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Dr. David Kirkby,
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7/8/2004.

Re: Poor service of the Southminster Branch Line.

Dear My Lombardelli

Thank you very much for your letter of the 3rd August 2004, in response to my letter of the 15th July, concerning the poor service on the Southminster Branch Line. Unfortunately, whilst your reply addressed some of the issues I raised, several were overlooked.

I've put bullet points below. Those with filled dots were overlooked in your reply to me, whilst those with unfilled dots are points where you replied, but I would appreciate a more detailed response, for the reasons which will be stated where appropriate.

Questions unanswered from my previous letter.

- I asked two questions with regard to meetings with 'one' managers at railway stations, neither of which you have answered. You may recall I expressed some concerns about these meetings, and particularly that few people knew of their existence. I asked:
 - i. Whether you would publicise the dates, times and locations of forthcoming meetings via your web site and posters at different stations?
 - ii. Add to your website the dates, times and locations of past meetings, the forenames of the manager(s) present, the questions asked and the replies given?
- I asked whether you could use replacement buses on Thursdays, to avoid the 2-hour gap between trains.
- My concerns about the ease of which people travel on the line for free, since there are no penalty fares, were not addressed.
- I asked whether the branch line was treated in any way differently from the Southend line trains when gathering statistics for punctuality and reliability.

I am keen to ascertain if there is less of a financial loss to 'one' if Southminster trains are delayed or cancelled, than if a Southend trains is delayed or cancelled.

- I asked why there are such large variations of the departure times of trains, which was not addressed. The following two tables show the basis for my concern about irregularity in greater detail than in my letter of the 15th July 2004.

Departure time from Liverpool St.	Interval since previous Southminster Train (minutes)
1722	42
1816	54
1854	38

If these departure times are compared with those for the Southend Victoria, over the same period, the difference is very marked indeed.

Departure time from Liverpool St.	Interval since previous direct Southend Victoria train (minutes)
1714	10
1724	10
1734	10
1744	10
1754	10
1804	10
1824	20
1834	10

Obviously the Southend trains are more frequent, but with just one exception, the intervals are consistently 10 minutes. In contrast, the Southminster Branch Line gets a very irregular service, with wildly varying intervals between trains.

That concludes the issues you did not answer from my previous letter.

Points on which clarification is sought.

- o I mentioned the times of last trains during the week, Saturday and Sunday. Your letter said:

The Southend/Southminster line timetable is being revised for the winter 2004 timetable, and I am pleased to confirm that we are actively looking at the possibility of running a later 'last train' to Southminster than currently exists.

Is this for trains during the week, Saturdays, Sundays or all three?

I have been passed a copy of a letter addressed to another unhappy commuter Christine Drew. This was written to her on the 22nd July 2004 by Jeff Cracknell from 'one'. That letter states:

“Although the possibility of timetabling later trains has been discussed, there are no plans to do so at present. Network rail are reluctant to allow later evening trains on branch lines as they require access to the track for overnight maintenance work and the number of passengers using the service is unlikely to be economically viable “

So could you please clarify the current state of progress with regard to last trains in greater detail? The lack of later trains is I feel the issue that bothers more people than anything else on the branch line, so deserves attention at the earliest opportunity. The content of these two letters, written just twelve days apart, do give a very different impression of progress (or lack of) on this issue.

- Your letter stated

“Whilst a 38-minute frequency is theoretically possible, this would only be possible as a Wickford to Southminster shuttle – and makes no allowance whatsoever for any late running. In practice therefore, a 45 minute frequency in the peaks ‘more robust’.”

The 1816 and 1854 both run directly from London’s Liverpool St. to Southminster. These are **not** shuttle trains, yet have a 38-minute interval between them. The latter train does make one extra stop (Billericay), so departure times from Wickford differ by 40 minutes (the 1816 from London departs from Wickford at 1848, the 1854 departs from Wickford at 1928).

I find it hard to accept that there needs to be 45 minutes between trains, when:

- i. The journey time between Wickford and Southminster, according to your own timetables is 29 or 30 minutes.
- ii. The current timetable must have allowance for late running – all timetables do.
- iii. The trains run at higher speeds if delayed.
- iv. You do run trains direct trains from London with a gap of 38 minutes.
- v. I received a letter a letter from the former Great Eastern saying 38-minute service could not be achieved due to *routing problems at Shenfield*.

It is hard to believe that trains could not be run with intervals of at least 5 minutes less than currently, which would reduce the overcrowding.

We are all well aware rail companies get fined for late-running trains. Unfortunately, I feel a side-effect of this is that companies like ‘one’ have introduced unnecessarily long allowances, to avoid being fined, which is obviously to the benefit of National Expresses shareholders, but not to passengers.

I look forward to your reply

Yours sincerely,

Dr. David Kirkby.