

# EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE REPORT

Q3 2020 (1 JULY 2020 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2020)



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## 1. EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE'S MESSAGE

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30 October 2020

**This report covers the Q3 2020 quarterly period (1 July 2020 – 30 September 2020).**

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a huge impact on our way of life and economy.

During Q3 2020, Melbourne experienced a second wave of COVID-19 infections – and it was of course a much larger wave than the first.

This resulted in very strict Stage 4 lockdown restrictions being introduced by the State Government for the first time. These restrictions were in place for almost the entirety of Q3 2020.

For a significant period, EastLink traffic volumes were reduced by approximately half.

However, there continues to be little evidence of any significant change in the number of complaints to the EastLink Customer Advocate arising from the impact of COVID-19.

For example, the number of cases raised in Q3 2020 was 16% less than the previous quarter. The number of complaints that were fully upheld or partially upheld decreased by 44%. And the number of complaints that were rejected decreased by 50%.

Furthermore, only a few of the cases raised made any mention of COVID-19 or financial hardship.

Regrettably, however, I anticipate that the economic impact of COVID-19 will inevitably result in more EastLink customers experiencing financial hardship during 2021, 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 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](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

43% of the cases raised during Q3 2020 related to toll invoices.

Table 1: ECA cases raised

ECA CASES RAISED	Jul 2020	Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Q3 2020
Toll invoice	16	7	8	31
Toll invoice payment	2	0	0	2
Account notice	1	0	0	1
Account charge	4	3	1	8
Account charge for a sold vehicle	1	0	0	1
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle or cloned vehicle	1	0	1	2
Account closure	0	0	1	1
Tags	1	0	0	1
Tolls	0	1	0	1
Tolling class	0	1	0	1
Debt recovery	0	2	0	2
Customer service	9	2	3	14
Hardship assistance	2	1	1	4
Infringements (fines)	1	0	1	2
Graffiti	1	1	0	2
Landscaping	1	1	1	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>76</b>

### 2.2 CASES CLOSED

All of the cases raised during Q3 2020 have been closed.

Table 2: ECA cases closed

ECA CASES CLOSED	Jul 2020	Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Q3 2020
Q3 2020 cases closed (as at date of report)	40	19	17	76
Q3 2020 cases still open (as at date of report)	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>76</b>

### 2.3 CASE FINDINGS

In 63% 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. 8% of cases were fully upheld, and a further 11% of cases were partially upheld. In 14% of cases the complaint was rejected with no practical customer service assistance identifiable. 4% of cases were referred to a third party.

Table 3: ECA case findings

ECA CASE FINDINGS	Jul 2020	Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Q3 2020
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	30	10	8	48
Complaint upheld	2	2	2	6
Complaint partially upheld	5	1	2	8
Complaint rejected	3	5	3	11
Referred to another tollway operator etc.	0	1	2	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>76</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 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	Jul 2020	Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Q3 2020
Refunds & credits awarded	\$378	\$94	\$265	\$737

## 2.4 ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE CASES

The average elapsed time to close ECA cases during the quarter was 1.3 days. This elapsed time includes weekend days and public holidays.

Table 5: Elapsed time to close ECA cases

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	Jul 2020	Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Q3 2020
Average time to close cases (days)	1.4	0.9	1.4	1.3

### Case Study – complaint about double charging

The customer was convinced there was double charging of the same trips, with the same tolls being charged to both their EastLink account as well as their Transurban Linkt account. The customer provided copies of account statements issued by Transurban Linkt as proof of the complaint.

Following the complaint to the EastLink Customer Advocate, a detailed review was conducted of each trip that was charged to the customer’s EastLink account, as well as each trip that was charged to the customer’s Transurban Linkt account.

This review verified that no trips had been double charged. Each trip was either charged to the EastLink account, or to the Transurban Linkt account, but not to both.

It was, however, found that the EastLink account was suspended periodically (for non-payment).

As the customer’s vehicle was also linked to the Transurban Linkt account, this meant that whenever the EastLink account was suspended, any EastLink trips during the suspension were charged to the Transurban Linkt account instead of to the EastLink account.

This was the correct course of action, and there was no error by EastLink.

This was explained to the customer.

The opportunity was also taken to inform the customer that their EastLink tag was installed incorrectly (vertically instead of horizontally). This issue was detected on toll point images that were seen during the detailed review.

### 3. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE TRENDS

#### 3.1 HISTORICAL TRENDS

In Q3 2020, a total of 76 cases were raised with the EastLink Customer Advocate, which is a decrease of 16% compared to the previous quarter – see Table 6.

Table 6: ECA cases trend

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

The number of complaints that were fully upheld or partially upheld decreased significantly from 25 to 14 (-44%). The number of complaints that were rejected decreased even further from 22 to 11 (-50%) – see Table 7.

On examination, 48 of the 76 cases raised during Q3 2020 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 to update their account payment details and email address; a customer enquiring about the status of a toll invoice; or a customer enquiring about toll prices. Such cases are forwarded to the EastLink customer service team for expedited service.

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	48	-
Complaint upheld	13	9	15	15	6	-
Complaint partially upheld	12	18	14	10	8	-
Complaint rejected	8	11	14	22	11	-
Referred to another tollway operator etc.	1	0	2	0	3	-
Insufficient details provided	0	0	0	1	0	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>-</b>

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q3 2020 (\$737) returned to the levels seen during 2019.

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	\$737	-

The elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q3 2020 was the lowest on record, assisted by the relatively low number of cases during the 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
Average time to close cases (days)	4.0	2.8	2.2	1.8	1.3	-

## 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 (TAG STOPPED WORKING)

Customer A's tag stopped working. However, Customer A did not notice that the tag had ceased beeping at toll points, and did not notice the image processing fees that were listed on five successive account statements.

There was no error by EastLink.

However it was determined that the goodwill credit that had been provided by EastLink could have been more generous given the value of the customer (high lifetime spend, automatic payment), impeccable account history (no suspensions), and age of account (in operation since 2008).

Accordingly, all the remaining image processing fees were refunded.

### 4.2 CUSTOMER B (VEHICLE NOT LINKED TO ACCOUNT & TAG NOT INSTALLED CORRECTLY)

Customer B failed to register their vehicle's licence plate number on their account. There was also evidence that the tag was not installed in the vehicle correctly.

On occasions when the tag was not able to be read by the tolling gantry, the licence plate number was not able to be matched to an account. This led to three EastLink toll invoices being issued and the complaint by Customer B.

However, there was no error by EastLink.

As a gesture of goodwill, EastLink had waived some (but not all) toll invoice fees. None of the VicRoads lookup fees had been waived.

It was determined that the goodwill gesture could have been more generous given the value of the customer (high lifetime spend) and impeccable account history (no suspensions).

Accordingly, all the VicRoads look up fees and the one remaining toll invoice fee were refunded.

#### 4.3 CUSTOMER C (LICENCE PLATE NUMBER READ ERROR)

Customer C complained that they had received an EastLink toll invoice even though their vehicle had not travelled on EastLink,

The investigation uncovered an error in the reading of another vehicle's licence plate number – a '0' was read instead of the correct 'Q'. This error had led to the toll invoice being issued to the wrong person.

The toll invoice was cancelled, and an apology provided to Customer C.

#### 4.4 CUSTOMER D (DAMAGED VEHICLE LICENCE PLATE)

Customer D complained that tolls were charged to their account for trips that had not been made by the customer.

The investigation uncovered another motorist's vehicle with an almost identical licence plate number.

Unfortunately, that other vehicle's licence plate had been damaged in such a way that made it read like Customer D's licence plate number. This problem was further compounded by that other vehicle only having the one licence plate visible to tolling gantries. (Normally front and rear plates are both visible, which reduces the risk of error.)

The investigation identified 66 trips by that other vehicle which had been charged to Customer D's account.

All tolls and image processing fees for these 66 trips were refunded to Customer D.

EastLink has also taken process improvement steps aimed at reducing the likelihood of this error occurring each time the other vehicle makes future trips on EastLink.

#### 4.5 CUSTOMER E (SOLD VEHICLE)

Customer E raised a complaint when three EastLink toll invoices were received. Customer E had sold their vehicle prior to the EastLink trips being made. However, Customer E did not retain the details of the buyer and so could not nominate the toll invoices to the other driver.

The investigation revealed that the state vehicle registration authority maintained that Customer E continued to be responsible for the vehicle – this can happen when the seller and buyer do not fully complete the vehicle transfer process.

As a gesture of goodwill, the three toll invoices were cancelled.

Customer E was also advised to contact the state vehicle registration authority to ensure that the registration details for the vehicle are up to date, and to ensure that Customer E has at hand the necessary contact details for the new owner in case further toll invoices are received.

#### 4.6 CUSTOMER F (ACCOUNT SUSPENDED)

Customer F complained that they had received EastLink toll invoices even although their vehicle was on a Transurban Linkt account.

The investigation revealed that the customer has an EastLink account, and the vehicle is linked to that account. However, the EastLink account was suspended at the times of travel (for non-payment).

The investigation also revealed a Transurban Linkt account with the same vehicle, however the vehicle was not linked to that account at the times of travel.

Accordingly, the EastLink toll invoices were issued correctly and remained payable.

**For further information:**

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