Justice Committee

Railway Policing (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Anonymous 1

In relation to your call for evidence re the proposed Railway Policing (Scotland) Bill please see my comments on this subject below.

The impact, if any, which the devolution of railway policing will have in terms of retaining specialist skills and knowledge built up by British Transport Police officers.

As a serving BTP Officer I am aware of a number of officers who have already and also who are in the process/contemplating leaving BTP in Scotland to join either BTP in England/Wales or another force including MOD/CNC Police. I know that a number of these officers have left BTP in Scotland due to the uncertainty over the proposed merger of BTP into Police Scotland and the fact that they do not want to join Police Scotland for a wide variety of reasons. Therefore as a result BTP in Scotland in my opinion will have issues in retaining its specialist skills and knowledge as experienced officers are leaving this role in Scotland.

I am firmly of the opinion that nearer the time of integration into Police Scotland that more of the current BTP Officers and staff in Scotland will transfer to other forces or leave the police all together as I know that many do not want to join Police Scotland through speaking to my colleagues regularly about this issues.

The impact, if any, which the devolution of railway policing will have in terms of cross-border security arrangements.

I believe that cross-border train services will notice a poorer quality of service if integration goes ahead. Currently the BTP operate throughout the UK and there are well established process in place to police the rail network throughout the UK. For example; currently the BTP operate a central command and control therefore members of the public and staff know that they can contact BTP directly to ask for police assistance regardless of where on the network they are and that the BTP control room will be able to allocate the correct resources. I believe that by creating a border between Scotland and England in terms of railway policing will add confusion as to who should be contacted and cause possible delays in police attendance and potentially be dangerous to those travelling on cross border trains.

The BTP also have I.T systems which link the whole of the UK and have all details of recorded crime and offenders based on one system. If BTP in Scotland is integrated into Police Scotland I believe that criminals that travel across the border could potentially be missed due to the I.T systems in BTP and Police Scotland being completely different.

The BTP also run UK wide operations which target specific crimes/incidents and I believe that separating BTP in Scotland will prevent this from happening on the same level as it currently does therefore lowering the high standard of service currently provided.
BTP is a UK wide police service and this has huge advantages due to having a single command and control; therefore issues impacting the railway network in England/Wales can be brought to the attention of BTP in Scotland (Vice versa) due to the knock on effects certain incidents can have such as crowd control etc. On integration and having a 2 different command and control systems in place communication between England/Wales and Scotland will be drastically reduced and not operate as seamlessly as it current does.

I believe that there could potentially be issues regarding jurisdiction of crime and which police service should be investigating on cross border services as it is often not clear where exactly an incident took place and I think this could delay investigation of incidents and be distressing to victims of crime.

The impact, if any, on ensuring consistency in delivering passenger safety and maintaining confidence within railway policing.

This merger will cause confusion to members of the public and rail staff and in particular those travelling on cross border services as there will not be a consistent approach to railway policing throughout the UK.

As I am a serving officer with BTP I speak to members of the public and railway staff on a daily basis when on duty and I know through speaking to individuals who use or work on the railway that they are concerned about the proposed merger and do not wish for it to happen as they feel confident and safe when using the railway network as it is currently police by BTP. They highlighted concerns that there would be no railway police available should the merger go ahead as they believe that officers would be removed from the railway network to police other areas in Scotland due to Police Scotland having a larger demand for service.

Members of the public and rail staff that I have spoken to also highlight that BTP has the text 61016 service in place so that they can report incidents discreetly which is of particular importance when on a busy trains. It has been highlighted that this service would no longer be available for them to use in Scotland.

I believe that for members of the public and staff in particular will also be confused as they would no longer recognize which officers are railway police officers as it is likely that the current BTP officers on integration would be required to wear the uniform worn by Police Scotland officers.

The possibility that officers tasked with railway policing in Scotland may be abstracted from their core rail policing duties in order to support wider operational roles within Police Scotland.

As a serving BTP Officer I interact with Police Scotland Officers on a regular basis and I also have friends and family who are officers with Police Scotland. I know from speaking to these Police Scotland officers that they are often under resourced and have a back log of incidents to attend. I have no doubt that officers would be abstracted from railway policing duties to attend calls outwith the railway environment as there will be huge temptation and pressure on Police Scotland to
attend outstanding calls, therefore railway police officers will not be on hand to deal with incidents and deter crime on the rail network.

A lot of the duties carried out by BTP officers involve patrolling busy stations and trains and carrying out mobile patrols of railway depots and infrastructure to deter crime. This is unlike Police Scotland who are more of a reactive service who respond to incidents as and when they happen. I believe that crime would increase on the railway network in Scotland as a result of the merger and confidence in staff and passengers will decrease as officers will most likely be abstracted from core railway policing duties to back fill Police Scotland and only attend railway locations when called.

BTP officers are well aware of incidents that can cause huge disruption to the rail network and a specially trained to access railway tracks and deal with incidents safely. If BTP officers are abstracted to deal with incidents outside of the rail network they would not be suitably trained and experienced officers to deal with these types of incidents safely and cause the least amount of disruption as possible.

Whether there will be any difficulties in setting up new railway policing agreements with railway operators.

I know that rail operators are satisfied with the service BTP provide and through reading articles in the media that they wish for the BTP to continue to provide the police service in Scotland. I think that issues will arise in setting up railway policing agreements with railway operators especially cross border operators who will not receive the same end to end service which they currently enjoy.

Setting up the railway policing agreements will take up more of the cross border companies time as they will now have to have to have policing agreements for 2 separate police services which will need to be negotiated so that they can be satisfied that they are receiving the best possible service.

The implications, if any, for BTP officers who are currently contracted officers when they are transferred to Crown Servant status including any implications with regard to terms and conditions and pensions.

BTP officers have terms and conditions as contracted employees which are unlike Crown Servants. Officers in BTP should have the right to exercise their terms and conditions in terms of their employment with BTP which may include relocation to another area of BTP or redundancy payments. As the BTP officers made the choice to join BTP rather than Police Scotland they should not be put at any detriment due to this proposed merger.

The main issues that many BTP officers have is in regards to their pension. The main concern being that they will lose out on the current pension that they pay into and have to transfer to a pension with Police Scotland which is of less benefit to the BTP officers.
Many BTP officers have stated that they would prefer to join BTP in England or Wales or another police force in England or Wales rather than join Police Scotland in an attempt to maintain the benefits they currently enjoy.

I think it is important to highlight that BTP officer are currently on Windsor terms and conditions which have many benefits to them. For example BTP officers get to the top salary band within 7 years rather than 10 years. BTP officers also received Bank Holiday pay at double time and get paid unsocial allowance for hours worked between 2000hrs-0700hrs. These benefits should be maintained and that no detriment is caused to the current BTP officers.

BTP officers also receive privileged railway travel which is an excellent benefit to officers. This should also be continued to ensure no detriment is caused.

If BTP officers do transfer from BTP to Police Scotland through this merger they may end up on different terms of conditions than current Police Scotland Officers which may be seen as unfair and cause confusion and issues in administrative terms.

As a final note on the proposed merger I think it would be an idea for BTP to remain and operate as it currently does at present but ensure the Chief Constable of BTP is accountable to the Scottish Government and the Scottish people. I think that this should at least be attempted in the first instance and if this does not work out then the merger should be considered instead of potentially going down a costly road to a full merger which appears to have no major benefits*. (*The only benefit that the Scottish Government have suggested is that there would be access to national resource, however BTP have many resources at its disposal and do not require the use of specialist Police Scotland resources all that often (In my service I have never required nor am I aware of any other officer requesting any specialist Police Scotland resources)BTP have their own specialist resources such as Crime Scene examiners, Fatality response officers, Specialist body recovery officers, Football Spotters, Search Officers, Public Order Officers and even air observers to name a few and some of which Police Scotland do not have. I therefore believe that the justification for the merger being based on having access to national resource is not well founded and not justification to merge which in my opinion will reduce the quality of service to the rail Policing.

Anonymous
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