

# SNP merger of Police Scotland and BTP delayed

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The controversial move to bring the British Transport Police under the control of Scotland's single force has been delayed.

The SNP wants Police Scotland to take control of transport policing north of the border, despite BTP officers and other experts warning against the move.

The merger was initially planned to take place in April 2019, but the Scottish Government today announced that will now be put back.

It is understood concerns over IT systems may be among the reasons for the delay, which justice secretary Michael Matheson admitted was "disappointing".

In a statement, he said the timetable for the move would be extended, allowing a "re-planning" exercise.

Numerous issues have been raised since the SNP government announced the plans last year, including pensions, funding, IT and officers choosing not to switch over.

Critics have also questioned whether or not crisis-hit Police Scotland is in a position to take on more responsibilities.

And the Scottish Conservatives said if an IT failing was the reason for the delay, it would be yet another example of incompetence in that area following problems processing farming payments and running systems for NHS 24.

## **Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:**

"While this SNP merger may have hit the buffers, it's time it was derailed altogether.

"The Scottish Conservatives have campaigned to stop this flawed plan for some time, and we're glad there's at least been a delay which might allow the SNP to do some proper planning and strategising.

"It's an unpopular move that virtually nobody is in favour of, with ideology and dogma seemingly the motive.

"There have been numerous concerns about this proposal, all of which should be enough to force the SNP into a rethink.

"The nationalists have already messed up one Police Scotland IT project, as well as failed systems impacting farming payments and NHS 24.

"It calls into question their ability to govern competently."