

Ipswich Station, Burrell Road, Ipswich IP2 8AL  
North Station, Colchester, CO1 1XD

## customer relations

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Doctor David Kirkby  
Stokes Hall Lodge  
Burnham Road  
Althorne  
Essex  
CM3 6DT

Contact Ref.93  
03/Aug/2004

Dear Doctor Kirkby,

Thank you for your letter dated 15 July, concerning services on the Wickford to Southminster line.

It is our aim, when planning a timetable, to produce a service that meets the needs of the majority of our passengers, although the cost of providing a service has to be balanced against likely use.

The Southend/Southminster line timetable is being reviewed 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. There is, however, no prospect of an improvement in the general frequency of service. We are very much aware that some Dengie Hundred passengers choose to drive to Wickford, but there is little we can do about this – although car parking tariffs on the branch are deliberately kept low (compared with Wickford) to encourage their use.

We would be delighted to be able offer a 30 minute frequency in the morning and evening peaks but, as you are already aware, the geography of the route prevents us from doing so. 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'.

To be able to offer a 30 minute frequency over the entire route would require extra passing points to be built at approximately five and 10 miles from Wickford. For major investment schemes of this nature, the Strategic Rail Authority would be in the lead, rather than train operating companies such as ourselves – although Essex County Council may well have funding in its long term transport budget for projects of this nature.

Fares from Southminster line stations are generally slightly higher than those which apply from Southend line stations, as we have to keep Southend line fares competitive with those offered by c2c on Fenchurch Street services. However, Southminster fares are generally slightly lower than those which apply from Chelmsford line stations of equivalent or similar distance from London. For example, the annual season ticket from Witham – which is two miles closer to London than Althorne – costs £2820 (£120 more).

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When services are disrupted, our control office makes every effort to avoid cancelling a Southminster service – which is only done as a last resort. Whilst the simple solution would appear to be to divert a Southend service to Southminster, I regret that in practice it is not quite as easy as this.

There are no specific criteria for the provision of replacement buses from Wickford as every situation varies. Because a replacement bus invariably takes a minimum of 30 minutes to arrive (if we can get one), if the next train is likely to depart within this time frame then there is little point in our ordering a bus which may well arrive after the next train has departed.

I am sorry I cannot be more positive, but I hope these comments clarify our position.

Yours sincerely,



Carl Lombardelli  
Customer Relations Team Manager  
Colchester Office