

EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE REPORT

Q1 2021 (1 JANUARY 2021 – 31 MARCH 2021)



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1. EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE'S MESSAGE

12 May 2021

This report covers the Q1 2021 quarterly period (1 January 2021 – 31 March 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic had an unprecedented impact on the Victorian economy, increasing unemployment and under-employment, and businesses have closed.

During Q1 2021, Melbourne continued its recovery from the impact of its second wave of COVID-19 infections and an extended lockdown which had taken up most of July-October 2020.

This recovery was interrupted and partially set back by a five-day 'stage 4' lockdown, which was introduced at midnight on 12 February 2021 in response to locally acquired cases of COVID-19 infection.

Following that five-day lockdown, EastLink traffic volumes continued to recover. EastLink traffic volumes are now almost back to pre-pandemic levels.

Looking at the details of the cases raised with me as the EastLink Customer Advocate (ECA), there is little direct evidence that the impact of COVID-19 has directly resulted in large numbers of specific ECA cases. Only a few of the cases raised have made any mention of COVID-19 or financial hardship. However, it is now clear that the number of ECA cases did indeed peak during the first half of 2020 when the pandemic first emerged.

Last quarter, I reported that EastLink had donated \$100,000 to Peninsula Community Legal Centre, to assist local people experiencing disadvantage during these difficult times.

Today, I can report that EastLink has made three further donations:

- > \$100,000 to Eastern Community Legal Centre
- > \$100,000 to EACH for Eastern Financial Counselling Services
- > \$100,000 to Beyond Blue.

EastLink will be making similar donations to two more community service providers, which will be announced by EastLink in the coming weeks.

Each of these donations demonstrates that EastLink recognises that some local people living in the EastLink corridor have been directly affected and are experiencing financial hardship, mental health issues and family violence

If you have been directly affected by COVID-19 and are seeking additional assistance from EastLink, please phone EastLink's customer services team in Melbourne on (03) 9955 1400 during business hours Monday to Friday (closed public holidays).

For more information about EastLink's hardship policy (which outlines available options and how to request hardship assistance), visit www.eastlink.com.au/hardship.

For more information about the role of the EastLink Customer Advocate, visit www.eastlink.com.au/customeradvocate.

Doug Spencer-Roy
EastLink Customer Advocate



2. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASES DURING THE QUARTER

2.1 CASES RAISED

40% of the cases raised during Q1 2021 related to toll invoices. This is within the nominal range.

Table 1: ECA cases raised

ECA CASES RAISED	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Q1 2021
Toll invoice	8	3	8	19
Toll invoice SMS message	0	2	0	2
Toll invoice payment	0	2	0	2
Account notice	0	1	1	2
Account payment	1	0	0	1
Account charge	1	2	0	3
Account charge for a sold vehicle	1	2	1	4
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle or cloned vehicle	0	1	0	1
Account closure	1	1	1	3
Tags	1	0	0	1
Tolling class	2	0	0	2
Debt recovery	1	0	1	2
Customer service	4	2	1	7
Payment options	1	0	0	1
Hardship assistance	1	2	2	5
Infringements (fines)	1	0	0	1
Landscaping	0	2	0	2
TOTAL	23	20	15	58

2.2 CASES CLOSED

All of the cases raised during Q1 2021 have been closed.

Table 2: ECA cases closed

ECA CASES CLOSED	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Q1 2021
Q1 2021 cases closed (as at date of report)	23	20	15	58
Q1 2021 cases still open (as at date of report)	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	23	20	15	58

2.3 CASE FINDINGS

In 50% of cases although EastLink was not at fault and there was no valid complaint, I arranged for EastLink's customer service team to assist the customer with their predicament.

12% of cases were fully upheld, and a further 14% of cases were partially upheld. In 24% of cases the complaint was rejected with no practical customer service assistance identifiable. No cases were referred to a third party.

Table 3: ECA case findings

ECA CASE FINDINGS	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Q1 2021
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	14	8	7	29
Complaint upheld	1	3	3	7
Complaint partially upheld	3	3	2	8
Complaint rejected	5	6	3	14
Referred to another tollway operator etc.	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	23	20	15	58

Most cases involved complaints about modest sums – in particular, the fee component of a toll invoice but not the toll component. (In general, with toll invoice complaints, it is not the trip or toll that is disputed, but whether the trip is able to be charged to a valid account.)

This means that the refunds and credits awarded can vary significantly from month to month, depending on whether there are any of the more unusual, higher value cases during the month, and whether those complaints are upheld or rejected.

Table 4: ECA case findings – refunds & credits

ECA CASE FINDINGS – REFUNDS & CREDITS	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Q1 2021
Refunds & credits awarded	\$1,128	\$618	\$1,043	\$2,789

2.4 ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE CASES

The average elapsed time to close ECA cases during the quarter was 2.8 days. This elapsed time includes weekend days and public holidays.

Table 5: Elapsed time to close ECA cases

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Q1 2021
Average time to close cases (days)	1.7	4.4	2.7	2.8

Case Study – disputed tollway trip

The customer disputed a video trip on CityLink.

Analysis of a sample of images of the vehicle travelling on EastLink indicated that the EastLink tag had not been installed correctly in the customer’s vehicle (it was on the vehicle’s dashboard).

I informed the customer that the tag needs to be installed according to the instructions, and advised the customer of the implications of travelling while the tag is not installed correctly.

A toll point image provided by CityLink allowed verification that the vehicle detected travelling on CityLink was the same vehicle as the vehicle that had travelled on EastLink with the customer’s tag not installed correctly.

There was no error by CityLink or EastLink.

3. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE TRENDS

3.1 HISTORICAL TRENDS

In Q1 2021, a total of 58 cases were raised with me, which is similar to the number of cases in the previous quarter, and 35% lower than the same quarter last year – see Table 6.

Table 6: ECA cases trend

ECA CASES	Q3 2019	Q4 2019	Q1 2020	Q2 2020	Q3 2020	Q4 2020	Q1 2021
Service request	5	1	2	0	0	0	0
Toll invoice	24	27	44	31	31	18	19
Toll invoice SMS messages	0	0	1	3	0	1	2
Toll invoice payment	0	0	1	3	2	1	2
Account notice	1	2	0	0	1	0	2
Account payment	2	0	4	4	0	4	1
Account charge	1	2	2	10	8	3	3
Account charge for a sold vehicle	1	2	4	3	1	0	4
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle etc	0	3	3	5	2	3	1
Account charge for an LPN error	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Account suspension	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Account closure	1	0	1	0	1	0	3
Deceased account	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Tags	2	0	2	1	1	2	1
Tolls	0	1	1	1	1	1	0
Tolling class	0	1	0	1	1	0	2
Trip pass	1	2	0	2	0	2	0
Rental vehicle toll payment	4	2	1	2	0	0	0
Debt recovery	1	1	0	0	2	1	2
Customer service	2	7	13	13	14	17	7
Payment options	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Website	0	3	0	1	0	3	0
Hardship assistance	0	2	1	3	4	2	5
Payment plan	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Infringements (fines)	2	3	4	3	2	0	1
Incident response	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Debris damage	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Road maintenance	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Signage	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Litter	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Noise	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Speed limit	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Graffiti	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Landscaping	0	2	2	0	3	1	2
EastLink Trail	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Privacy	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Problem with another tollway operator	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown (withdrawn, insufficient details)	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Police search	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	55	63	89	91	76	59	58

The number of complaints that were fully upheld or partially upheld increased from 11 to 15 (+36%). The number of complaints that were rejected increased from 7 to 14 (+100%) – see Table 7.

On examination, 29 of the 58 cases raised during Q1 2021 were in fact found to be requests for customer service with no valid complaint, rather than unresolved customer complaints – see Table 7. For example: a customer seeking confirmation that their account had been closed; a customer seeking assistance with a tag that did not beep at a toll point; a customer requesting a

payment plan to pay off outstanding toll invoices; or a customer seeking to nominate a toll invoice to another person. Such cases are forwarded to the EastLink customer service team (or other department where appropriate) for expedited service.

Table 7: ECA case findings trend

ECA CASE FINDINGS	Q3 2019	Q4 2019	Q1 2020	Q2 2020	Q3 2020	Q4 2020	Q1 2021
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	21	25	44	43	48	41	29
Complaint upheld	13	9	15	15	6	6	7
Complaint partially upheld	12	18	14	10	8	5	8
Complaint rejected	8	11	14	22	11	7	14
Referred to another tollway operator etc.	1	0	2	0	3	0	0
Insufficient details provided	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
TOTAL	55	63	89	91	76	59	58

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q1 2021 was \$2,789, the highest on record – see Table 8.

However, 73% of this amount relates to just two unusually large refunds, both of which involve cases that relate to family violence situations: a \$1039 refund in one case and a \$1004 refund in the other case. In both of these cases, the refund was provided by EastLink's billing and credit department following a request for hardship assistance made by the customer during their contact with me.

Table 8: ECA case findings – refunds & credits trend

ECA CASES – REFUNDS & CREDITS	Q3 2019	Q4 2019	Q1 2020	Q2 2020	Q3 2020	Q4 2020	Q1 2021
Refunds & credits awarded	\$738	\$590	\$1,707	\$974	\$737	\$1,131	\$2,789

The elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q1 2021 was higher than the four previous quarters – see Table 9.

However, one case in Q1 2021 took an unusually long 35 days to close – see Section 4.4 for more about this case. Excluding just that one case, the average time to close ECA cases during Q1 2021 would fall to 2.3 days (which would be lower than the previous quarter).

Table 9: Elapsed time to close ECA cases trend

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	Q3 2019	Q4 2019	Q1 2020	Q2 2020	Q3 2020	Q4 2020	Q1 2021
Average time to close cases (days)	4.0	2.8	2.2	1.8	1.3	2.5	2.8

4. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE EXAMPLES

This section only shows a very brief summary of each case example. The detailed circumstances of every case are unique, so these case examples should not be read as precedents for other cases.

4.1 CUSTOMER A (TOLL INVOICE INCORRECTLY ISSUED)

Customer A complained that an EastLink overdue notice had been issued incorrectly for a vehicle linked to a Transurban Linkt account. Transurban Linkt confirmed the date of registration of the vehicle on the account, which was prior to the date of travel on EastLink. An error had been made, so the overdue notice was completely cancelled, and the cause of the error further investigated by EastLink's customer service, billing and credit teams.

4.2 CUSTOMER B (TOLL INVOICE SMS REMINDER MESSAGE)

Customer B complained that a fraudulent SMS message had been received, purporting to be an EastLink overdue notice reminder. However, the veracity of the EastLink overdue notice was confirmed, and it was observed that the vehicle's registered owner had the same surname as Customer B. I explained to the customer that the mobile phone number had been provided by VicRoads for the vehicle, the SMS overdue notice reminder for the vehicle is valid, and the overdue notice needs to be paid by the vehicle's owner.

4.3 CUSTOMER C (TRANSFER OF TOLL INVOICE TO TOLLING ACCOUNT DENIED)

Customer C complained that the transfer of a number of EastLink toll invoices to a Transurban Linkt account had been denied by EastLink. It was confirmed that the Transurban Linkt account was suspended at the time of travel, so the EastLink toll invoices had been issued correctly. It was also confirmed that EastLink's customer services team had correctly advised Customer C that EastLink does not transfer EastLink toll invoices to Transurban Linkt video tolling accounts, and that transfers are only possible to Transurban Linkt tag accounts. The EastLink toll invoices remained payable to EastLink, with additional time provided for Customer C to make the payment. Customer C was also advised that further EastLink toll invoices would be issued if the vehicle continued to be driven on EastLink while the Transurban Linkt account continued to be suspended.

4.4 CUSTOMER D (NOISE PANEL REPAIRED)

Customer D complained that a wooden noise panel backing on to Customer D's residential property was coming apart. It was determined that although the noise panel was nominally part of EastLink, the noise panel is currently located in a construction zone controlled by the Monash Freeway Upgrade project and difficult for EastLink's operations team to access. An EastLink engineer contacted the Monash Freeway Upgrade contractor, who conducted an on-site inspection. Following their on-site inspection, which indicated that the noise panel was only slightly damaged, the Monash Freeway Upgrade contractor agreed to repair the noise panel. Repair works were scheduled and the noise panel was repaired by screwing the panel back on to the noise wall post.

4.5 CUSTOMER E (CONFUSION BETWEEN EASTLINK AND TRANSURBAN LINKT/CITYLINK)

Customer E complained that an EastLink overdue notice had been received for a toll invoice that Customer E had already paid. Customer E provided copies of the toll invoice and a payment receipt as proof. However, it was determined that the toll invoice and payment receipt were for Transurban Linkt/CityLink, and not for EastLink. It was also determined that a separate EastLink overdue notice was also outstanding for Customer E's vehicle, as EastLink had received no payment for, and no contact in relation to, several trips on EastLink. This was explained to Customer E and a copy of the outstanding EastLink overdue notice was provided together with information about payment options.

For further information:

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