

Justice Committee

Proposed integration of the British Transport Police in Scotland into Police Scotland

Supplementary written submission from the British Transport Police Federation

Thank you for inviting the British Transport Police Federation to provide the Justice Committee with an update with regards to the proposed integration of Railway Policing in Scotland.

On 1 November 2018, I had the honour of meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Mr Yousaf MSP. During the meeting he described his intentions regarding the future of Railway Policing in Scotland and afforded me the opportunity to provide the views and thoughts of BTP officers that we represent, especially those most greatly affected based in Scotland. The continued level of uncertainty and the previous failings in communications to keep officers and staff updated were two relevant topics that were raised in conversation.

The Cabinet Secretary, having described that alternative options to full integration would now be explored, also reassured me that one of his priorities is to lift the level of uncertainty that BTP Scotland officers and staff have experienced. The Minister stated that he did not want to rush into deciding on an alternative option because any such decision would need to be future-proofed; therefore, he would look to have an alternative option in place sometime in 2019. Mr Yousaf detailed that he would like to see an alternative 'road tested' prior to 2021. He did go on to describe that an administrative option would not find favour with the Scottish Government, as the principles of devolution would not be achieved. A different statutory option would be the preferred route.

As a staff association we welcomed the change in direction. We have always maintained a stance against full integration of BTP Scotland into Police Scotland knowing the potential risk, cost and impact on the travelling public as well as those we represent. We therefore agreed and welcomed the invitation to participate in a stakeholder's event on 6 November 2018. At this meeting we were all invited to explore three options, in brief the options were:

1. Exploring current legislation and the potential to introduce an administrative option.
2. Exploring amending the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003, introducing statutory Governance and accountability with BTPA and SPA.
3. The introduction of new legislation giving the SPA authority around governance and accountability.

We believed the stakeholders meeting to have been a successful event. It appeared obvious that full integration was not the preferred option and that option two was the most viable approach to achieving the challenge set by the Cabinet Secretary.

Following the Stakeholder event we attended the 20th Joint Program Board meeting chaired by Gillian Russell, who opened the meeting stating that although alternative options are being explored, this was an interim measure as it still remains the intention of the Scottish Parliament to implement full integration in 2026. I challenged this statement and inferred that it misrepresented the instructions of the Cabinet Secretary.

If full integration is still the aim of the Scottish Parliament then the Cabinet Secretary's reassurances about lifting the level of uncertainty are near on impossible. If the alternative option is now being judged without being future-proofed and as an interim model with the aim of eventually introducing full integration then the last three years of uncertainty will be prolonged. It is our understanding that if the alternative option achieves the principles of devolution, then there would not be any justification for re-introducing full integration.

I would respectfully take this opportunity to remind the Justice Committee that full integration cannot be implemented in April 2019 due to the risks associated with it, especially with regards to: passenger/staff safety; the introduction of a single command and control system; the cost of full integration which has already exceeded £3million; the cost of the pensions liabilities; the impact on the structure of BTP in England and Wales; the impact on officers and staff as highlighted by Dr K. Murray's and Dr C. Atkinson's survey. These risks will not change in the future simply because the date of full integration has changed.

As stated previously, we welcome the Cabinet Secretary's change in direction towards railway policing in Scotland. As we have continually demonstrated throughout the last three years, the principles of devolution can be achieved without dismantling an already successful policing service. We must now wait to see the outcome of the consultation and discussions between BTP/A and SPA/Police Scotland. The timetable remains unknown as does the detail of the alternative option currently under review.

I do hope that this provides you with an insight into the BTP Federation's understanding of the current position.

Nigel Goodband
Chairman
British Transport Police Federation
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