

**Rail Passengers Council,
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London
N1 9HF.**

**Dr. David Kirkby,
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26/8/2004.

Complaint concerning last trains on the Southminster Branch Line.

Dear sir/madam,

I have for many years been unhappy about the service on the Southminster Branch Line between Wickford and Southminster. This is not just since 'one' had the franchise.

London is of course a major city, with many theatres, pubs, clubs, restaurants etc. It is impossible to visit many theaters, whilst avoiding a large (26 pounds in my case) Taxi fare, since currently the last train leaving Liverpool Street, which connects with a train for Southminster are 2200 (Monday-Friday), 2120 (Saturday) and 2054 (Sunday). A **significant number** of regular users feel the weekday and Saturday services cease **far too early**. At a meeting I attended at Burnham on Crouch Station, the managers admit this is a common complaint.

On the 15th July 2004 I wrote to the train operator 'one' [1] about several points concerning the line, including the times of the last trains. I received a reply from Mr. Lombardelli, the Customer Relations Team Manager at 'one', dated the 3rd August [2], which addressed **some** of the issues I raised. However, more than half of the points in my original letter were completely ignored. His letter did however state they were actively looking at running latter trains.

I wrote back to Mr. Lombardelli at 'one' on the 7th August [3], asking that the points previously ignored were addressed and seeking clarification on a couple of others. One point I wanted clarification on was the time of the last train, as another commuter, Christine Drew, had written to 'one' [4] and the reply she received dated 22nd July [5], less than two weeks before the letter sent to me [2], stated there were no plans to introduce later trains. One of the reasons cited for this was that

“Network Rail are reluctant to allow later evening trains on branch lines, as they require access to the track for overnight maintenance work”

Christine copied me the letter. I felt that excuse was a very poor excuse indeed, so I wrote a single page letter to Network Rail [6] on the 7th August, asking them if they are reluctant to allow later trains on the branch line. At this point in time, 19 days later, I have not received any response from Network Rail.

In the second reply to myself from 'one', dated 14th August [7], Carl Lombardelli states

“I am pleased to confirm that from 12 December, the last train with a Southminster Connection will definitely leave later every day of the week – although the difference is only marginal. The times will be 22 15 (Monday-Friday), 21 45 (Saturday) 21 15 Sunday”

Whilst these are later than the current 'last trains', the difference is only marginal, as Mr. Lombardelli acknowledges. I, and many others I have spoken too, feel this improvement is just too small.

Although the line is a branch line, it is a busy line. At times there is standing room only on trains – this is not a rarely used line, but used by a large number of commuters.

What I consider would be the minimum acceptable outcome.

1) A response from Network Rail, confirming or denying they are reluctant to allow later evening trains, to allow access for maintenance. If they confirm this is the case, some justification would be appreciated.

2) A firm commitment from ‘one’ to provide a train (Monday-Friday), with a connection to Southminster, that leaves London’s Liverpool St. **no earlier than 11 pm**. Neither 2200 nor 2215 are acceptable. 2300 would give people time to visit a theatre, cinema etc and still get the last train home. One could have a meal in a restaurant, without having to leave a table early, to rush and board the last train home.

Given there are a large number of trains that leave Liverpool St for Southend Victoria after 2200, which have few passengers in them, it would not seem unreasonable to divert one train to Southminster instead. (Point #1 in my first letter to ‘one’ contains an error, as the intervals between Southend trains is not quite as short as I thought. But there are still a large number of trains departing between 2200 and 0055, one of which could reasonably be sent to Southminster).

I look forward to your reply. I’m sorry if the number of enclosures seems a lot, but I have tried to resolve this, but been hampered by

- ‘one’ ignoring several points in my original letter[1], forcing me to write again.
- ‘one’ providing conflicting information to two passengers.
- ‘one’ citing Network Rail as one reason for not running later trains, but Network Rail failing to confirm or deny this.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. David Kirkby.

Enclosures – not in chronological order, but the order referred to in this letter.

- [1] My first letter to ‘one’, dated 15th July 2004.
- [2] Reply from ‘one’ to myself, dated 3rd August.
- [3] My second letter to ‘one’ dated 7th August
- [4] Letter sent by Christine Drew in early July 2004 to ‘one’
- [5] Reply from ‘one’ to Christine Drew, dated 22nd July.
- [6] Letter to Network Rail, 7th August – no reply received.
- [7] The second reply from ‘one’ dated 14th August