

Justice Committee

Railway Policing (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from David Howie

I would ask that the comments below are passed to the justice committee for their consideration in regards the devolution of the British Transport Police in Scotland.

Skills Retention:

The devolution of railway policing will undoubtedly have a massive impact in the retention of the skills and knowledge of the existing British transport police officers. BTP officers currently undergo personal track safety training which covers all areas of safety on the railway. This training is essential for any officers and anyone who works on or near the rail lines.

Will this training continue? Who will fund it? Who will provide the training? Will existing police Scotland officers be given the same level of training or given an A4 hand out and expected to get on with it? Should a police Scotland officer be injured or worse due to a failure to provide this training who will shoulder the burden for this?

BTP officers who cover Glasgow response will attend incidents (person struck by train) many miles from their own area to assist colleagues and to ensure that the disruption to the railway is kept to a minimum. The skills and more importantly the knowledge of the railway that they have built over many years, will be lost as undoubtedly they will no longer travel out with a set area to attend such incidents and will be left covering a small area attending calls which police Scotland would resource. These incidents will fall to local officers to attend who could very well be expected to attend with little or no training.

BTP officers have also worked hard to gain and maintain further skills such as, Public order, search, driving, DVI, specialist body recovery officers etc. Will BTP officers be allowed to transfer and retain these skills after moving to police Scotland? Again there may be a cost implication in this.

Cross Border Security:

BTP officers routinely carry out cross border patrols whether it's for policing of a late night cross border service (Carlisle to Dumfries) or for major events north or south of the border.

The current system of officers easily traveling to England or Scotland will stop under Police Scotland as they will not be responsible for the policing of the entire rail network. After devolution remaining BTP officers escorting football fans from England would have to leave the train at Carlisle and vice versa Police Scotland officers would possibly have to leave before entering England.

The real losers in this instance will be the public and rail staff who will undoubtedly see a decrease in cross border train patrols. This could leave passengers and staff

open to abuse, luggage theft or people who wish to exploit the railway for movement of their criminal activity.

With the current terrorist threat level at severe this could leave the rail network open to exploitation by person wishing to carry out a terrorist atrocity in any major city. Giving them virtual free undetected movement throughout the country.

Passenger safety and confidence:

BTP carry out routine patrols of train services and are permanently based at the mainline stations. This has gone a long way to reducing crime on the railway and at present Passenger confidence is high.

After devolution officers at mainline stations, Glasgow central station for example will find themselves responsible for a portion of the city centre ultimately taking them away from providing a police presence and reassurance to the traveling public and rail staff.

Relationships with Rail Operators:

BTP officers have built up and maintain excellent working relationships with all rail companies. For example many officers work alongside Network Rail employees to provide a response during major events to minimise disruption to the network. After devolution these relationships will be lost as the officers will no longer be able to provide such a service as they will no doubt be left to back fill in other areas of police Scotland.

Ultimately police Scotland will not be able to provide the level of service that BTP currently do. Will they provide officers to routinely patrol the rail network with a NWR employee in the vehicle?

Policing the rail network is a unique environment. A ticket examiner with an abusive passenger on board would feel very vulnerable when the next stop could be twenty to thirty minutes away. Who or what area would answer this call when it originates in South Ayrshire for example and the train continues its journey through different control areas? With the train met in Paisley I doubt if a supervisor in Paisley will want his or her resources dealing with an incident that realistically took place in Ayrshire. However currently this would be resourced by the British Transport Police regardless of where the incident started as ensuring the safety rail staff and passengers is a priority.

Abstraction to police Scotland:

British Transport police respond to incidents which may cause them to travel through numerous police Scotland divisional areas. After integration this practice will stop with local officers attending and the existing BTP officers resourcing calls in whichever area they are in. The recently reported financial difficulties that police Scotland currently face and the predicted shortfall of £200 million. <http://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/police-scotland-in-crisis-amid-200m-funding-gap-1-4349699> show that policing of the railway will sadly fall to the back of

the queue whilst the BTP officers are constantly utilised to cover existing police Scotland incidents.

Implication for BTP officers:

This will undoubtedly have a massive impact on BTP officers. They currently have different terms and conditions to colleagues in police Scotland. For example different pay scales in operation, an out of hour's payment for night shift hours and a different pension scheme. Will there be written guarantees that these will stay the same? Surely this move cannot be made to the detriment of officers.

The failure to secure these terms and conditions could see officers leave rather than move across and lose out financially. This could mean a vast wealth of knowledge and skills being lost. Ultimately the losers and those that will feel the impact the most at the traveling public and rail staff.

I look forward to your response.

David Howie
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