

EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE REPORT

Q1 2024 (1 JANUARY 2024 – 31 MARCH 2024)



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1. EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE'S MESSAGE

8 May 2024

This report covers the Q1 2024 quarterly period (1 January 2024 – 31 March 2024).

Although the number of cases raised in Q1 2024 (72 cases) was significantly higher than the nominal case rate (50 to 60 cases per quarter), it was only the sixth highest quarter to date and no cause for concern. The elevated level of cases is attributed to increased cost of living pressures.

The elapsed time to close EastLink Customer Advocate (ECA) cases during Q1 2024 (2.8 calendar days) was close to the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (2.7 calendar days).

Four cases in Q1 2024 took a relatively long time to close (22 calendar days, 16 calendar days, 14 calendar days and 13 calendar days respectively). This is attributed to waiting for third parties to provide information to assist with investigation of the case. Excluding these four cases, the average time to close ECA cases during Q1 2024 would fall to just 2.0 calendar days.

More than two-thirds of the cases raised during Q1 2024 related to the following:

- > Toll invoices (58%) – which is a higher proportion than the longer term average for this case type over the preceding seven quarters (43%). However, there is no indication of a specific or systemic toll invoice failure contributing to this increase.
- > Customer service (11%) – however that is lower than the longer term average for this case type over the preceding seven quarters (16%).

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q1 2024 (\$1,307) was 54% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$846). However, the Q1 2024 figure is a 19% reduction compared with the previous quarter Q4 2023. The Q1 2024 figure is well below the top three highest quarters on record for refunds and credits: \$2,789 and \$2,103 for two quarters in 2021; and \$1,707 for one quarter in 2020.

Protection of customer data continues to be of critical importance.

As reported last quarter, during Q4 2023, EastLink launched:

- > Two-factor authentication for account login at the EastLink website, which has further strengthened customer data security. Two-factor authentication is mandatory and now applies to all EastLink accounts. Each customer can configure their own two-factor authentication method (SMS text message, Microsoft Authenticator or Google Authenticator).
- > One-time passcodes via SMS text message for all EastLink trip pass purchases at the EastLink website, which has further strengthened the security of customer financial transactions.

Despite these significant changes during Q4 2023, only one ECA case was raised in relation to them during Q1 2024.

If you are experiencing financial hardship and are seeking assistance in relation to any EastLink debt, please email hardship@connecteast.com.au or 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

More than two-thirds of the cases raised during Q1 2024 related to the following:

- > Toll invoices (58%)
- > Customer service (11%)

During Q4 2023, EastLink launched two-factor authentication for account login at the EastLink website, and one-time passcodes via SMS text message for all EastLink trip pass purchases at the EastLink website. Despite these significant changes during Q4 2023, only one case was raised in relation to them during Q1 2024. One of the four Website cases related to a customer having difficulty logging in with two-factor authentication. The ECA arranged for a customer service operator to assist the customer.

Table 1: ECA cases raised

ECA CASES RAISED	Jan 2024	Feb 2024	Mar 2024	Q1 2024
Toll invoice	14	17	8	39
Toll invoice payment	0	2	1	3
Account charge	1	0	1	2
Account charge for a sold vehicle	1	0	0	1
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle etc	0	1	0	1
Account closure	0	0	1	1
Tags	0	0	1	1
Tolls	2	0	0	2
Debt recovery	0	1	0	1
Customer service	2	4	2	8
Website	2	2	0	4
Third party scam	2	0	1	3
Infringements (fines)	0	2	1	3
Road maintenance	0	2	1	3
TOTAL	24	31	17	72

2.2 CASES CLOSED

All of the cases raised during Q1 2024 have been closed. The last of these cases was closed on 2/4/2024, with the customer notified of the ECA's finding on the same day.

Table 2: ECA cases closed

ECA CASES CLOSED	Jan 2024	Feb 2024	Mar 2024	Q1 2024
Q1 2024 cases closed (as at date of report)	24	31	17	72
Q1 2024 cases still open (as at date of report)	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	24	31	17	72

2.3 CASE FINDINGS

In 43% of cases during Q1 2024, although EastLink was not at fault and there was no valid complaint, the ECA arranged for EastLink's customer service team to assist the customer with their predicament via expedited service.

18% of cases in the quarter were fully upheld, and a further 19% of cases were partially upheld.

In 19% of cases the complaint was rejected with no practical customer service assistance identifiable.

No customers were referred to another tollway operator or other body. No customers provided insufficient details to allow the case to be investigated (despite specific information requested and reminders sent).

Table 3: ECA case findings

ECA CASE FINDINGS	Jan 2024	Feb 2024	Mar 2024	Q1 2024
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	13	11	7	31
Complaint upheld	4	6	3	13
Complaint partially upheld	4	8	2	14
Complaint rejected	3	6	5	14
Complaint referred to another tollway operator etc.	0	0	0	0
Insufficient details provided	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	24	31	17	72

Most cases involved complaints about modest sums – in particular, the fee component of a toll invoice but not the toll component, or the image processing fee component but not the toll component. In general, it is not the trip or toll that is disputed, but whether the trip is able to be charged to a valid account or pass, or if the trip is subject to additional fees such as the toll invoice fee or image processing fee.

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 2024	Feb 2024	Mar 2024	Q1 2024
Refunds & credits awarded	\$406	\$654	\$247	\$1,307

2.4 ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE CASES

The average elapsed time to close ECA cases during the quarter was 2.8 calendar days. This elapsed time metric (calendar days) includes days on weekends and public holidays, and is synonymous with customer wait time.

Table 5: Elapsed time to close ECA cases

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	Jan 2024	Feb 2024	Mar 2024	Q1 2024
Average time to close cases (calendar days)	1.4	4.0	2.5	2.8

Case Study – complaints about road closures during resurfacing works

EastLink has recently completed a major project to resurface the tollway, which involved nightly closures of sections of EastLink over three successive summers.

The ECA received two complaints about the road closure on Sunday night 4 February 2024.

The road closure that night was the northbound carriageway between Thompson Rd and Greens Rd (from 8pm to 5am).

It had been an unusually hot weekend. A lot of visitor traffic was returning from Mornington Peninsula, causing lengthy delays.

In both complaints, the customers said road closures should not occur in summer when people visit Mornington Peninsula.

The ECA explained to both customers the reasons why the resurfacing project was necessary, and the reasons why the resurfacing works must be done only at night and only in summer.

The ECA discussed these complaints with EastLink’s management, and it was decided that the remaining northbound closures on Sunday nights would start later (9pm instead of 8pm), and the remaining southbound closures on Friday nights when visitors may be travelling to Mornington Peninsula would also start later (9pm instead of 8pm). Traffic volumes are lower at 9pm.

This decision was communicated to the two customers, and the ECA also monitored the remaining closures to verify compliance with the decision.

3. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE TRENDS

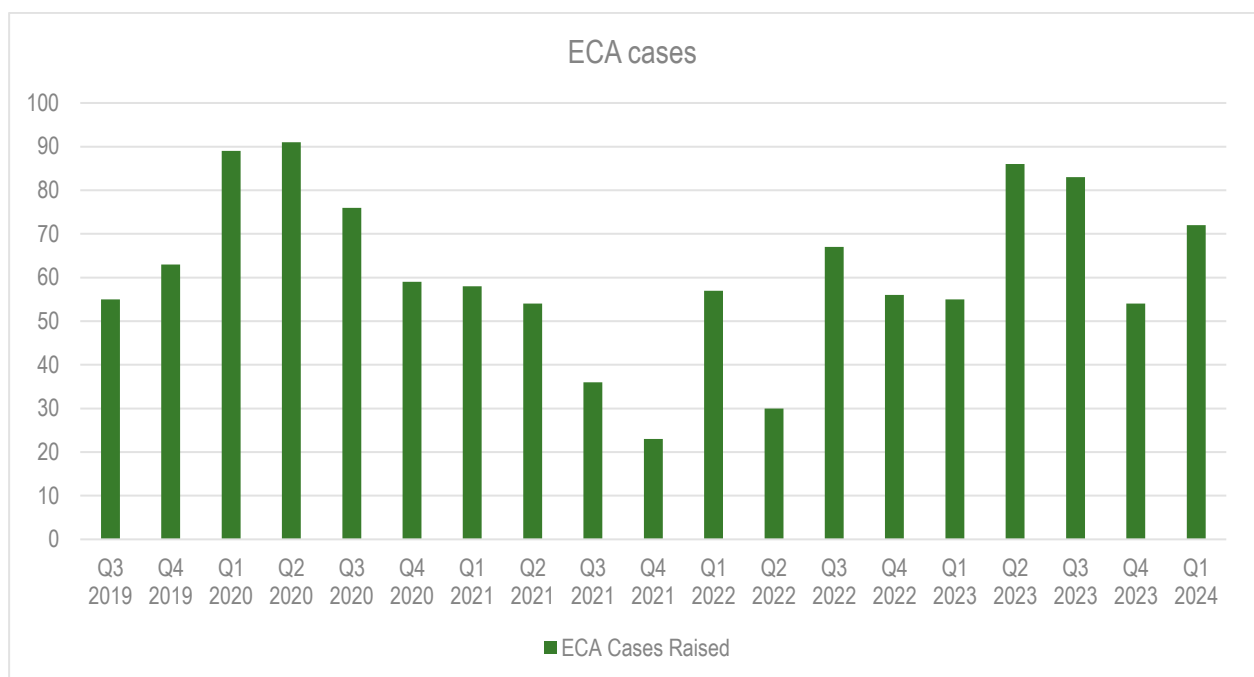
3.1 HISTORICAL TRENDS

Chart 1 shows the number of cases raised in each quarter since the commencement of the ECA role at the start of Q3 2019.

The chart shows a wave of additional cases during the first half of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic first emerged and impacted the economy. More recent waves in the middle quarters of 2023 and now Q1 2024 are attributed to increased cost of living pressures. The chart also indicates that the nominal case rate is in the 50 to 60 cases per quarter range.

Although the number of cases raised in Q1 2024 (72 cases) was significantly higher than the nominal case rate, it was only the sixth highest quarter to date and is no cause for concern.

Chart 1: ECA cases trend



58% of the cases raised during Q1 2024 related to toll invoices, which is a higher proportion than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (43%) – see Table 6.

However, there is no indication of a specific or systemic toll invoice failure contributing to this increase, and a wide range of outcomes was recorded for toll invoice cases. Of the 42 cases raised in relation to toll invoices during Q1 2024:

- > 8 of these toll invoice cases were of finding type “complaint upheld”
- > 9 of these toll invoice cases were of finding type “complaint partially upheld”
- > 15 of these toll invoice cases were of finding type “service expedited (no valid complaint)”
- > 10 of these toll invoice cases were of finding type “complaint rejected”

A further 11% of the cases raised during Q1 2024 related to customer service, however that is lower than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (16%).

Table 6: ECA cases trend

ECA CASES	2022			2023				2024
	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Toll invoice	15	31	18	15	35	35	31	39
Toll invoice communications	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	0
Toll invoice payment	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	3
Account notice	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Account payment	0	1	0	1	2	0	1	0
Account charge	4	6	5	2	6	9	5	2
Account charge for a sold vehicle	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle etc	0	1	0	1	3	5	2	1
Account charge for an LPN error	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Account suspension	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Account closure	0	0	1	5	4	1	0	1
Deceased account	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tags	0	2	0	2	1	0	2	1
Tolls	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	2
Tolling class	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Trip pass	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Debt recovery	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1
Customer service	4	10	9	6	11	24	4	8
Payment options	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Website	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	4
Hardship assistance	4	4	4	9	7	2	1	0
Payment plan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Third party scam	0	6	7	5	0	1	0	3
Infringements (fines)	1	2	6	3	4	0	1	3
Incident response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Debris damage	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Abandoned vehicle	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Road maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Signage	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Litter	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Noise	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Speed limit	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Graffiti	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Landscaping, public artworks	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
EastLink Trail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wildlife	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Privacy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown (withdrawn, insufficient details)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Police enquiry	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
CCTV request	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Insurance claim	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
TOTAL	30	67	56	55	86	83	54	72

As outlined earlier in section 3.1, the number of cases in Q1 2024 (72 cases) was significantly higher than the nominal range (50-60 cases).

The distribution of these cases across each category of case findings was not particularly unusual in Q1 2024 compared to previous quarters – see Table 7.

Table 7: ECA case findings trend

ECA CASE FINDINGS	2022			2023				2024
	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	12	32	28	26	45	49	18	31
Complaint upheld	9	14	9	9	16	14	9	13
Complaint partially upheld	3	13	8	7	9	5	14	14
Complaint rejected	4	8	7	12	10	12	11	14
Referred to another tollway operator etc.	2	0	2	1	6	3	1	0
Insufficient details provided	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0
TOTAL	30	67	56	55	86	83	54	72

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q1 2024 (\$1,307) was 54% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$846) – see Table 8.

However, the Q1 2024 figure is a 19% reduction compared to the previous quarter Q4 2023. The Q1 2024 figure is well below the top three highest quarters on record for refunds and credits: \$2,789 and \$2,103 for two quarters in 2021; and \$1,707 for one quarter in 2020.

Although the mean average refund/credit per case during Q1 2024 (\$18) is 29% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$14), it is not unusual.

Table 8: ECA case findings – refunds & credits trend

ECA CASES – REFUNDS & CREDITS	2022			2023				2024
	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Refunds & credits awarded	\$511	\$1,088	\$264	\$1,133	\$736	\$573	\$1,619	\$1,307
Mean average per case (all cases, rounded)	\$17	\$16	\$5	\$21	\$9	\$7	\$30	\$18

The elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q1 2024 (2.8 calendar days) was close to the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (2.7 calendar days) – see Table 9.

Four cases in Q1 2024 took a relatively long time to close (22 calendar days, 16 calendar days, 14 calendar days and 13 calendar days respectively):

- > In the first, second and fourth of these cases, the delay was attributed to waiting for third party tollway operator to provide information to assist with investigation of the case.
- > In the third of these cases, the delay was attributed to waiting for a state vehicle registration authority as well as an EastLink technical specialist to provide information to assist with investigation of the case.

Excluding these four cases, the average time to close ECA cases during Q1 2024 would fall to just 2.0 calendar days.

Table 9: Elapsed time to close ECA cases trend

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	2022			2023				2024
	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Average time to close cases (calendar days)	3.5	3.7	2.4	2.3	3.0	1.4	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 (RENTAL VEHICLE AND RENTAL TOLLING PRODUCT ISSUE)

Customer A rented a vehicle and travelled on EastLink with the rental vehicle. Customer A subsequently received an EastLink toll invoice and an EastLink overdue notice even though Customer A expected the tollway travel to be covered by the rental company's toll payment program. Investigation revealed that the vehicle was a brand new vehicle and that it was added to the rental company's rental vehicle tolling account (provided by the operator of another tollway) after the travel on EastLink. This meant the rental vehicle did not have an arrangement to pay EastLink tolls. Accordingly, EastLink issued a toll invoice to the vehicle owner (the rental company). The rental company erroneously contacted EastLink to nominate Customer A. EastLink issued a toll invoice to Customer A, who did not pay it or contact EastLink. Consequently, EastLink issued an overdue notice to Customer A. There was no error by EastLink. However, Customer A's expectation was reasonable. The EastLink overdue notice (\$19.58) was cancelled by EastLink.

4.2 CUSTOMER B (TRIP PASS CONSUMED INCORRECTLY)

Customer B purchased two EastLink trip passes and made two trips on EastLink. Customer B subsequently received an EastLink toll invoice for one of the trips, which was not expected. Investigation revealed that EastLink made an error when manually reading the image of another vehicle, which had a similar licence plate number to Customer B's vehicle. The error resulted in the other vehicle being recorded as Customer B's vehicle, and one of Customer B's trip passes was consumed by the other vehicle. One of the trips by Customer B was therefore not able to be charged to a trip pass, and the EastLink toll invoice was issued to Customer B. As there was an error by EastLink, the EastLink toll invoice (\$15.49) was cancelled by EastLink. It was noticed that Customer B purchases trip passes regularly, and often for travel on weekends and public holidays. It was recommended to Customer B that an EastLink account be opened, as that would provide the customer with the 20% weekend toll discount (whereas trip passes are not discounted).

4.3 CUSTOMER C (VEHICLES ON TWO TOLLING ACCOUNTS AT THE SAME TIME)

Customer C complained about double charging. Investigation revealed two vehicles concurrently associated with an EastLink account and an account issued by another tollway operator. Both accounts were suspended at different times. This resulted in some tollway trips being charged to the EastLink account and some tollway trips being charged to the account issued by the other tollway operator. Trip details were analysed, which confirmed there had been no double charging. This was explained to Customer C, and it was recommended that Customer C proceed with only one of the two accounts. Customer C was reminded about the amount outstanding to EastLink for the EastLink account, which was suspended at the time. Information was provided to Customer C about how to arrange a payment plan, if needed.

4.4 CUSTOMER D (RENTAL VEHICLE AND NUMBER PLATE ERROR)

Customer D rented a vehicle, purchased a visitor's pass issued by another tollway operator, and travelled on EastLink with the rental vehicle. Customer D subsequently received an EastLink toll invoice and an EastLink overdue notice even though Customer D expected the tollway travel to be covered by the visitor's pass. Investigation revealed that Customer D had made an error when purchasing the visitor pass from the other tollway operator. The error was made when specifying the vehicle's licence plate number ('0' zero instead of 'O' oh). This meant the rental vehicle did not have an arrangement to pay EastLink tolls. Accordingly, EastLink issued a toll invoice to the vehicle owner, the rental company. The rental company correctly contacted EastLink to nominate Customer D. EastLink issued a toll invoice to Customer D, who did not pay it or contact EastLink. Consequently, EastLink issued an overdue notice to Customer D. There was no error by EastLink. However, the error made by Customer D was made in good faith and was minor in magnitude. As a gesture of goodwill, EastLink waived the toll invoice fee and VicRoads lookup fee (totalling \$16.24), with the tolls remaining payable. The tolls (plus image processing fees) would have been charged to the visitor pass had no error been made by Customer D.

4.5 CUSTOMER E (VEHICLE ADDED TO ACCOUNT NEARLY TWO MONTHS AFTER TRAVEL)

Customer E is the holder of a tolling account issued by another tollway operator. The ECA was cc'd in a reply from that other tollway operator to Customer E. The reply was in response to an enquiry from Customer E to the other tollway operator about an

EastLink toll invoice that had been received by Customer E and which had resulted in a fine from Victoria Police. The ECA read the communications and determined that the other tollway operator had not addressed one of the principal questions from Customer E. (Paraphrased: "Why was the EastLink toll invoice received when there is a tolling account with the other tollway operator.") The ECA explained to Customer E that EastLink's records indicate that the vehicle was added to the tolling account nearly two months after the travel on EastLink, and that this meant there was no arrangement to pay the EastLink tolls. The ECA provided information to Customer E about the sequence of events (toll invoice, overdue notice, method of delivery, referral of one trip to Victoria Police for potential infringement, and the payment of the residual amount). There was no error by EastLink. No amount remained outstanding and payable by Customer E to EastLink. Customer E was provided with information about who to contact: Fines Victoria in relation to the fine; the vehicle registration authority in relation to the contact details for the vehicle in case they are out of date; and the other tollway operator in relation to the operation, terms and conditions of the tolling account.

For further information:

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