

Justice Committee

Railway Policing (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from the Scottish Women's Convention

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of Parliamentary, Governmental and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to the issues around railway policing in Scotland.

Key Issues for Women

This Bill has the potential to impact on women in a number of ways. It is vital that this is taken into account in its development and implementation.

There is a danger that the specialist skills and knowledge which has been built up by officers could be lost when the BTP comes under the powers of Police Scotland. Officers who patrol Scotland's railways have the expertise to be able to deal with specific situations which can arise for passengers, much of which ordinary police officers may never have had to deal with. If specialist officers are taken away from core rail policing duties to support other parts of Police Scotland and are replaced by standard police officers, there is a real danger that passenger safety could be compromised. Female passengers can often feel in danger or at risk of being involved in an incident on a train. This could be further exacerbated when a transfer of power takes place. It is, therefore, essential that the knowledge and expertise of BTP officers is not lost.

"What happens if a police officer is sent to deal with something that a BTP officer would usually have dealt with, but they don't know how to fully handle the situation? Things could end up so much worse."

The most important consideration is undoubtedly that of safety, both for women as rail passengers and as police officers. The creation of Police Scotland itself has resulted in the centralisation of a number of services, often to the detriment of local communities and individuals.

"Over the past few years staffing levels have been reduced and local police stations closed altogether. As a woman living on my own, this has made me feel quite apprehensive."

Women are concerned that the further centralisation of services through the transfer

of power over railways to Police Scotland will have a similar impact. Many women rely on Scotland's railways to travel to more outlying areas, often in the evenings. They need to be given the guarantee that their safety will not be compromised.

"I work later shifts so get the train home to an unstaffed station in the countryside, anytime between 9pm and 11pm. There are times where I don't feel safe because of the behaviour of others in the carriage. I was worried enough about my safety when there was an announcement about taking the conductors off the trains, but the thought of there not being a specialist railway police service makes me even more nervous. What if something happens? The police could take long enough to get to where we are, by which time real damage could have been done."

It is extremely important that there is a guarantee that officers who are currently BTP staff continue to carry out their current roles, to the same level and in the same numbers.

Conclusion

The transfer of responsibility of railway policing from the BTP to Police Scotland could be a positive thing. It has the potential to create a more joined-up way of policing overall, as well as opening up further opportunities for existing officers in both of the current organisations to develop their careers. It must, however, be recognised that there are significant safety considerations, particularly for women, which must be taken into account as part of the transfer of power.

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