

Justice Committee

Railway Policing (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Serco Caledonian Sleeper

Personal background

I have worked in the railway industry for 30 years, the last 12 of which have been in Scotland, including eight years as Route Director for Network Rail, during which time I had extensive interaction with BTP regarding their activities in Scotland. For the last two years I have been Production and Safety Director for Caledonian Sleeper which is a cross border operator running trains from London to various Scottish destinations and therefore dealing with BTP matters on both sides of the border.

Experience of working with BTP in Scotland

As noted above I spent eight years as Route Director for Network Rail in Scotland. During this period I was responsible for all operational and safety matters concerning the rail network across the country, and therefore had significant engagement with BTP in Scotland. As well as liaising on the whole range of day to day matters concerning the safety and security of the rail network, there were also a number of specific areas where I believe significant progress was achieved through adopting a collaborative approach with BTP. Successive Chief Superintendents for BTP Scotland have participated fully in this approach, setting the tone for effective engagement between BTP officers and railway staff at all levels of the respective organisations. Areas I would highlight where significant progress was made would include:

- Reducing level crossing misuse by introducing red light cameras operated by BTP, to address what is one of the highest risk factors in railway operations.
- Reducing cable theft, a very significant cause of delay and disruption on the rail network in recent years.
- Fatality management, with the target 90 minute time for restoring normal operations following a suicide event achieved on a regular basis, and often significantly bettered.
- Working on railway projects such as Airdrie – Bathgate and the Borders Railway, where dedicated teams of BTP officers carried out a range of activities in connection with building these new railways including advice on safety and security which had a significant benefit.
- Reducing trespass and vandalism and associated activities such as graffiti across the network, reducing risk to the travelling public.
- A strong focus on reducing disruption, including Identification of the key corridors on the rail network where focus on all areas of policing would bring maximum benefit, using delay minutes, a common railway currency for disruption measurement, as a target.
- Providing a very visible and effective presence at major stations on the network, including Glasgow Central and Edinburgh Waverley.
- Tackling specific issues such as theft of high value items from freight trains whilst en-route.

The above list is by no means exhaustive but does I hope give the committee an indication of areas where the very strong relationship and interaction between BTP Scotland and the rail industry in recent years has resulted in increased safety and security for rail users.

The key factor in achieving this progress has been the ability for the rail industry to engage effectively on both a formal and informal basis with BTP on both tactical and strategic matters. It is therefore imperative that the existing levels of engagement are maintained and built upon following the proposed transfer of BTP to Police Scotland.

Comments on proposed merger

I would note first of all that there has been extensive consultation with the rail industry on the proposed merger, including a number of meetings with the Transport Minister, which have been helpful in enabling the industry to articulate the progress made with BTP in Scotland in recent years and our views on what will be necessary following the proposed merger to maintain this progress. As a result of this engagement a range of assurances have been provided which suggest that the concerns of the industry have been recognised and acted upon. These include terms and conditions for BTP staff, cross border working, the creation of a Railway Policing management forum, and Trade Union engagement, as well as making sure that Police Scotland have a full understanding of the rail industry's expectations. It is important that these assurances are upheld.

Above all else it is important that the primary objective of maintaining a safe and secure rail network is recognised by all involved. To achieve this, regular and meaningful interaction between the industry and BTP is essential so that tactical and strategic priorities properly reflect industry priorities.

Maintaining existing levels of competency when dealing with rail related matters is key, and so we welcome the proposal to maintain rail policing as a specialist unit within Police Scotland, led by a suitably qualified and experienced officer. We also recognise and welcome opportunities to provide existing and new Police Scotland officers with specific rail knowledge and skills so that they can better deal with incidents on the rail network. Historically there are many examples where Civil Police involvement in railway incidents has led to prolonged disruption because officers are unfamiliar with the railway environment, and this is an opportunity to address that.

There are also opportunities to improve coverage and response times on remote parts of the network where Police Scotland officers may be closer to an incident than existing BTP deployment provides.

BTP centrally currently provides a range of specialist support and services to its current divisions including Scotland and so it is important to understand how this can continue to be provided, or provided by other means, under the proposed new arrangements. This applies particularly to areas such as transport network security and protection against terrorism where a national approach, and the well-practised responses of BTP to bomb threats for example, has been of benefit in recent years.

In respect of governance and accountability the most effective way to maintain the existing positive arrangements would be for the proposed Railway Policing management forum to be able to provide the direction and support to achieve industry policing objectives, including the ability to drive decisions on resources and funding which reflect the needs of the rail industry. How this board relates to and interacts with the SPA requires further consideration so that remits are clear.

Equally, at a working level I have noted above the regular and effective dialogue and interaction between the rail industry and BTP, and it is essential that the level of access to the railway policing force to enable these discussions is maintained so that tactical plans reflect the emerging and changing needs of the industry.

Cross border operation requires strong protocols between the various forces. A recent incident on a sleeper service provided a good example of how well current processes work. This incident involved a passenger setting fire to luggage whilst the train was travelling through Scotland. At the next station stop, Carlisle, the individual involved was arrested by English civil police, but transferred to BTP Scotland custody later that day for enquiries to continue. Throughout the process there was excellent dialogue with Caledonian Sleeper. Policing of cross border services must continue to be seamless from the train operator's point of view.

In respect of funding, it is important that the costs of providing policing of the rail network are not increased as a result of the proposal. There remains uncertainty over funding arrangements for cross border operators such as Caledonian Sleeper, based in Scotland and contributing to BTP Scotland, but who will continue to use the services of BTP in England, and presumably will require to make a contribution to their costs in future – the overall cost of policing to operators must not rise as a result of the merger.

Finally, it is essential that the rail industry is involved in the transition process to the new arrangements so that our needs are fully understood and accounted for by the teams delivering the transition. It is also important that there is no reduction in the current levels of service provided through the transition period, noting that reorganisations can often be a distraction to the delivery of core day to day services.

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