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RAILWAY POLICING RESEARCH

THIS SERVICE TERMINATES HERE? POLITICS, PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES, AND THE FUTURE OF RAILWAY POLICING IN SCOTLAND

Dr Kath Murray and Dr Colin Atkinson

Abstract

Following the devolution of railway policing under the Scotland Act 2016, the Railway Policing (Scotland) Act 2017 set in motion a process that, if completed, will see the British Transport Police's Scottish Division integrated into Scotland's relatively new national police force, Police Scotland. The post-legislative journey has, however, proven far more challenging than supporters of integration envisaged. Drawing upon primary and secondary data, this article investigates the integration process to date and shows how a politicized and poorly managed transition programme left employees disillusioned, and fostered a deep strain of mistrust towards the project. With escalating costs, a lack of practitioner buy-in, the potential loss of experienced officers and staff, longer-term risks to the remaining BTP organization, and no clear evidence of benefits, the article concludes that the Scottish Government should call off full integration and consider an alternative approach towards the devolution of railway policing.

INTRODUCTION

The complex evolution of railway policing in Britain has, for the most part, been intertwined with the development of the rail industry, as well as infrastructure developments under the post-war nationalization programme. Specialist railway policing functions date back to the numerous railway police forces that mushroomed from the early 1800s, by dint of the expanding rail sector (Lennon, 2015). The Railways Act 1921 consolidated most railway companies into four groups (the 'big four'), each with its own police force and Chief of Police. The Transport Act 1947 nationalized the railways and other modes of transport, including road haulage, buses, and the waterways, and established the British Transport Commission (BTC) to take responsibility for operations. Thereafter, the British Transport Commission Act 1949 brought together the prenationalization forces and established a single national force whose responsibilities, reflecting the broader BTC remit, extended to various non-railway transport systems including canals and docks (Department for Transport, 2014, p. 8) as well as responsibilities undertaken by the London Transport Police following its absorption in 1958.

Deemed inefficient and unwieldy, the Transport Act 1962 replaced the BTC with five successor Boards, with policing provided by the rebadged British Transport Police (BTP) under the British Transport Police Force Scheme 1963. The loss of non-railway functions between 1964 and 1965

narrowed the BTP remit to the railways.[1] Currently the BTP polices the rail network across two legal systems (England and Wales, and Scotland) with a primary jurisdiction that 'encompasses railway tracks, networks, stations, light maintenance depots, land used for the purposes of or in relation to a railway, land in which a railway operator has a freehold or leasehold interest, and a purpose connected to a railway or to anything occurring on or in relation to a railway' (Lennon, 2015). In some circumstances, a BTP constable can also exercise powers outwith the railway; for instance, if requested by a constable from another police force, under mutual aid agreement, or in relation to people suspected (with reasonable grounds) of having committed, in the course of committing, or about to commit an offence. Following rail privatization in the 1990s the BTP retained the single network-wide command structure, with funding provided by the rail industry on a 'user pays' basis, and accountability (since 2004) to a dedicated Authority (BTPA) that sets priorities and allocates funding. Understood as such, as Hamelin and Spenlehauer (2014) observe, the BTP remains an unusual example of a privately funded policing organization that has maintained and strengthened its 'publicness' and public interest ethos, alongside its commercial responsibilities. The force has also, until recently, successfully resisted proposals to integrate its functions with territorial Home Office forces, principally via an appeal to its specialist functions. These include its approach to delay management [a railway closure by the Metropolitan Police is estimated to be 2.5 times longer than a BTP imposed closure (AECOM, 2011)], policing the movement of football fans, tackling metal theft, and dealing with chemical or biological threat (see BTP and BTPA, 2014 for an overview, also House of Commons Transport Committee, 2004). At a structural level, the strength of the force lies in its network-wide jurisdiction which cuts across legal systems and police force boundaries, facilitates consistent policing standards across the rail network, provides a single point of contact for the industry and travelling public, and reflects the network-wide nature of criminality (Department for Transport, 2004). Yet, by the same token, its cross-boundary remit is also its Achilles' heel, insofar as any territorial loss (such as Scotland) is likely to weaken the remaining force. For instance, Hamelin and Spenlehauer argue that the merger proposal put forward by the Metropolitan Police Service in 2005 would have amounted 'to signing the organisation's death warrant', as, 'maintaining the BTP's regional entities and thereby its unity would no longer make much sense. These entities would become easy prey for the county police forces . . .' (2014, p. 429).

The end of the line?

In 2016, the devolution of railway policing to Scotland set in motion a process that, if completed, looks set to radically change the course of railway policing in Britain. Established in the aftermath of the no vote on Scottish independence in 2014, the Smith Commission (2014) agreed on a set of new powers to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, among them, the functions of the British Transport Police in Scotland. The publication of the Railway Policing (Scotland) Bill in December 2017 sought to realize a long-standing Scottish National Party (SNP) aim to control railway policing in Scotland (Herald, 2011), thereby rupturing the longstanding single command structure and breaking with the remaining BTP and BTPA:

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[1] These are: the 1964 loss of the British Waterways Board (although BTP constables retained policing powers on and in the vicinity of inland waterways owned by the Commission until 2004); the loss of London Buses in 1984; and loss of the docks in 1985 following privatization of the British Transport Docks Board.

> Our ambition is to maintain a specialist national railway policing unit within Police Scotland which is accountable to the people of Scotland, builds on the excellent skills, knowledge and experience of BTP and enhances railway policing in Scotland through direct access to the local, specialist and national resources of Police Scotland. (Scottish Government, 2018).

Departing from core BTP operating principles, the proposal assumed greater operational efficiency could be secured within a single geographical structure (Scottish Government, 2016a). While Scottish Government plans to strengthen joined-up working and enhance access to Police Scotland's resources appeared straightforward, the proposal also relied on untested assumptions, as well as costs loosely modelled on the existing GB-wide model. At no stage was the proposal developed into a full business case, or other operational models explored in detail. Nor was the proposal supported by detailed evidence as to the viability of the complex task of taking one division of a specialist policing force, integrating it with a territorial force, and linking back to the BTP for the purposes of cross-border policing (HMICS, 2017).

Despite the absence of a business case or supporting detail apropos viability, the Railway Policing (Scotland) Bill passed by a narrow majority in June 2017, with an agreed transfer date of April 2019. At the time of writing, however, against a backdrop of implementation problems, the legislation remains to be commenced. In February 2018, the then Justice Secretary Michael Matheson announced integration would be delayed beyond April 2019 to a date as yet unspecified, citing public safety concerns. With increasing transition costs[2] (estimated as 'minimal' in the original Bill documentation (Scottish Government, 2016b)), dependency on consultants and a potential pension liability estimated at between £45 and £100 million (Herald, 2018), the project currently represents a financial risk to Police Scotland, tax payers and the rail industry, as well as a potential 'detriment' to the Police Scotland reform programme (Page, 2018). By the same token, the project also represents an increasing reputational risk to the Scottish Government. Beyond the Scottish Government, the merger remains divisive, with seemingly few supportive stakeholders. Railway unions and staff associations, including the BTP Federation and Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA) continue to campaign against full integration and advocate lower-risk alternatives, while the merger has drawn criticism from the rail industry. Attuned to the 'will of Parliament' and sensitive constitutional politics underpinning integration, the core policing stakeholders—the BTP, the BTPA, Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA)—have steered clear of broader arguments as to the value or otherwise of the merger, instead flagging problems on an issue-by-issue basis. It is nonetheless plausible to posit that the cumulative effect of these concerns amounts to a detailed and substantive case against full integration. It is also clear, as

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[2] Frustratingly, no single source of costs is available, although the following may be ascertained from published papers and parliamentary evidence. Note also there may also be an overlap of £200k in the cited costs; however, we do not have sufficient detail to confirm this. Scottish Government costs (August 2017 to June 2018 only) £310k, Department for Transport £150k (Scottish Government and Department for Transport, 2018). BTP and BTPA (until February 2018) £1.17 million (House of Commons Library, 2018, 9). Police Scotland (until April 2019) £1.7 million (Police Scotland, 2018). Consultancy costs £817k and pension set-up costs £400k (Scottish Parliament Justice Committee, 2018, col. 18). Costs still to be established include programme delivery, ICT, legal fees and signage.

this article demonstrates, that integration is not currently supported by the majority of BTP Scotland officers and staff.

While Scottish Government Ministers have acknowledged the preservation of railway expertise is 'vital' to successful integration (BBC, 2018) and anticipate existing staffing levels will be maintained, our results indicate that plans to retain 'exactly the same numbers and rank/grade of officers and staff' may not be realized. On-the-ground, practice also points to a recent increase in BTP Scotland officer turnover rates: from thirteen officers per annum in the 2 years and 3 months prior to Royal Assent, to 34 officers per annum in the 7 months following Royal Assent, with most of the latter citing the merger as the reason for leaving.[3] In May 2018, the BTP Chief Constable Paul Crowther cautioned that retirement plans over the next 2 years would see the loss of the current Divisional Commander and could see the loss of entire levels of senior ranks; a situation compounded by the fact that Police Scotland has no experience of railway policing among its current chief officer team (Scottish Parliament Justice Committee 2018; col. 9).

Against this background, this article explores the integration process to date and the impact on BTP Scotland officers and staff. First, we outline the politics of railway policing in Scotland and explain how, by way of a politicized approach to programme management, Scottish Government officials failed to grasp the complexity of railway policing, resulting in a raft of major problems that have left BTP employees in limbo. Drawing on organizational change theories, we then investigate the impact on BTP Scotland officers and staff. The analysis indicates that job status insecurity and a perceived lack of fairness undermined support for and trust in the merger, and suggests that organizational attachment to the BTP is inversely associated with support for integration. Concluding with an assessment and commentary on the merger itself, we argue that with increasing risks, and no clear beneficiaries or operational benefits, the Scottish Government should consider alternative devolution options and drop its commitment to full integration.

Research methods and data

The analysis draws on a range of secondary sources, including documentary evidence, parliamentary records and Freedom of Information data.[4] [4]The main empirical findings are informed by primary data from an online cross-sectional survey disseminated to BTP Scotland (D Division) police officers and civilian police staff in January 2018. The survey comprised of 35 questions, structured across four categories: background; service history and experience at the BTP; participant views on their current role; and participant views and feelings about the merger. The survey included closed-ended questions (multiple choice and Likert-scaled) and open-ended questions that allowed for less structured but more individual, detailed qualitative responses. Reflecting the central tenets of non-probability convenience sampling (Bryman, 2016, p. 187), the survey was distributed internally via an email list to BTP Federation members based in Scotland, and through other contacts to reach members of the special constabulary and civilian police staff based in Scotland. The survey was open for a 10-day period, with periodic follow-up reminders (see

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[3] Twenty BTP officers left the organization in the 7 months following Royal Assent, with 14 citing the merger as the reason (figures provided by BTP Federation).

[4] The article draws on Freedom of Information (FOI) data originally accessed by The Herald newspaper. The value of using FOI as a research tool is discussed in Savage and Hyde (2014).

Nardi, 2014, p. 129). Prompts were also sent to prospective participants via intermediaries to elicit additional responses. Recognizing the benefits of snowball sampling (Bryman, 2016, p. 188), survey recipients were also encouraged to distribute the link to the survey to other colleagues in Scotland. Ultimately, the survey attracted 182 individual responses from officers and staff, accounting for 66% of the overall BTP workforce in Scotland.[5] [5]The quantitative analysis was undertaken using SPSS and significant results are reported at the 0.05 significance level (meaning the finding has a 95% chance of being true).

THE POLITICS OF RAILWAY POLICING IN SCOTLAND

The BTP merger may be tied to the wider police centralization agenda in Scotland, as well as political issues apropos national identity and control; as then SNP MSP John Finnie put it, the BTP in Scotland are 'part of the Scottish policing family' (Herald, 2011). Coinciding with the announcement of plans to amalgamate Scotland's eight police forces into a single police force under the 2011 SNP Programme for Government, in September 2011 the then justice minister Kenny MacAskill wrote to former UK Transport Secretary Philip Hammond stating, 'I would like to explore the potential for the BTP in Scotland to become part of the new Scottish policing landscape' (BBC, 2015). Following police centralization in April 2013, the Scottish Government (2013) presented its case for integration to the UK Government, maintaining that the establishment of the new single service left 'the position of BTP in Scotland incongruous'.

In a robust joint response, the BTP and the BTPA stated 'the proposal to use Scotland as a "test bed" for an integrated policing solution is not supported by any evidence as to how this would work or how it would be progressed' (BTP and BTPA, 2014).

SNP plans to takeover BTP functions in Scotland gained momentum in the aftermath of the 2014 independence referendum via the Smith Commission on further devolution. Backed by all political parties in Scotland, the Smith Commission report recommended 'the functions of the British Transport Police in Scotland will be a devolved matter' (Smith, 2014, p. 21) but made no recommendation as to how devolved railway policing should operate. With the politics of railway policing realigned in the reconfigured landscape, the BTP/A committed to work closely with the Scottish Government to deliver devolved railway policing, whilst nonetheless making clear that full integration— a clean break from the BTP—would be the most high-risk route (BTP and BTPA 2015).

The Scotland Act received Royal Assent in March 2016, devolving the 'policing of railways and railway property' to Scotland, after which the Scottish Government opened its plans to fully integrate the BTP into Police Scotland to public consultation. The proposal received minimal support: independent analysis on the consultation reported many individuals and organizations 'considered that a strong case for integration had not been made' (Nicholson, 2016, p. 5), while the

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[5] Based on 213 police officers, 38 members of police staff, and 26 special officers (HMICS, 2017, p. 9).

BTP Federation and rail unions argued forcefully against the plan. The proposal also drew criticism from the rail industry, including a sharply worded paper from the Rail Delivery Group (2017):6[6]

> It appears from the consultation that the reason behind undertaking the integration is because it can be done as opposed to there being a well set out argument as to why it should be done . . . From a service provider perspective, only disbenefits can be envisaged which have already been articulated in detail by the BTPA, the BTP and in a previous RDG response.

The Railway Policing (Scotland) Act nonetheless passed by a small majority in July 2017, with the minority SNP Government securing support from the independence-supporting Scottish Green Party. Yet as detailed next, the post-legislative journey would not be smooth. As former Scottish justice minister Kenny MacAskill (2018) later acknowledged:

> It is obviously proven far more complex than had been imagined . . . It was flagged up by [BTP/Federation that the issue was far more protracted and procedural than simply the political and policing arguments that were to the fore . . . Rightly or wrongly their voices were drowned out by those demanding integration into the single service.

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT POLITICS

> Civil servants tread a difficult line. They must serve the government, without being party political. They should enable Ministers to carry out their promises and policies, but also draw attention to any difficult questions about practicality, legality, cost, effectiveness and wider impacts. They are expected to help Ministers present the government's activities in a positive light, but they should stand against being misleading. (Hunter-Blackburn, 2018)

In January 2016, the Scottish Government established a Joint Programme Board (JPB) chaired jointly by Scottish Government and Department for Transport senior civil servants to oversee the Bill and potentially integration itself. Departing from Scottish Government project management methods, as well as public body mergers guidance, the initial programme proceeded without a viability study, a detailed business case—a decision retrospectively justified on the basis that integration was a 'Ministerial decision' (Scottish Government/Freedom of Information 2017) —and, for the first year, without railway policing expertise or operational input.7[7] In Spring 2017, coinciding with the passage of the Bill, an unpublished independent assurance review (ibid.) flagged a range of problems with the programme, including a reluctance to discuss financial issues, unclear strategy and timelines, poor communication, the lack of a Benefits Realization plan and in a tacit nod to the underlying fundamental political differences, a lack of commitment to a single, joint purpose.

A strategic overview of BTP integration by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) in late 2017 brought the politics and problem of integration into the public domain. Delivering a critique of decision-making to date, the review commented:

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[6] Rail Delivery Group represents train and freight operating companies, Network Rail, Transport for London, the BTPA Chief Executive, BTP Deputy Chief Constable, Department for Transport and Transport Focus

[7] The JPB excluded both Police Scotland and the BTP in its formative year.

As the decision to transfer BTP's functions in Scotland to Police Scotland was a Ministerial decision, no single, detailed and authoritative business case which articulates the benefits, disadvantages or costs of the transfer to Police Scotland was developed . . . the key benefits set out in the Policy Memorandum only make reference to the future state of railway policing in Scotland. No benefits to BTP as an organisation or the future operation of railway policing in England and Wales have been articulated. Neither does the Policy Memorandum set out any disbenefits or risks . . . no consideration is given to the fact that by creating a single command structure for policing in Scotland, a dual command structure is created for railway policing across Great Britain. No information is set out regarding the impact this may have on railway policing, how this impact may be mitigated, or why a single command structure for policing in Scotland is more beneficial than a single command structure for railway policing across Great Britain. . . without fully identifying the potential disbenefits, it is not possible to effectively plan to mitigate them. . . (HMICS, 2017, p. 21).

In relation to the JPB programme, HMICS cautioned against 'a culture of optimism which prevents challenges and risks being fully addressed' and stated that having failed to do so previously, the risks needed to be fully explored and managed. Despite delivering a strong message, the fact that the report was published several months after Royal Assent meant the parliamentary impact was negligible. As the BTP Federation Chair stated, 'had this report been published prior to the Railway Policing Bill being passed in June, it would have helped politicians to better understand the complexities of the transfer' (Goodband, 2017).

Following the HMICS strategic overview, Police Scotland flagged further risks including a lack of agreement on assets transfer, inadequate information sharing, inadequate resourcing, and the potential loss of BTP employees (Police Scotland, 2017). In February 2018, in a significant blow to the project, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice announced integration would be delayed beyond the intended April 2019 transition date, citing safety concerns. Issues raised by Police Scotland and the BTPA at this stage included the lack of a detailed operating model, the (unanticipated) requirement for a Scotland-wide railway policing ICT architecture; inadequate progress on (and understanding of) Railway Policing Agreements (RPAs) and the attendant risk of judicial review; a lack of clarity on the legal mechanism to transfer BTP employees; an estimated pension liability between £45 and £100 million; and poor engagement with BTP employees:

BTP police staff and police officers have been promised that a clear 'offer' around terms and conditions will be forthcoming at various times, however none of these commitments have been met. The impact on D Division staff has been significant and negative. (Cited in Herald, 2018)

With no substantive progress to report and few hard facts to convey, Scottish Government communications invariably lacked clarity and authority. Next, applying theories of organizational change, we examine the impact on BTP employees. We show how a failure to provide detailed assurance on terms, conditions and pensions, as well as a sense of unfairness, alongside existing organizational commitment to the BTP, fostered a deep strain of mistrust and hostility towards integration.

THE IMPACT OF INTEGRATION

Using online cross-sectional survey data, this part of the article examines the impact of integration on BTP officers and staff. Taking an overview of the survey results, most respondents opposed full integration: 70% were very unsupportive and 13% quite unsupportive. Only seven per cent were either supportive or quite supportive (the remainder were neutral). Strikingly, opposition towards integration did not vary significantly by age-group, gender, rank or role (police officer, police staff, or special constabulary), although officers with specialist skills or training[8] were more likely to be very or quite unsupportive, compared to those without specialist skills, at 91% and 74%, respectively. While attitudes towards integration varied slightly by length of service (P = 0.030), these results fluctuated by category, without a clear trend. Opposition to integration also correlated with the likelihood of leaving railway policing (p = 0.000). Around a fifth (19%) said that they had given serious consideration to leaving policing prior to the merger, however when asked if they had given serious consideration to leaving because of the merger this proportion increased to almost two-thirds (64%). Of those who were not at all or quite unsupportive (n = 131), 73% had given serious consideration to leaving because of integration, compared to 38% of those with neutral attitudes (neither supportive nor unsupportive). Consistent with the findings above, the likelihood of leaving did not vary significantly by age-group, gender, rank, or role. However, the likelihood of leaving did relate to length of service, with a higher risk among more experienced staff. Just under half (47%) of officers and staff with 5 years' or less service had given serious thought to leaving, compared to 79% of those with 11–15 years' service. Next, the survey results are analysed in terms of a range of factors associated with attitudes towards organizational change: job status insecurity; procedural and distributive fairness; and organizational attachment.

a) **Job status insecurity**

Job status insecurity refers to anxiety about the loss of valued occupational features (for example, skills, work discretion, treatment by managers) and acts as a key determinant of successful organisational change (Gallie et al., 2016, Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984). It is separate to job insecurity, which refers to the risk of loss of employment. The BTP Scotland survey results provided strong evidence of job status insecurity, stemming principally from a lack of clarity apropos terms, conditions and pensions, and an absence of authoritative answers on future employment conditions.[9] While Ministers and officials maintained employees would transfer on an 'as is' basis, with 'no detriment' and a 'triple-lock guarantee' on pensions, respondents were clearly attuned to the slippery language and lack of underpinning detail or longer-term assurances:

> I do not trust the Government to maintain a triple lock guarantee and do not believe that I will not face any detriment. (Police officer, 11–15 years' service)

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[8] Of the 131 respondents that identified as police officers, two-thirds had specialist skills, including fatality response, football liaison, and disaster victim identification (excludes Taser trained).

[9] A previous staff survey of BTP Scotland employees reported that two-thirds were uncertain about transferring to Police Scotland, principally due to a lack of information on terms and conditions (BTP, 2017).

I do not trust Police Scotland with reference to honouring these terms and conditions should I transfer across. They may do initially, but I'm convinced over time they will be frozen and I will be given new terms and conditions. (Police officer, 11–15 years' service)

SNP MSPs are like a broken record and just keep repeating the phrase 'triple lock guarantee' without any confirmation in black and white of what we will be entitled to. (Police staff, 21–35 years' service)

Similarly, despite the intention of the Scottish Government to retain a dedicated railway division, in terms of future day-to-day roles and responsibilities respondents variously referred to 'possible erosion of the current role I hold', 'career progression prospects stifled or halted altogether' and a 'loss of opportunity, skills and specialism'. Many respondents also believed that moving outwith the new 'Railway Division' would most likely result in a loss of terms and conditions, despite the Scottish Government previously citing 'an increased ease to move post and to access opportunity' (Scottish Government, 2013, p. 6) as a benefit.

I fear that I will be the bottom of the pile for any training or for any chance of promotion. This was compounded by [Police Scotland operational lead] stating at a meeting that if any officer wants promotion they would need to sign away any terms and conditions they are currently on. (Police officer, 11–15 years' service)

I am massively concerned that I will be forced to migrate into the Police Scotland pension scheme if looking to move out from the newly created Railway Division for development or promotion. (Police officer, 11–15 years' service)

b) **Fairness**

Attitudes towards organisational change are also influenced by perceived fairness, which can be broadly classified into two camps, procedural and distributive, each appealing to different principles (Alexander and Ruderman, 1987). In the context of integration, procedural fairness refers to the change process; whether it is consistent, transparent and respectful, whether leaders are genuinely concerned about employee well-being, and whether employees are allowed input into the change process (Tyler and De Cremer, 2005). Appealing to broader social justice principles, distributive justice refers to fair outcomes; whether integration itself is deemed fair or just.

Most respondents viewed the integration process itself as deeply unfair, referring to weak or non-existent communication, a lack of opportunity for input or influence, and, in some instances, adverse effects on health and well-being:

The stress levels put upon officers involved in this merger are unbelievable and should never have been allowed to happen. The lack of information from all sources is unacceptable. (Police officer, 11–15 years' service)

The uncertainty has left me feeling anxious and unprepared for my future. I would like to move up the ranks within BTP however I feel that the uncertainty is holding me back as I do not know what the future holds. (Police officer, 0–5 years' service)

> There is now little over a year until the proposed implementation date and we still have nothing concrete. With the noise that 2019 is not possible and no clarification on what the "operational integration" option would mean, it is becoming harder and harder to trust anything we are told. (Police staff, 6–10 years' service)

In terms of outcomes, many respondents viewed the merger in and of itself as unfair: as politically motivated, disruptive and/or unnecessary, with few if any gains. In some cases, the anger was palpable, with emotive negative references to Scottish nationalism and a perceived desire to remove British identity markers.

> A solution to a non-issue that is not required to be solved and highly politically motived. It is this political motivation which has angered officers most rather than any other issue. (Police officer, 0–5 years' service)

> This merger is motivated by political nationalism and a desire by Government to have centralised control of all aspects of public service in Scotland. At no time has Scottish Government, or anyone else for that matter, provided any sound evidence that there is any business case for the merger to take place. (Police officer, 21–30 years' service)

> We are a well-run force I am proud to belong to BTP and have been for over 30 years or I would not have stayed. It is being destroyed for political reasons. I am happy with my job and the way I am treated. It is an infuriating turn of events. (Police staff, 21–35 years' service)

c) **Organisational attachment**

Organizational attachment also acts as an important determinant and mediator of change (Bernerth et al., 2007). In brief, employees with strong commitment are more likely to be aligned with organizational values, more likely to expend effort on the organizations behalf, and, by the same token, more likely to accept change (Iverson, 2006).

While the results flagged areas for organizational improvement (for example, communications and career progression), most respondents demonstrated strong organizational commitment to the BTP, with more than eight in ten (82%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were proud to work for the BTP. Strikingly, this proportion was more than double the proportion of Police Scotland officers who, in a separate survey, agreed or strongly agreed that they were proud to work for Police Scotland (Axiom Consultancy, 2015). Similarly, nearly three-quarters (72%) stated they referred to BTP as 'we', rather than 'they', again more than double the equivalent Police Scotland proportion (32%) (Axiom Consultancy, 2015). While organizational pride was significantly associated with attitudes towards integration (p = 0.000), in this instance, attachment to the BTP was inversely associated with support for the merger (which was broadly viewed as akin to a hostile takeover). Of those who strongly agreed or agreed that they were 'very proud' to work for the BTP, 88% did not support integration, compared to 62% of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were proud to work for the BTP. In the qualitative responses, organizational pride and attachment to existing working relationships were also coupled with hostility towards integration:

> I feel incredibly disheartened . . . If this was a good idea I would genuinely embrace it. I love being a police officer and despite stating flaws within BTP I take pride in being and officer for

this organisation that I chose to join ahead of Police Scotland. (Police officer, 6–10 years' service)

We are BTP and proud for a reason. We didn't ask for this, Police Scotland didn't ask for this. SPA didn't even ask for this. It is clearly not a decision based on what is best for policing. (Police staff, 6–10 years' service)

I have always enjoyed and taken pride in working for BTP but I am unwilling to risk the uncertainty around my future pension by staying in policing post-merger. (Police officer 21–30 years' service)

I have worked in many different places over the years and this is by far the best bunch of people I have every worked with. Being such a small force means that everyone either knows you or knows your name. Everyone is very supportive and we all help one another out. I just know that that feeling— almost like being part of an extensive family—will be lost. (Police staff, 0–5 years' service)

While further investigation is required, it is plausible to suggest that the prospect of integration strengthened officer and staff attachment to the BTP; as Reiner observes, 'internal conflicts may often be overridden by the need to present a united front in the face of external attack' (Reiner, 2010, p. 22). Looking ahead, it is likely the inverse relationship between organizational commitment and support for integration will present a serious challenge for Police Scotland leaders, both in terms of morale, and the potential loss of experienced staff and officers:

Police Scotland will be inheriting disgruntled, unhappy officers with morale as low as can be due to being forced into a merger that the majority of officers do not want . . . I can see many resigning or having to move elsewhere in the UK. (Police officer, 11–15 years' service)

They will be inheriting a work force who do not want to be part of them, who are proud BTP officers and wanted to remain. (Police officer, 11–15 years' service)

The morale of officers and staff has taken a hit like no other we have seen in over 10 years. Whilst we strive to provide the best possible service because we love the jobs we do, this cannot be [sustained]. The organization has already started losing good people because they have chosen to move on due to the proposed merger. (Police staff, 6–10 years' service)

Discussion

Following the delay to integration in February 2018 the Scottish Government stated that deceleration would provide an opportunity to strengthen engagement with BTP officers and staff. While some improvements in engagement are evident, the lack of detailed evidence and planning to support the merger remain problematic. As Bernerth et al. (2007) observe, successful organizational change requires fair procedures and clear reasoning as to why change is necessary. Yet, weighing up the respective benefits and risks of the merger, it seems clear that full integration remains fraught with risk. On the one hand, the intended benefits cited by the Scottish Government include 'operational advantages such as integrating railway policing with airports and road policing' (thereby broadening the transport remit), 'a joined-up process to identify links between crime on

the railways and wider communities', 'joint training of railway and other police officers in Scotland for more effective deployment' (House of Commons Library, 2017, p. 10) and direct accountability to Scotland. Some survey respondents also identified integrated working with Police Scotland as an advantage, while many respondents cited greater professional opportunities; although these were mostly caveated with the observation that any lateral or upward move into general policing would result in a loss of existing terms and conditions.

On the other hand, in relation to operational policing, the BTPA has argued that full integration will introduce new risks apropos cross-border policing, by dint of the dual-command structure. Accountability to the SPA, as a non-specialist policing Board, may dilute rather than strengthen accountability (House of Commons Library, 2017, p. 10–11) given the Authority has no experience of overseeing or negotiating the difficult balance between constabulary independence and the legitimate commercial concerns of the railway industry. Audit Scotland has also stated the SPA is yet to establish its own role (Audit Scotland, 2018, p. 3). As flagged by the RDG, there are also financial risks for rail operators who may be required to cover additional costs (it remains unclear as to who would pay for these if incurred (House of Commons Library, 2017, p. 12)). Moreover, as many survey respondents observed, there are risks to the remaining BTP, by dint of its diminished structure:

> The UK-wide reach having disappeared, it may seem an easier bet for some in Government to consider further drastic proposals around the future of the rest of BTP. (Police officer, 26 years' or more service)

> [The merger is an] attack on the integrity of the force and increased probability of further fractures, elsewhere, e.g. to MPS/[City of London Police] in London. (Police officer, 11–15 years' service)

At the time of writing, further challenges include a failure to secure stakeholder buy-in or support, unquantified costs and liabilities for the SPA, and the possibility of reputational damage to Police Scotland, the SPA, and Scottish Government. For Police Scotland, full integration may jeopardize plans to deliver a balanced budget by 2021 and is viewed by the organization's own Deputy Chief Officer as a potential detriment to the existing reform programme (Page, 2018). Our analysis suggests the issues and challenges associated with the BTP integration, including staff opposition, stem principally from an opaque, politically driven, and top-down process that failed to fully consider the risks and complexity associated with railway policing, or properly investigate the financial implications. In terms of politics, a parallel may be drawn with the top-down amalgamation of Scotland's eight police forces into a single service (Moggré et al., 2017, p. 9) which paved the way for BTP integration and forms part of the same policing centralization agenda.10[10]

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[10] The Smith Commission also considered the devolution of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary; however, this was rejected, most likely on national security grounds. This rationale would also extend to any proposal to devolve the Ministry of Defence Police.

Looking at the impact of the process, the findings demonstrate the strength of BTP Scotland officer and staff hostility towards integration, the attendant risk that experienced employees will leave, and a negative impact in terms of welfare. While it is difficult to disentangle the various factors underpinning attitudes towards the merger—for instance, a lack of clarity on terms, conditions and pensions may influence respondent's wider opposition on integration—the fact that these issues remain unresolved more than 2 years after the establishment of the JPB reflects poorly on a programme that has consistently put politics ahead of people. Against this background, the concluding section discusses possible next steps, as well as areas for further research.

Conclusion

If full integration is successful, then operational railway policing in Scotland should look, to the public at least, broadly the same, bar a change of uniform and badge. It will, however, come at a significant cost, not least to the BTP officers and staff affected. Nor can the cost to BTP officers and staff be assuaged by an appeal to utilitarian principles, because, as it stands, it appears there are no clear beneficiaries. It is arguably for the same reason that parliamentary debate on integration is now largely reduced to a matter of political resolve, whereby substantive problems rub up against a non-negotiable appeal to the 'will of Parliament'. Whether the will of Parliament can continue to prop up full integration is difficult to predict, and it may be that ICT costs, coupled with the sizeable pension liability, halt integration altogether. It is also notable that a UK Government proposal to integrate the BTP, Civil Nuclear Constabulary (CNC) and Ministry of Defence Police (MDP) has stalled, which may be read as indicative of the difficulty inherent in merging different specialisms.

To be clear, there is a case for strengthening accountability for railway policing in Scotland. Currently, BTPA Board representation includes a dedicated Scotland member, while the BTP in Scotland is accountable to the Scottish Police Investigations and Review Commissioner (PIRC) and subject to review by HMICS. Possible improvements under the existing structure might include: making the BTPA Chair accountable to Scottish Ministers; aligning BTP Scotland strategic priorities with those of the SPA and Police Scotland; and joint SPA/BTPA involvement in the oversight of BTP D Division. There is also room for improvement in the quality of partnership working between the BTP and Police Scotland. Crucially, however, neither the existing seams in partnership working nor the apparent accountability challenges necessarily require full integration to be addressed. The options available to Scottish ministers are to proceed with full integration, with an increasing risk of reputational damage, or to consider an alternative route which would involve either repealing the 2017 Act (which has not yet commenced) or keeping the Act on the statute book, but not commenced. We would suggest that an alternative path should be taken; with repeal offering the most definitive way to provide certainty to stakeholders and address officer and staff anxieties, whilst also providing space for new solutions to deliver devolution to be devised. While cutting losses at this stage will carry short-term political and reputational consequences, such a decision would stem the escalating financial, professional and personal costs, as well as the longer-term political risks, particularly if an alternative option helps secure the future of specialist railway policing in Britain. Such a move would also provide a long overdue reprieve for many BTP Scotland officers and staff, as well as those who have already retired.

The devolution of railway policing remains a dynamic and challenging part of the Scottish political and policing landscape. Railway policing north of the border thus represents a subject that is germane for further research. Should current structures be changed, then there are clear

opportunities to explore the efficacy and effectiveness of these new arrangements. Whichever route is ultimately taken, future enquiry would be beneficial. Railway policing in Britain has long been a neglected topic, and the issues of the longer-term viability of this specialism in Scotland will be of interest beyond the confines of Scotland's politics and policing. More broadly the case of the integration of railway policing in Scotland will undoubtedly provide new opportunities and evidence for those interested in the politics and practicalities of police mergers, just as it will continue to raise questions around the thorny politics of national policing identity and the politicization of policing.

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