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Time better spent.

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# **EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE REPORT**

**Q4 2019 (1 OCTOBER 2019 – 31 DECEMBER 2019)**



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## 1. EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE'S MESSAGE

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16 January 2020

**This report covers the second quarterly period undertaken by an EastLink Customer Advocate.**

In Q4 2019, 63 cases were raised with me, which is an increase of 15% on the previous quarter.

However, even with this increased case load, the average elapsed time to close each case decreased from 4.0 to 2.8 days. This is an excellent outcome for customers who are seeking quick closure of an unresolved complaint that may have been on-going for some time prior to being raised with me.

In 25 out of 63 cases this quarter, although I found that EastLink was not at fault and the complaint should be completely rejected, I arranged for EastLink's customer service team to assist the customer with their predicament.

Nearly half of all the cases raised with me during the quarter (27 out of 63 cases) have related to complaints about EastLink toll invoices. This ratio is similar to the previous quarter.

It is important to note that these toll invoice cases did not dispute that a trip was made on EastLink. Instead, the dispute is usually about whether a payment arrangement was available, such as a tolling account or EastLink trip pass.

For example, a tolling account may have been suspended at the time of travel due to non-payment.

When a customer has a complaint about a toll invoice, it is vitally important for the customer to contact EastLink's customer services team as soon as possible.

It is my experience that a small complaint is relatively quick and easy to resolve in a fair and reasonable way, to all parties' satisfaction.

However, if the customer does not contact EastLink about the complaint until much later, the dispute will most likely have grown significantly in magnitude as well as complexity. Some toll invoices may even have progressed to infringement penalty notices issued by Victoria Police, on which I am not able to issue a binding finding.

A fair and reasonable outcome for a large and complex dispute may be less satisfying for the customer.

Therefore, I strongly encourage customers to raise any complaint as early as possible.

In the first instance, contact EastLink's customer services team about the complaint.

If the outcome of that complaint is not to the customer's satisfaction, then I can be contacted to review it.

For more information about the role of the EastLink Customer Advocate, visit [www.eastlink.com.au/customeradvocate](http://www.eastlink.com.au/customeradvocate).

**Doug Spencer-Roy**  
EastLink Customer Advocate



## 2. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASES DURING THE QUARTER

### 2.1 CASES RAISED

Table 1: ECA cases raised

ECA CASES RAISED	Oct 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Q4 2019
Enquiry (service request, not a complaint)	1	0	0	1
Toll invoice	10	11	6	27
Account notice	1	1	0	2
Account charge	2	0	0	2
Account charge for a sold vehicle	0	1	1	2
Account charge for stolen plates / vehicle	2	0	1	3
Account suspension	0	1	0	1
Tolls	0	0	1	1
Tolling class	1	0	0	1
Trip pass	1	0	1	2
Rental vehicle toll payment	2	0	0	2
Debt recovery	0	0	1	1
Customer service	3	0	4	7
Website	2	1	0	3
Hardship assistance	0	2	0	2
Infringements (fines)	2	1	0	3
Incident response	0	0	1	1
Landscaping	1	1	0	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>63</b>

### 2.2 CASES CLOSED

All of the cases raised during Q4 2019 have been closed.

Table 2: ECA cases closed

ECA CASES CLOSED	Oct 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Q4 2019
Q4 2019 cases closed (as at date of report)	28	19	16	63
Q4 2019 cases still open (as at date of report)	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>63</b>

### 2.3 CASE FINDINGS

In 40% of cases EastLink was not at fault, and even though the complaint was rejected, I arranged for EastLink's customer service team to assist the customer with their predicament. 14% of cases were fully upheld, and a further 29% of cases were partially upheld. In 18% of cases the complaint was rejected with no practical customer service assistance identifiable.

Table 3: ECA case findings

ECA CASE FINDINGS	Oct 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Q4 2019
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	12	4	9	25
Complaint upheld	3	4	2	9
Complaint partially upheld	6	7	5	18
Complaint rejected	7	4	0	11
Referred to another tollway operator	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>63</b>

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 in doubt, 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	Oct 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Q4 2019
Refunds & credits awarded	\$268	\$116	\$206	\$590

## 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.

The figure for December 2019 was impacted due to three unrelated cases that required more complex investigation. Excluding those three cases, the average elapsed time to close cases in December 2019 was 2.5 days.

Table 5: Elapsed time to close ECA cases

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	Oct 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Q4 2019
Average time to close cases (days)	1.5	3.3	4.4	2.8

### Case Study – A complaint resulting in a website improvement

A customer complained about receiving an unexpected toll invoice for a rental vehicle.

Upon investigation, it transpired that the customer had not followed the instructions provided by the rental company to their vehicle renters about the purchase of tollway passes (all tollways, not just EastLink) and the operation of the rental company's toll payment program (arranged via the NSW RMS tollway operator for travel on all Australian tollways).

The EastLink Customer Advocate reviewed the information on the EastLink website (in the trip pass purchase section) and determined that the content displayed there could be improved to assist vehicle renters.

The EastLink website was immediately updated with these improvements.

The customer was advised of this outcome, and the EastLink toll invoice costs were refunded (as the customer had paid the toll invoice in addition to purchasing trip passes).

### 3. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE TRENDS

#### 3.1 HISTORICAL TRENDS

It is too early to identify trends over time.

Table 6: ECA cases trend

ECA CASES	Q3 2019	Q4 2019	Q1 2020	Q2 2020	Q3 2020	Q4 2020
Enquiry (service request, not a complaint)	5	1	-	-	-	-
Toll invoice	24	27	-	-	-	-
Account notice	1	2	-	-	-	-
Account payment	2	0	-	-	-	-
Account charge	1	2	-	-	-	-
Account charge for a sold vehicle	1	2	-	-	-	-
Account charge for stolen plates / vehicle	0	3	-	-	-	-
Account charge for an LPN error	1	0	-	-	-	-
Account suspension	0	1	-	-	-	-
Account closure	1	0	-	-	-	-
Faulty tag	2	0	-	-	-	-
Tolls	0	1	-	-	-	-
Tolling class	0	1	-	-	-	-
Trip pass	1	2	-	-	-	-
Rental vehicle toll payment	4	2	-	-	-	-
Debt recovery	1	1	-	-	-	-
Customer service	2	7	-	-	-	-
Website	0	3	-	-	-	-
Hardship assistance	0	2	-	-	-	-
Infringements (fines)	2	3	-	-	-	-
Incident response	0	1	-	-	-	-
Debris damage	1	0	-	-	-	-
Signage	1	0	-	-	-	-
Litter	1	0	-	-	-	-
Landscaping	0	2	-	-	-	-
EastLink Trail	1	0	-	-	-	-
Privacy	1	0	-	-	-	-
Problem with another tollway operator	1	0	-	-	-	-
Unknown (e.g. customer withdrew case)	1	0	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

Table 7: ECA case findings trend

ECA CASE FINDINGS	Q3 2019	Q4 2019	Q1 2020	Q2 2020	Q3 2020	Q4 2020
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	21	25	-	-	-	-
Complaint upheld	13	9	-	-	-	-
Complaint partially upheld	12	18	-	-	-	-
Complaint rejected	8	11	-	-	-	-
Referred to another tollway operator	1	0	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

Table 8: ECA case findings – refunds & credits trend

ECA CASES – REFUNDS & CREDITS	Q3 2019	Q4 2019	Q1 2020	Q2 2020	Q3 2020	Q4 2020
Refunds & credits awarded	\$738	\$590	-	-	-	-

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
Average time to close cases (days)	4.0	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 (TRIP PASS)

Customer A purchased two EastLink trip passes.

Customer A complained about receiving an EastLink toll invoice after making a northbound journey and a southbound journey.

The investigation revealed that the northbound journey was correctly split into two separate EastLink trips, as Customer A had exited EastLink for a time (e.g. to make a delivery) and then had re-entered EastLink in the same direction to continue the journey.

The total northbound journey on EastLink exceeded the 60 minute trip limit, therefore the northbound journey was correctly charged as two separate EastLink trips.

As three separate EastLink trips had been made but only two EastLink trip passes were available, the EastLink toll invoice was correctly issued to Customer A for the third tip.

The EastLink Customer Advocate explained these details to Customer A. As Customer A had made a genuine mistake and contacted EastLink promptly about it, and there was no history of the customer making these mistakes, the toll invoice was waived as a gesture of good will.

### 4.2 CUSTOMER B (TRIP PASS)

Customer B attempted to purchase an EastLink trip pass on the EastLink website, however the payment was not successful.

EastLink issued a toll invoice correctly for Customer B's trip on EastLink.

The EastLink Customer Advocate explained these details to Customer B. As Customer A had made a genuine mistake and contacted EastLink promptly about it, and there was no history of the customer making these mistakes, the toll invoice fee was waived as a gesture of good will.

### 4.3 CUSTOMER C (TRIP PASS)

Customer C purchased EastLink trip passes four days after travelling on EastLink.

However, EastLink trip passes need to be purchased no later than three days after travel.

EastLink issued a toll invoice correctly for Customer C's trips on EastLink.

The EastLink Customer Advocate explained these details to Customer C. As Customer C had purchased trip passes, made a genuine mistake and contacted EastLink promptly about it, and there was no history of the customer making these mistakes, the toll invoice was cancelled as a gesture of good will.

### 4.4 CUSTOMER D (TOLL INVOICE SMS REMINDERS)

Customer D is a Queensland resident and does not travel to Victoria.

Customer D complained about receiving SMS reminders for an EastLink toll invoice.

Upon investigation, it transpired that another person, Motorist X who travelled on EastLink had made an error with their VicRoads vehicle registration – which resulted in Customer D’s mobile phone number being registered with VicRoads for Motorist X.

This resulted in EastLink sending SMS toll invoice reminders to Customer D instead of to Motorist X.

EastLink passed this information to VicRoads for correction of Motorist X’s record in the VicRoads database.

This will ensure that Customer D does not receive further SMS toll invoice reminders for travel by Motorist X on EastLink (or any other tollways).

#### **4.5 CUSTOMER E (TOLL INVOICE)**

Customer E complained about an EastLink toll invoice on the basis that Google Maps had recommended a route on EastLink and Customer E followed the route but didn’t intend to use a tollway.

However, upon investigation, it transpired that Customer E had made the same claim a few months earlier for a previous trip on EastLink, and EastLink’s customer services team had provided a toll invoice fee waiver at that time.

The EastLink Customer Advocate rejected the new claim on the basis that EastLink is not responsible for a motorist’s use of Google Maps or content provided by Google, EastLink’s road signs are clearly marked “TOLL”, this is a repeated claim, and it is not fair on other motorists to provide one motorist with waivers every time they travel.

However, Customer E was provided with extended payment terms to help with payment.

**For further information:**

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