

# EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE REPORT

Q2 2020 (1 APRIL 2020 – 30 JUNE 2020)



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## 1. EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE'S MESSAGE

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9 July 2020

**This report covers the Q2 2020 quarterly period (1 April 2020 – 30 June 2020).**

It is now just over 12 months since the EastLink Customer Advocate role was created and I was appointed to it.

The most important achievement through the year has been in the time it takes to close each case. The average elapsed time to close each case has decreased steadily each quarter: from 4.0 days in Q3 2019, to 2.8 days in Q4 2019, to 2.2 days in Q1 2020, and most recently to 1.8 days in Q2 2020. This is very good outcome for customers.

In Q2 2020, 91 cases were raised with me, which is an increase of 2% compared to the previous quarter.

Although the number of cases increased slightly compared to the previous quarter, the number of complaints that were fully upheld or partially upheld decreased from 29 to 25 (-14%).

Therefore the increased number of complaints does not, in my view, suggest any deterioration of service.

In 43 of the 91 cases this quarter, although I found that EastLink was not at fault and any complaint should be rejected, I arranged for EastLink's customer service team to assist the customer with their predicament.

41% of all the cases raised with me during the quarter related to EastLink toll invoices. This is a reduction compared to the previous quarter (52%).

The coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on our way of life and economy, with the introduction and ratcheting up of social distancing measures during late March and April 2020, followed by the relaxing of some of those measures in May and June 2020, and then a second lockdown starting in Melbourne as I write this.

There is little evidence (so far) of any significant change in the number of complaints to the EastLink Customer Advocate arising from the impact of the pandemic. For example, the number of complaints logged in Q2 2020 was only 2% higher than in Q1 2020.

Regrettably, however, I expect that the economic impact of the pandemic will inevitably result in more EastLink customers experiencing financial hardship, in particular once Government support programs such as JobKeeper and the banking industry's debt repayment concessions come to an end.

**If you have been directly affected by the Coronavirus pandemic 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](http://www.eastlink.com.au/hardship).

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

41% of the cases raised during Q2 2020 related to toll invoices.

Table 1: ECA cases raised

ECA CASES RAISED	Apr 2020	May 2020	Jun 2020	Q2 2020
Toll invoice	11	6	14	31
Toll invoice SMS messages	2	0	1	3
Toll invoice payment	1	1	1	3
Account charge	4	2	4	10
Account charge for a sold vehicle	1	1	1	3
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle or cloned vehicle	3	2	0	5
Account payment	3	1	0	4
Tags	0	0	1	1
Tolls	0	0	1	1
Tolling class	0	1	0	1
Trip pass	0	1	1	2
Rental vehicle toll payment	0	1	1	2
Customer service	2	2	9	13
Website	1	0	0	1
Hardship assistance	1	1	1	3
Infringements (fines)	1	1	1	3
Road maintenance	0	1	0	1
Noise	1	0	0	1
Speed limit	0	1	0	1
Privacy	0	0	1	1
Unknown (insufficient details)	1	0	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>91</b>

### 2.2 CASES CLOSED

All of the cases raised during Q2 2020 have been closed.

Table 2: ECA cases closed

ECA CASES CLOSED	Apr 2020	May 2020	Jun 2020	Q2 2020
Q2 2020 cases closed (as at date of report)	32	22	37	91
Q2 2020 cases still open (as at date of report)	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>91</b>

### 2.3 CASE FINDINGS

In 47% 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. 16% of cases were fully upheld, and a further 11% of cases were partially upheld. In 24% of cases the complaint was rejected with no practical customer service assistance identifiable. 1% of cases involved insufficient details being provided and no replies to attempted contacts by the EastLink Customer Advocate.

Table 3: ECA case findings

ECA CASE FINDINGS	Apr 2020	May 2020	Jun 2020	Q2 2020
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	13	5	25	43
Complaint upheld	8	3	4	15
Complaint partially upheld	3	5	2	10
Complaint rejected	7	9	6	22

ECA CASE FINDINGS	Apr 2020	May 2020	Jun 2020	Q2 2020
Unknown (insufficient details provided)	1	0	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>91</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	Apr 2020	May 2020	Jun 2020	Q2 2020
Refunds & credits awarded	\$403	\$334	\$237	\$974

## 2.4 ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE CASES

The average elapsed time to close ECA cases during the quarter was 1.8 days. This elapsed time includes weekend days and public holidays.

Table 5: Elapsed time to close ECA cases

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	Apr 2020	May 2020	Jun 2020	Q2 2020
Average time to close cases (days)	2.2	1.6	1.5	1.8

### Case Study – complaint arising from misunderstanding of charging a toll invoice to an account

An EastLink toll invoice was issued correctly as the customer's vehicle was not linked to a tolling account at the time of travel.

The customer paid the toll invoice directly to EastLink.

Subsequently, a dispute developed between the customer and EastLink when the customer demanded that the already paid toll invoice be transferred to a Transurban Linkt account, to which the vehicle had been subsequently added at a later date.

EastLink does not, and is not obliged to, provide that service.

To resolve the dispute, the EastLink Customer Advocate explained to the customer that there is no financial advantage in charging a toll invoice to an account – all the fees are charged to the account as well as the tolls.

This resolved the dispute amicably, as the customer had erroneously thought there would be some kind of discount if the invoice was charged to the account, and understandably did not want to miss out.

As a result of this complaint, the EastLink website's Settle Toll Invoice page was updated to clarify that transferring a toll invoice to a tolling account is for the full invoice amount including the fees.

### 3. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE TRENDS

#### 3.1 HISTORICAL TRENDS

In Q2 2020, 91 cases were raised with me, which is an increase of 2% compared to the previous quarter – see Table 6.

Although the number of cases increased slightly compared to the previous quarter, the number of complaints that were fully upheld or partially upheld decreased from 29 to 25 (-14%) – see Table 7.

In Q2 2020, there was an unusual number of complaints about account charges (10). However, these were for a wide range of different complaint topics relating to account charges, rather than a single underlying reason for the increase.

Overall, the increased number of complaints does not, in my view, suggest any deterioration of service.

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	2	0	-	-
Toll invoice	24	27	44	31	-	-
Toll invoice SMS messages	0	0	1	3	-	-
Toll invoice payment	0	0	1	3	-	-
Account notice	1	2	0	0	-	-
Account payment	2	0	4	4	-	-
Account charge	1	2	2	10	-	-
Account charge for a sold vehicle	1	2	4	3	-	-
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle etc	0	3	3	5	-	-
Account charge for an LPN error	1	0	0	0	-	-
Account suspension	0	1	0	0	-	-
Account closure	1	0	1	0	-	-
Deceased account	0	0	1	0	-	-
Tags	2	0	2	1	-	-
Tolls	0	1	1	1	-	-
Tolling class	0	1	0	1	-	-
Trip pass	1	2	0	2	-	-
Rental vehicle toll payment	4	2	1	2	-	-
Debt recovery	1	1	0	0	-	-
Customer service	2	7	13	13	-	-
Website	0	3	0	1	-	-
Hardship assistance	0	2	1	3	-	-
Payment plan	0	0	1	0	-	-
Infringements (fines)	2	3	4	3	-	-
Incident response	0	1	0	0	-	-
Debris damage	1	0	0	0	-	-
Road maintenance	0	0	0	1	-	-
Signage	1	0	0	0	-	-
Litter	1	0	0	0	-	-
Noise	0	0	0	1	-	-
Speed limit	0	0	0	1	-	-
Landscaping	0	2	2	0	-	-
EastLink Trail	1	0	0	0	-	-
Privacy	1	0	0	1	-	-
Problem with another tollway operator	1	0	0	0	-	-
Unknown (withdrawn, insufficient details)	1	0	0	1	-	-
Police search	0	0	1	0	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>91</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	44	43	-	-
Complaint upheld	13	9	15	15	-	-
Complaint partially upheld	12	18	14	10	-	-
Complaint rejected	8	11	14	22	-	-
Referred to another tollway operator etc.	1	0	2	0	-	-
Insufficient details provided	0	0	0	1	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q2 2020 (\$974) was similar to the average across the three previous quarters (average \$1,012 per quarter).

Table 8: ECA case findings – refunds &amp; credits trend

ECA CASES – REFUNDS & CREDITS	Q3 2019	Q4 2019	Q1 2020	Q2 2020	Q3 2020	Q4 2020
Refunds & credits awarded	\$738	\$590	\$1,707	\$974	-	-

The elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q2 2020 was the lowest on record. This is despite the number of ECA cases during Q2 2020 being the highest on record.

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	2.2	1.8	-	-

## 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 (CLONED LICENCE PLATES)

Customer A, resident in NSW, received three EastLink toll invoices and claimed the vehicle had never left NSW.

Comparing images of the vehicle provided by customer A against images captured by EastLink, it was evident that the vehicle licence plate had been cloned.

EastLink cancelled the three toll invoices.

Customer A contacted NSW RMS to cancel the licence plate and have a new licence plate issued.

### 4.2 CUSTOMER B (CLONED OR STOLEN LICENCE PLATES)

Customer B disputed three toll invoices, but the details of the complaint were vague.

However, comparing images captured by EastLink against the make/model recorded by VicRoads for the licence plate, it was evident that the vehicle licence plate had either been cloned or the plates themselves had been stolen.

EastLink cancelled the three toll invoices.

### 4.3 CUSTOMER C (ACCOUNT PAYMENT)

Customer C complained about a \$35 bank account payment to EastLink that was not authorised under a standing authorisation.

However, investigation revealed that there were no banking details linked to customer C's EastLink account.

Upon request, customer C provided further banking details to assist with the investigation of the complaint.

This allowed another customer's EastLink account to be identified.

The other customer had the same last name as customer C.

Investigation revealed that customer C had in fact opened the account for the other customer (a relative) and had set up an automatic payment arrangement using customer C's own banking details.

Upon authorisation by customer C, customer C's banking details were removed from the other customer's account.

#### **4.4 CUSTOMER D (TOLL INVOICES AND TOLL FINES)**

Customer D complained about toll fines for EastLink travel that had apparently progressed to Court.

Investigation revealed that Customer D's Transurban Linkt account was suspended at time of travel.

This resulted in EastLink correctly issuing two toll invoices to customer D.

These were not paid by their due date.

Consequently, EastLink correctly issued two overdue notices to customer D.

EastLink also sent four SMS message reminders prior to passing trips to Victoria Police / Fines Victoria for enforcement.

No error by EastLink was found.

The postal address and mobile phone details used by EastLink were current.

Customer was informed about the above, and advised to deal with the court directly.

#### **4.5 CUSTOMER E (SPEED LIMIT AND SPEEDING FINE)**

Customer E received an infringement penalty notice for exceeding the speed limit in an EastLink tunnel.

Customer E complained that no organisation contacted had been able to provide the reason why the speed limit was reduced to 40km/h at the time of the infringement.

Investigation with the EastLink operations department and records within the road and tunnel management system confirmed for Customer E that the speed restriction was in place at the time of travel to ensure workplace safety during tunnel maintenance works.

#### **4.6 CUSTOMER F (TOLL INVOICE)**

Customer F complained about an EastLink toll invoice and overdue notice.

Investigation revealed that the vehicle was linked to a Transurban Linkt account that had been suspended for months by the time of travel.

It was also identified that the vehicle was added to another Transurban Linkt account 12 days after travel.

This meant that the vehicle was not linked to a valid account for the time of travel.

No error by EastLink was found.

**For further information:**

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