

Poor Quality of Service on the Southminster Branch Line.

See the new web site at <http://www.southminster-branch-line.org.uk/>

Most regular commuters traveling on the single-track line between Wickford and Southminster seem unhappy with the service, for one or more reasons. These might include:

Cost

The cost of tickets on the main Southend line and the Southminster Branch Line are very different. Here's a list of prices for 2nd class annual tickets in order of increasing prices.

Station	Annual cost of season ticket to London	Cost compared to Southend Victoria.
Southend Victoria	£2,500	-
Woodham Ferrers	£2,600	£100 more
Fambridge	£2,640	£140 more
Althorne	£2,700	£200 more
Burnham on Crouch	£2,780	£280 more
Southminster	£2,800	£300 more

These prices exclude travel on the underground, which adds £480 to all tickets. Monthly and weekly tickets follow a similar pattern, with ticket costs a lot higher on the Southminster Branch Line. Full details on One Great Eastern's web site at <http://www.onegreateastern.com/tickets/season-tickets.asp>

Times of the last train from London.

Despite paying much more for tickets, Southminster Branch Line users have to be at Liverpool St. much earlier to meet their last train home.

Day of week	Southend Victoria	Southminster	Difference (hours:minutes)
Monday-Friday	0050	2200	2:50
Saturday	0050	2120	3:30
Sunday	0050	2052	3:58

Regularity of trains.

The following table shows the departure times from London in the peak period. Clearly trains can be run at 38 minute intervals (e.g. the 1816 and 1854), despite the single passing point at Fambridge, but this is not done. Preference is given to other trains. The Southminster service is treated as a second class line.

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

Now compare these figures with the Southend line, over the same period.

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

There are a number of other issues that affect the Southminster Branch Line. Some complaints might be:

- The regularity of problems which result in long delays, making people late for work, or late getting home. When trains are cancelled, it is far more likely to be a Southminster train than a Southend train.
- The low frequency of the trains, which means long waiting periods and overcrowding.
- The refusal sometimes of staff at Wickford to arrange buses when Southminster trains are delayed. They say they don't have the authority to arrange buses.

- The need to change at Wickford and/or Shenfield.

A new web site has been set up highlighting the problems at <http://www.southminster-branch-line.org.uk/> (note it's .org.uk, not a .co.uk). There's a *guestbook* where you can see the comments of others, and add your own comments <http://www.southminster-branch-line.org.uk/guestbook/add.html>

Scheduled Colchester and Southend services are already very good, so slightly inferior scheduled services on those lines should not stop improvements on the Southminster Branch Line. More housing is being built, especially around Wickford and Southminster so there will be more passengers, with more crowded trains.

One Great Eastern gets a distorted view of the usage of the branch line, since:

- Many people travel on the branch line for free since it's so easy to do so – there are no penalty fares between Wickford and Southminster. When asked by ticket examiners where they got on, they usually say the previous station.
- Many people drive to Wickford rather than suffer the Branch Line's poor service.
- Many get Taxis from Wickford late at night, since it's impossible to travel beyond Wickford by train.

A lot of people do use the line, but even more people would use the line if it was better, and more would pay for the service if penalty fares were introduced and **enforced**.

What Most people do about the poor service.

- Moan to other customers.
- Moan to the ticket examiners on the trains.
- Moan to the station staff at Wickford, Woodham Ferrers, Burnham-on-Crouch or Southminster.

All these actions are a complete waste of time. The only way the service will get improved is by putting your concerns (preferably in writing) to organisations or individuals who have power to influence the matter. Please don't copy this flyer, or sign it and send it off. Make your complaint look original.

What can you do, that will have an effect?

If you have complaints about the service, contact The Customer Service Manager, One Great Eastern, North Station, Colchester, C01 1XD, or alternatively e-mail customer.services@onerailway.com. Telephoning One Great Eastern is a waste of time. Writing is **much** better than email, but email is better than nothing at all, especially if copied to your MP. For most of the Dengie, the MP is John Whittingdale, e-mail (jwhittingdale.mp@tory.org.uk), but for South Woodham I believe is Mark Francois (mfrancois@rayleighconservatives.org.uk) but are not sure of this. Both MP's can be contacted at the same address at the House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA
You can find your MP at <http://www.locata.co.uk/commons/> if you enter your postcode. This is the best way to ensure you get the correct MP. Letters from MPs are taken seriously by companies.

If you do email One Great Eastern, you might get a response by a junior member of staff with a disclaimer at the bottom saying something like '*These views do not necessarily reflect the views of Onerailway*'. If you do, then email them back, with your postal address, asking for a written response that officially reflects the views of the company, so you can take the matter further, with their official response. This will force the issue to be raised at a higher level of management inside One. If you do email or write to one, I would be interested in knowing about what you do and what response you get. See my details at the end of this.

Final Thoughts.

Before dismissing this and thinking "*I can't be bothered*", or "*that will cost me money for a stamp*", you might consider that the value of your house would increase if the area had better transport facilities. Please post a copy of this at your local station. You can find an electronic copy at <http://www.southminster-branch-line.org.uk/southminster-flyer.pdf> Do something about this issue. Above all, please contact One Great Eastern and your MP. Let them know if you are unhappy.

Please put yourself out, and put pen to paper, or fingers to a keyboard, and write/e-mail to complain about the problems that affect you personally. With sufficient pressure, the service would be improved. Without pressure, it will not.

Dr. David Kirkby, 1st August 2004. e-mail: david.kirkby@onetel.net