050.

About one-third of the T’s bus fleet has cameras, O’Connor said, and the agency has plans to install them on more buses. Detectives are checking to see if the attack was caught by cameras installed on properties around where it happened, he said.

During 2013, there have been 22 cases of T drivers’ reporting being assaulted or threatened. Through the same period in 2012, there were 18 such cases, O’Connor said.

He said the assaults have not been concentrated in a certain area or along a certain route.

“There’s no pattern of where these assaults occur,” he said.

Sunday evening inside Forest Hills Station, Jenny Nguyen, 16, said she takes the Route 16 bus a few times per month to get to her high school, Boston Latin Academy.

“You wouldn’t suspect something like that would happen,” she said. “The 16 is such a quiet bus.”

Nguyen said Saturday’s attack and other reports of violence on T buses and trains have made her more nervous.

“It makes you watch your surroundings more when you’re on the bus,” she said.

Jay Orsha, 19, of Dorchester, said he has ridden the Route 16 bus regularly for the past several years and was shocked to hear about the attack, which he called “appalling.”

“It’s usually mad quiet,” on the 16, he said.

He and his friend Katie Jelfs, 18, of Mattapan said they hope the T will install cameras on more buses and take any other safety measures possible.

“You don’t feel safe anymore riding the T,” Jelfs said.

Barrow, who witnessed the incident, said he does not ride the T, citing a deadly shooting less than two weeks ago at a bus platform at the Dudley Square Station in Roxbury.

“It’s too dangerous,” he said. “There’s stuff like that. Shootings. Stabbings.”

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at mjrochele@gmail.com.

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