Justice Committee

Railway Policing (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Paul Blackburn

I am writing to comment on the proposals to incorporate the current functions of the British Transport Police into Police Scotland. I am a retired former Police Support Staff employee and I was employed by Northumbria Police for over 26 years. I supervised sections within The Criminal Justice Department mainly involving prosecutions work.

We never had a problem with BTP cases. Their officers supplied case files to the CPS to the same standards and timeliness as did the Northumbria officers and the BTP Criminal Justice Inspector for the North of England attended all court liaison meetings throughout the area of his remit. It all worked and I believe still does work fine.

In Scotland there is a risk of serious dilution of skill and expertise as BTP officers move south, retire or resign. Their work is quite different from that of territorial police and it is a role that has existed for 150 years without a break. Duties include: station security; fraud investigation; disorder policing at stations; depots and on trains; regular attendance at railway suicides; preventing metal theft and subsequent investigation; involvement in railway safety issues and many more tasks specific to the industry. Track safety, electrical safety, knowledge of railway rules, rosters, signalling and maintenance regimes are all particular to railway policing. Force-wide intelligence on railway crime issues and trends can be seamlessly disseminated across the country from the West and South of England to the North of Scotland. That just will not happen when separate Forces are involved.

In my view there will be abstraction of officers from the railway policing role to cover for territorial policing exigencies; the former role will be diminished in the eyes of the latter and control room staff will draw on railway trained officers for other tasks when under pressure.

Cross Border policing will be affected. Consider the current situation when BTP officers travel on board trains travelling non-stop from Edinburgh to Newcastle to quell disorder. Eg. on the Friday afternoon Aberdeen – London train which is usually full of rowdy inebriated passengers heading to Newcastle for ‘stag’ and ‘hen’ nights. The BTP officers would overlap the jurisdiction of Northumbria Police officers as the train crossed into England as has been the situation for decades. If the amalgamation goes ahead the future scenario would be Police Scotland officers finishing up in Newcastle having overlapped the jurisdiction of Northumbria and BTP officers once South of Marshall Meadows. Could Police Scotland afford the time for say Edinburgh based officers to be attending court in Newcastle, part of a different Criminal Justice system to that North of the border and well away from their home base?

These proposals are political, removing the word British from an institution north of the border and furthering the ‘nation’ state. Look no further than the Saltire branding...
on blue liveried rolling stock, Saltire patterns on seat covers and Gaelic nameplates on stations even where that language has never been used for centuries if at all.

It is an unwarranted, unnecessary change that will be detrimental to the safety and security of passengers.

Paul Blackburn
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