

ILEC

British Transport Police Federation

Session 1 Introduction to British Transport Police Federation

First, a quick introduction to the British Transport Police (BTP). We are currently an unarmed police force of 3,000 officers, responsible for the protection of the travelling public who make around five million passenger journeys each day. We are also responsible for the protection and security of Britain's railway infrastructure of stations and railroads, Eurostar services to Brussels and Lille and numerous light railway and train systems.

We are a national force operating the full length and breadth of Britain which includes Scotland, England and Wales. The only part of the UK we do not operate in, is Northern Ireland and there is no political or operational significance in that.

We have four issues facing us. Two of these issues have always been with us and two are of a more recent development.

Funding

Let's start with how we are funded and the User Pays Principle under which the government expects the principal user(s) of a service to pay for its provision. The BTP is accountable to a Government department, the Department for Transport. The UK's other 52 police forces are answerable through their police authorities to the Home Office. The Home Office is the lead government department on policing, crime, law and order and anti-terrorism and homeland security generally. You can see immediately that all the real expertise and authority for dealing with policing issues is in that one Department.

The Department to which we are responsible is really a super roads, freight, aviation and railway authority. Their specialist knowledge about policing is somewhat limited. We are largely funded by the Train Operating Companies – many of whom are very reluctant to part with the necessary money – our budget is for this year was £170m. The amount of management time spent prising the funds out of these companies is colossal.

Secondly, the current terrorist threat has created new operational priorities particularly in equipment and training. We have also received extra funding from the Home Office.

A third consequence of not being a specialist force and of not being located within the responsibility of the Home Office is that our role, future and existence has been reviewed no fewer than six times in the last three to four years. Each time we have emerged stronger and even more highly regarded by the reviewing body but such reviews are extremely unsettling for officers and their families.

Erosion of Pay and Conditions

My colleagues from the other UK police services can cover this in more depth. But in brief, the UK police service in 1978 benefited from a landmark report by Lord Edmund-Davies. Up until then because of poor pay and conditions officers were leaving the service at a rate of 50 per week. What saved the police service was the introduction of a pay indexation formula which is related to the movement of non-manual pay rules. The UK government is trying to break the agreement by disowning the whole current arrangements. The BTP can only sit on the sidelines and await the outcome of a settlement between the Home Office and the Home Department police forces. Our pay is directly related to the pay of the Home Department forces. Our conditions are broadly similar with some differences in retirement age and how our pensions are funded. Again, any pay dispute is demoralising, especially as in this case, the Government seems determined to destroy rules which have stood the test of time over 25 years plus.

Terrorism

Our third issue would be terrorism.

It is now the same throughout the world. Disaffected political, religious or ethnic minorities or a combination of all three, ideologically driven, pursue their aims through violent expression. The more spectacular the atrocity the better, from their distorted view, for hitting the world's headlines. Transport infrastructure offers the kind of targets they seek. The transport infrastructure provides concentrations of people whose mass slaughter on a railway, at a station or at an airport or in an airplane can create a very high level of terror which can paralyse governments. As a railway police force we cut our teeth especially in London in dealing with IRA terrorism over 30 years and with significant success. Now we have a threat which differs in two important aspects. These terrorists can be home grown; they are prepared to commit suicide and they are prepared to use chemical devices. Our priority – as first on the scene of an incident – is officer safety. That means investment in technology, training and equipment.

Second Tier Policing

My fourth concern is indeed second tier policing. Since this is a subject in itself in session 5, I will confine my remarks to saying that this is a growing threat to the integrity of operational policing. There are two issues here: one is that the promotion of any enforcement force with high visibility among the public is a deliberate confidence trick on the public. At the end of the day the public needs and expects to see a 'real' police officer.

Secondly, the removal of the so-called soft duties from the police officer will lead to a hardening in the character and manner of officers – a less rounded individual who only deals with real trouble and more serious public confrontation. This is not good for police officers, their families or the general public.

British Transport Police Federation
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