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The British Transport Police makes thousands of arrests every year, including hundreds for assault on staff and alcohol-related offences, new figures have shown.

A Freedom of Information request by the Scottish Conservatives revealed more than 13,000 arrests have been made since 2011 on trains and at stations in Scotland.

It comes as the SNP attempts to incorporate the BTP into Police Scotland, despite warnings from rail bosses this week that officers dealing with transport incidents could end up getting called away on other duties.

Now the Scottish Conservatives have questioned whether the single force is ready to deal with the dozens of additional incidents which occur on trains every week north of the border.

The FoI statistics showed the BTP made 2023 arrests last year, as well as 110 arrests in the first few weeks of 2017 alone.

Of the incidents in 2016, 221 related to alcohol, while 197 arrests followed allegations of verbal or physical assaults on a staff member.

In total, since 2011, there have been more than 1000 assaults on workers.

Last week, Scotrail said it feared a loss of expertise from the proposals, while officers themselves have pointed to a number of potential pitfalls that could occur as a result of the move.

The Scottish Conservatives have repeatedly questioned why ministers want to take one of the UK's most successful policing departments and merge it with one of the poorest-performing.

Scottish Conservative transport spokesman Liam Kerr said:

“The sheer numbers involved here show that taking away a dedicated service like the British Transport Police is a bad idea.

“What’s more, these are serious cases involving physical assault on staff and the abuse of alcohol.

“Passengers and staff alike respect the BTP and the job they do.

“Many suspect the motivation behind this move is for the SNP to get rid of the word ‘British’ from Scotland’s railways, and replace it with the word ‘Scotland’.

“If this move jeopardises the safety of workers and passengers, as these statistics suggest it might, then it must be resisted.”

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Douglas Ross said:

“The move by the SNP to have Police Scotland take over the BTP’s work is misguided and unpopular.

“It will cause all kinds of confusion, not least when it comes to cross-border services.

“The BTP itself has set out perfectly reasonable alternatives, but the Scottish Government doesn’t want to listen.

“If this move results in trains being less safe for staff and passengers, it will be another mark against Police Scotland’s name in the eyes of the public.”

Notes to editors:

To see a copy of the FoI response, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/FoI-Response-0080-17.pdf>

To read more on Scotrail’s concerns, visit:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/scotrail-warns-transport-police-merger-plan-could-lead-to-delays-1-4362864>