

Man struck by NJ Transit bus gets \$12.75M settlement for devastating brain injury

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A New Jersey Transit bus being towed after striking and critically injuring a pedestrian crossing Summit Ave in Summit on Nov. 2, 2016. The man settled his lawsuit with NJ Transit for \$12.75 million on Sept. 6, 2019.

By [Jeff Goldman | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com](#)

A man who suffered traumatic brain injuries after being [struck by a New Jersey Transit bus](#) whose accident-prone driver tested positive for cocaine settled his lawsuit for \$12.75 million.

Jason Gillespie, then 48, was hit in the crosswalk at the intersection of Summit Avenue and Union Place on Nov. 2, 2016. He suffered a permanent brain injury, multiple brain hemorrhages, skull fractures, a right clavicle fracture and multiple rib fractures, according to his attorney, David Mazie of [Mazie, Slater, Katz & Freeman](#).

The settlement was [first reported](#) by the New Jersey Law Journal.

Gillespie, who lived in Springfield, Union County, can no longer work or care for himself, Mazie said. He also has severe aphasia, meaning he has extreme difficulty forming words.

The driver, Ronald Lewis, quit his job following the crash, Mazie said. Lewis was involved in 54 motor vehicle collisions dating back to 1996 while driving for New Jersey Transit, according to records provided by Mazie.

His license had been suspended for 41 days for violations such as driving with suspended license, carless driving, leaving the bus unattended with passengers on board, using a cell phone while driving and failing to follow a police officer's instructions. Lewis has also been disciplined for taking a bus on the road with a known serious defect and driving in a restricted lane, according to Mazie.

At the trial, which was underway before the settlement was reached, NJ Transit argued that Lewis was high at the time of the crash. That meant he showed willful misconduct and would have made the agency not liable.

Mazie said he presented evidence that Lewis was not impaired and that the cocaine in his bloodstream was at least seven days old.

"It is beyond the pale that an operator with such a poor safety record would be allowed to continue to be employed given the totality of these events," commercial bus consultant J. Robert Berkstresser wrote in a report supplied to the plaintiff. "Despite the enormous amount of accidents, poor driving habits and safety violations NJ Transit retained Mr. Lewis as a bus operator. The failure on the part of NJ Transit to put a stop to the blatant unsafe performance of their operator Ronald Lewis indicated a general disregard for public safety."

The state Office of the Attorney General agreed to the settlement on Sept. 6.

NJ Transit declined to comment on the settlement.

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