

Justice Committee

Railway Policing (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Transport Focus

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written evidence on the Railway Policing (Scotland) Bill.

Transport Focus is the independent transport user watchdog. Our mission is to get the best deal for passengers and road users. With a strong emphasis on evidence-based campaigning and research, we ensure that we know what is happening on the ground. We use our knowledge to influence decisions on behalf of passengers and road users to secure improvements and make a difference

We welcome the indication by Police Scotland to deliver a specialist railway policing function within the broader Police Scotland structure to maintain the specialist skills, knowledge and experience British Transport Police (BTP) officers and staff have built. However, we would welcome concrete proposals on how this shall be delivered both in the short-term and particularly in the longer term to ensure that a gradual diminution of specialist skills, knowledge and experience is avoided.

Two elements in particular help to demonstrate the value of having those specialist skills, knowledge and experience. The first is the commitment to reducing delays and disruption – something very close to the hearts of passengers. Guidance and processes introduced by BTP to deal with non-suspicious fatalities have reduced the time taken to clear such incidents from an average of 113 minutes in 2011/12 to 83 minutes. Equally there has been a reduction in cable theft (87% reduction in offences since 2008/09). It is reasonable to ask whether either would have occurred without BTP's specialist knowledge.

The second is the commitment to more visible policing in the evening and early morning. BTP's National Policing Plan 2016-17 recognises that police visibility is a key driver of passenger and public confidence. The plan commits to deploy as many police officers, Police Community Support Officers and Special Constables in roles that are visible to the public between the hours of 7pm and 3am. When coupled with targets to tackle anti-social and public order offences we see a clear picture of BTP targets and policing being closely aligned with passenger aspirations.

It is important that not only that the skills, knowledge and experience are retained but that where appropriate Police Scotland officers develop those same attributes to assist policing the railways.

At present BTP operate a single command and control room covering the Great Britain (GB) rail network and allocate resources accordingly based on respective incidents. We would like to be reassured as to what mechanisms will be put in place to ensure a joined-up approach to railway policing, particularly on cross border services will apply as a consequence of the Railway Policing (Scotland) Bill.

Transport Focus carries out the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) providing a network-wide picture of passenger satisfaction. The NRPS is carried out twice each year (spring and autumn) across the entire Great Britain railway network with over 60,000 passengers. Passenger opinions of train services are collected from a representative sample of passenger journeys. Passengers overall satisfaction, overall satisfaction with the station and train and satisfaction with 32 specific aspects of service can therefore be compared over time.

The NRPS asks questions regarding personal security and the findings from the survey including ScotRail and journeys on cross-border services between Scotland and England, gives the following information:

Your personal security at station where train was boarded	Total	Regional operators	ScotRail	Scotland
Sample Size	23799	3790	1080	1319
Net: Good	71%	75%	79%	79%
Net: Poor	5%	5%	3%	3%
Your personal security whilst on board the train				
Sample Size	25136	4049	1147	1403
Net: Good	77%	82%	88%	88%
Net: Poor	4%	3%	3%	2%

The NRPS also asks passengers if other passengers' behaviour gave cause to worry or make you feel uncomfortable during your journey and for those passengers who were worried or felt uncomfortable during their journey the following reasons were given:

Reason
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Passengers drinking/under the influence of alcohol 2. Rowdy behaviour 3. Music being played loudly 4. Feet on seats 5. Passengers taking/under the influence of drugs 6. Abusive or threatening behaviour 7. Smoking

It is clear that those passengers who have reported concern for their personal security that the main reasons relate to the anti-social behaviour of other passengers, which is attributed to a lack of staff both on the train and at the station and a lack of police officers.

Passenger confidence at BTP is also calculated by combining passenger ratings to two questions in the NRPS. Respondents to the survey are asked to provide a rating, on a 5-point scale from 'Very good' to 'Very poor', for each of the following questions:

'How would you rate [station] for your personal security whilst using that station?'

'How would you rate the train you boarded for that journey in terms of your personal security whilst on board the train?'

As not all respondents would have provided an answer to both questions, BTP derives its passenger confidence rating by combining the number of positive responses to the first question and that to the second question, and then dividing the sum by the total number of responses to both questions. In other words, BTP passenger confidence rating reflects the percentage of respondents who rated either their at-station or on-train (or both) personal security positively as 'very good' or 'fairly good'.

We would welcome the retention of the above measures to ensure passenger confidence is being maintained and measure the effectiveness of Police Scotland and BTP as viewed by the passenger.

Transport Focus
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