

**One Great Eastern
Customer Service Centre,
North Station,
Colchester,
Essex,
C01 1XD.**

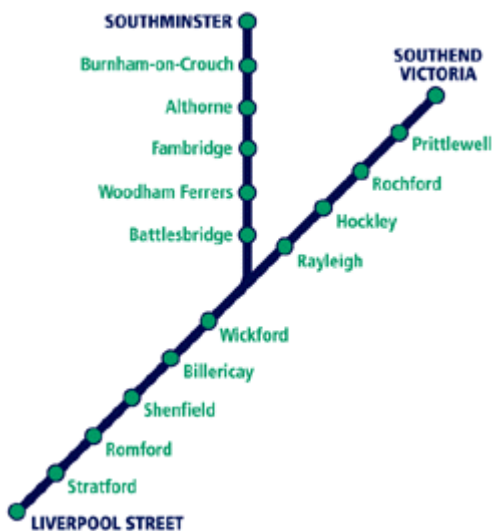
**Dr. David Kirkby,
Stokes Hall Lodge,
Burnham Rd,
Althorne,
Essex,
CM3 6DT.**

15/7/2004.

Poor service of the Southminster Branch Line.

Dear sir/madam,

I'm writing with some concerns I have regarding the Southminster Branch Line rail service. I'm a regular commuter, working in London, using the train each day from Althorne to Euston Square tube station, via Liverpool St station.



I'm well aware that no train timetable will be to everyone's liking - if a train is scheduled to depart at an ideal time for one person, it will just be too early for another person to board. I'm also aware timetable changes to one train, will most likely have to affect other trains too, especially in peak periods. Hence I am making no suggestions about what time a specific train should depart or arrive, but just requesting that the timetable is designed to be reasonable to all fare paying passengers, which I don't feel it currently is.

I note your web site says you did a survey and asked passengers to choose what they wanted most from a choice of four options; more facilities on stations, more fare offers for days out, closer links with the community or more facilities on trains. Apparently more facilities on stations was the winner. **Commuters** on the Southminster Branch Line would have a **very** different set of priorities.

Here are ten specific concerns, in order of my personal priority. A large number of people are unhappy about the service (hence many drive to Wickford and avoid the Branch Line completely). Other passengers would no doubt have differing priorities to me, although I suspect the first six on my list would be high priorities of most **regular commuters** on the Branch Line.

1. Departure time of the last Southminster train (Monday to Friday).

The last train from Liverpool St. that connects with a Southminster train is the 2200. This is **much** too early. It is nearly 3 hours before the 0050 for Southend Victoria departs. There are

12 trains departing from Liverpool St. to Southend after the 2200, with an average delay of just 13 minutes and 4 seconds between them. Many of these trains are almost empty, except for the last train (the 0050), which tends to be quite full. This shows two important points:

- Southend services get a **much** better service than the Southend Branch Line.
- People like to socialise late in London.

Would you please consider changing the destination of two trains (perhaps around 11 and 12 pm) to Southminster, rather than Southend Victoria? I know you store trains at Southend overnight, not at Southminster, but if a train departed from Liverpool St. for Southminster at midnight, it could easily be back to Southend, well before other trains arrive at Southend.

2. The irregular intervals between trains in the peak period.

The timetable shows that a train takes 29 or 30 minutes to travel from Wickford to Southminster. Obviously it takes time to turn a train around, so nobody is expecting a service every 30 minutes with a single passing point at Fambridge. But the timetable does show 38 minutes between trains is possible. If it can be done once, it can be done again, given sufficient priority to the service. Since other areas (Colchester, Southend etc.) get a far better and regular service (10 minutes or less), I feel it's not unreasonable to ask that higher priority is given to Southminster Branch Line trains, to make the intervals between trains smaller and more equal.

3. More direct trains, with no need to change at Wickford or Shenfield.

4. Cancellations and delays.

Myself, and many other users of the Southminster Branch Line, feel that if there are problems between London and Wickford, requiring that a train needs to be cancelled, or delayed, it is most likely to be a Southminster train. Even one of your own staff commented on this fact once. Clearly if there are problems along the Southminster Branch Line, we can expect this, but many feel the Southminster Branch Line is more likely to be affected than Southend services, even if the problem has nothing to do with the Branch Line. I have for example known several occasions where a Branch Line train is delayed at Wickford to allow a late-running Southend train to pass first.

Can you please advise me if the Branch Line is treated in a different way to the main Southend Line when statistics for punctuality and reliability are collected? If so, it could explain what appears to be a preference for canceling or delaying the Southminster Branch Line services. I understand the single-track line will always mean problems are more likely to occur, and are now wondering if the cancellation of a Southminster train is less detrimental to your statistics than cancellation of a Southend train. Would you please comment on this? When buses are used as replacements for trains, how does this affect your statistics?

5. Refusal of staff at Wickford to provide replacement buses in times of delays.

When there are very long delays, a rail replacement bus service is often provided. However, many feel this should be done more often when there are delays, but staff at Wickford say they don't have the authority to do this.

Who decides when buses will replace trains at Wickford, and what criteria are used?

6. High Fares Costs.

The prices of the monthly and annual tickets on the Southminster Branch Line are a lot higher than those on the main Southend line. For example, if one purchases an annual ticket

between Wickford and London it costs £2,460. Having the ticket cover the much longer journey between Southend and London adds just £40 to the cost. But London to Althorne, which is about the same distance, adds £240. Here's a short summary of data extracted from your web site. The disparity is obvious for all to see.

Station	Annual cost of season ticket	Extra cost compared to Wickford
Wickford	£2,460	-
Southend Victoria	£2,500	£40
Woodham Ferrers	£2,600	£140
Althorne	£2,700	£240
Southminster	£2,800	£340

I'm sure you will not suddenly decrease the prices of our tickets, nor increase the Southend tickets to be comparable with ours, but please remember the disparity when

- i. Setting priorities of service – we do pay more and get a much poorer service.
- ii. Setting new fares in the future.

7. Public meetings with One's management at rail stations.

Such public meetings occur occasionally, but they are poorly publicised, so few people know about them. Would you consider doing the following:

- i. Publicise the dates, times and locations of forthcoming meetings on your web site and via posters at different stations, so more people are aware of them?
- ii. Add to your web site a **permanent** record of the dates, times and locations of past meetings, the forenames and positions of the manager(s) present, the questions asked and the responses given by One's management?

8. Last train on a Saturday.

This leaves London at 2120, some 2 hours and 30 minutes before the last Southend train.

9. Last train on a Sunday.

This leaves London at 2054, a full three hours before the last train for Southend Victoria.

10. Two hour wait for a train on Thursdays.

When the nuclear fuel rods are moved from Bradwell power station to Sellafield, the 1133 from Liverpool St will not run past Wickford and the 1323 from Southminster does not run. Could you not use the rail replacement buses? The cost must be minimal compared to the revenue received from moving dangerous radioactive cargo at low speed.

I would like to state that I believe you have an inaccurate view of the usage (and potential usage) on the Branch Line since:

- Many people travel to Wickford by car, to avoid the Southminster Branch Line. If you dispute this, then I suggest you run a check on the postcodes of people with monthly or annual tickets to Wickford, and determine how many actually live closer to Branch Line Stations than to Wickford. I think you would find the number is large.
- There are no penalty fares, so many travel for free on the Branch Line.
- Many people get Taxis to go in the direction of the Branch Line from outside Wickford Station late at night, well after the last train for Southminster has left.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. David Kirkby.