I view this piece of legislation with no little concern and must ask why the Scottish Government sees the need to integrate what is a specialist, and highly effective Police Force, with Police Scotland, a force which has not exactly covered itself in glory since its inception, a force which continues to court controversy with what are described as “serious errors” to this day, and also a force which does not enjoy the confidence of the public at large in Scotland. The BTP is a unified proven and effective police force covering the national railway system.

The BTP enjoy a cross border intelligence network concerning issues which might otherwise threaten the safety of the travelling public. Currently, if required BTP officers can travel with an East Coast express train heading south from Edinburgh, even to the first stop Newcastle and carry out their duties unhindered. Officers of Police Scotland cannot do this since their remit must finish at Lamberton Toll (the Scottish Border), beyond which they have no jurisdiction. There is the old, oft quoted adage which says “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” which rings very true in this scenario.

Does the Scottish Government really understand what would be involved if this ridiculous proposal is ever enacted? Firstly, the BTP operate within the railway world, a world which is riddled with inherent risk and danger, and do so very effectively and efficiently given the scope of their specialist knowledge. I may also add that the railway world was my world for 50 years, and prior to Rail Privatisation (another political disaster) I was Keeper of Safety for BR Scottish Region and thus do know what I am talking about.

To require this policing role to be carried out by officers of Police Scotland, a role which could presumably require any such officer to enter on to the live railway, will require the Government to comply with basic Duty of Care requirements under H&S Legislation. Every operational Officer within Police Scotland will require compliance in full with RSSB Group Standard GE/RT8067 which lays down the minimum requirements concerning the safety of every member of personnel required to be on or near the railway in the course of their duties. Thus, each and every officer will require to be trained, examined and certificated (a Personal Track Safety Certificate) as being competent to be on the railway. This certificate must be shown on demand, to any Railway Officer. I doubt if any member within the Command level of Police Scotland, have this specialist knowledge either, and thus, they too, must be so trained. A PTS Certificate is valid for two years, after which re-training and re-certification must be repeated. This all comes at a cost and begs the question, “is this a cost, a wholly unnecessary cost, really what the Scottish Government wants when so many other services are in need of vital funding?.

I do not seek to exaggerate the dangers which abound in the real railway, but persons whose duties require them to be there, must be aware of overhead electrified lines (25Kv), multiple running lines of railways, those lines which are bi-directional where trains may approach from either direction, and what constitutes a
place of safety. Certainly if I were still a serving senior operating officer in railway employment I would view with concern, and oppose, the introduction of this questionable (and totally unnecessary) proposal.

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