

Dear Dr. Kirkby,

I note with interest the comments on your Web site about the Essex & South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership (ESSCRP). Rather than hide behind anonymous comments on the Partnership, I would like to take this opportunity to explain the aims and objectives of the ESSCRP and use your Web site as a suitable vehicle.

The Essex ESSCRP covers four branch lines and was founded in 1997 as a practical partnership between the local communities served by the railway lines and the railway industry. It is designed to encourage and promote primarily off-peak rail travel for residents and business users of the communities along the branch lines by way of a wide range of projects. The Partnership acts as a thread through the area offering increased travel, tourism, educational and economic regeneration opportunities, thus enabling the communities to increase their economic, social and environmental welfare.

A common misconception of the Partnership is that it is a mouthpiece of the train operator and Essex County Council, nothing could be further from the truth. The Partnership comprises representatives from community organisations, District and County Councils and rail authorities.

The Partnership has two tiers:

- (a) a Steering Group which assists in drawing up and agreeing on an action plan containing specific projects that meet the aims and objectives of the Partnership.
- (b) community lineside promotion teams who propose local projects that go on to be adopted, developed and implemented by the ESSCRP, funded by the partners and other parties.

Typical project themes surround community development, tourism and leisure, line promotion and the local transport network. Some examples of the projects that we have successfully delivered along the Crouch Valley Line to date include:

- Refurbishment of the Southminster station house for use by the community.
- Healthy Living centre at Southminster providing valuable community services.
- Dengie Cycle Hire scheme.
- The production of a mural at Southminster station which involved the Southminster community.
- The 'Adopt a Station' scheme whereby residents take an active interest in looking after their local station.
- Production and distribution of promotional material aimed at increasing tourists to the area.

- Special event trains, for example the Santa train that ran between Southminster and Wickford last Christmas.

The focus of the lineside promotion groups is on improving and promoting the use of railway, and its primary function is not to resolve issues on the late running of a particular train, although we will happily forward such complaints to the relevant operator.

In order to expand local involvement in the ESSCRP and our projects, I always welcome any volunteers. I hope that you will be able to join our lineside promotion team – please let me know if you would like me to forward you details of our next meeting.

If you have any further questions or are able to volunteer to join our lineside promotion group, please do not hesitate to contact me using any or all of the following:

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