

EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE REPORT

Q4 2022 (1 OCTOBER 2022 – 31 DECEMBER 2022)



CONTENTS

1.	EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE'S MESSAGE	3
2.	CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASES DURING THE QUARTER	4
2.1	Cases raised	4
2.2	Cases closed	4
2.3	Case findings	4
2.4	Elapsed time to close cases	5
3.	CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE TRENDS	6
3.1	Historical trends	6
4.	CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE EXAMPLES	9
4.1	Customer A (disputed toll invoice)	9
4.2	Customer B (toll invoice for travel by unregistered vehicle)	9
4.3	Customer C (unable to reset website password)	9
4.4	Customer D (trip passes purchased too late)	9
4.5	Customer E (interstate visitor)	9

1. EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE'S MESSAGE

18 January 2023

This report covers the Q4 2022 quarterly period (1 October 2022 – 31 December 2022).

The number of cases raised in Q4 2022 (56 cases) was within the nominal range (50-60 cases per quarter).

The elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q4 2022 (2.4 calendar days) was lower than the previous quarter (3.7 calendar days) and lower than the longer term average (2.7 calendar days).

During Q4 2022, 7 cases were raised in relation to online scams. In the previous quarter, 6 cases were raised in relation to online scams. There were no such cases prior to the previous quarter.

The online scams continue to involve large volumes of text messages about fictitious tolling debts being sent by cybercriminals to seemingly random Australian mobile phone numbers.

The scam messages aim to encourage recipients to visit scam phishing websites. The scam phishing websites seek to capture credit card details, which are then used by cybercriminals for large-value fraudulent transactions.

The scam messages and scam phishing websites use Australian tollway trademarks such as EastLink, Transurban, Linkt and E-toll. However, the scam messages are generic and do not include any personal information belonging to the recipient. This indicates that a scatter-gun approach is being used by the cybercriminals, and that the security of tolling customer data has not been compromised.

These tolling scams are a recent development that continues to attract media attention across Australia.

EastLink has published information on its website www.eastlink.com.au to help people identify whether a text message about EastLink is genuine or not. Transurban Linkt has also done this.

Uniquely, EastLink is also displaying a message raising awareness about these tolling scams on EastLink's roadside digital variable message signs (VMS).

Protection of customer data is of critical importance.

As reported previously, during Q3 2022 EastLink completed software development for some changes to the EastLink website that have enhanced the security of customer data and transactions.

For example, six digit PIN codes have been replaced by passwords to login to EastLink accounts at the EastLink website.

The first time a customer login is made to an EastLink account at the EastLink website using a correct six digit PIN code, the website now requires the customer to immediately create a new password for the EastLink account. The new password will need to satisfy minimum criteria, such as a minimum length.

Customers have readily adapted to these changes and no ECA cases have been raised in relation to it.

If you are experiencing financial hardship and are seeking assistance in relation to any EastLink debt, 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

32% of the cases raised during Q4 2022 related to toll invoices.

13% of the cases were raised in relation to online scams.

The online scams involve large volumes of text messages about fictitious tolling debts being sent by cybercriminals to seemingly random Australian mobile phone numbers. The scam messages aim to encourage recipients to visit scam phishing websites. The scam phishing websites seek to capture credit card details, which are then used by cybercriminals for large-value fraudulent transactions. These tolling scams are a recent development that has attracted significant media attention across Australia.

Table 1: ECA cases raised

ECA CASES RAISED	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022	Q4 2022
Toll invoice	8	4	6	18
Account charge	1	2	2	5
Account closure	0	0	1	1
Trip pass	0	0	1	1
Customer service	5	3	1	9
Website	1	0	0	1
Hardship assistance	2	1	1	4
Third party scam	3	2	2	7
Infringements (fines)	3	2	1	6
Debris damage	1	0	0	1
Landscaping	0	0	1	1
Unknown (withdrawn, insufficient details)	0	1	0	1
Police enquiry	0	0	1	1
TOTAL	24	15	17	56

2.2 CASES CLOSED

All of the cases raised during Q4 2022 have been closed.

Table 2: ECA cases closed

ECA CASES CLOSED	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022	Q4 2022
Q4 2022 cases closed (as at date of report)	24	15	17	56
Q4 2022 cases still open (as at date of report)	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	24	15	17	56

2.3 CASE FINDINGS

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

16% of cases were fully upheld, and a further 14% of cases were partially upheld.

In 13% of cases the complaint was rejected with no practical customer service assistance identifiable.

In 7% of cases either insufficient details were provided or the customer was referred to another tollway operator or other body. In the cases where insufficient details were provided, further details were requested but there was no response from the customer.

Table 3: ECA case findings

ECA CASE FINDINGS	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022	Q4 2022
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	12	9	7	28
Complaint upheld	5	1	3	9
Complaint partially upheld	3	1	4	8
Complaint rejected	3	2	2	7
Complaint referred to another tollway operator etc.	1	0	1	2
Insufficient details provided	0	2	0	2
TOTAL	24	15	17	56

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	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022	Q4 2022
Refunds & credits awarded	\$84	\$32	\$148	\$264

2.4 ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE CASES

The average elapsed time to close ECA cases during the quarter was 2.4 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	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022	Q4 2022
Average time to close cases (calendar days)	3.0	1.9	2.1	2.4

3. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE TRENDS

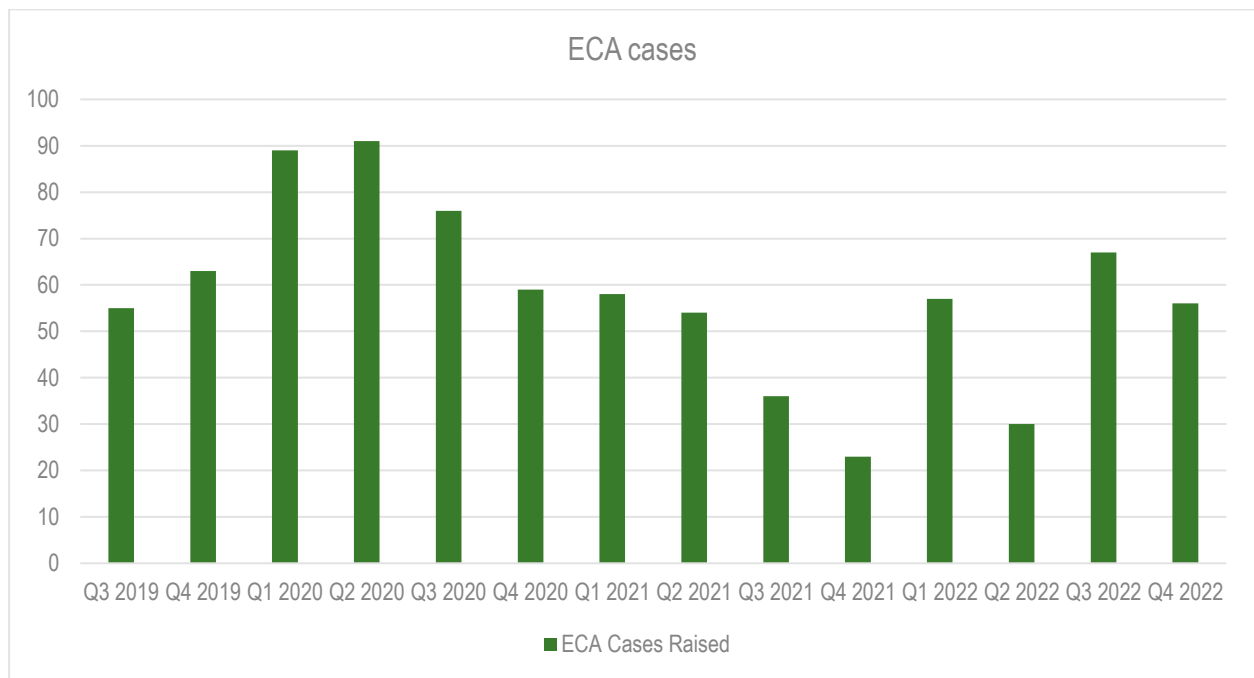
3.1 HISTORICAL TRENDS

Chart 1 shows the number of cases raised in each quarter since the commencement of the EastLink Customer Advocate 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. It also indicates that the nominal case rate is in the 50 to 60 cases per quarter range.

The number of cases raised in Q4 2022 (56 cases) is therefore within the nominal range.

Chart 1: ECA cases trend



32% of the cases raised during Q3 2022 related to toll invoices, which is a lower proportion than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (41%) – see Table 6.

13% of the cases were raised in relation to online scams. This is a higher proportion compared to the previous quarter (9%), and especially notable as there were no such cases prior to the previous quarter.

11% of the cases were raised in relation to infringements (fines), which is a significantly higher proportion than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (less than 3%)

Table 6: ECA cases trend

ECA CASES	2021				2022			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Toll invoice	19	23	16	10	20	15	31	18
Toll invoice SMS/email message	2	1	3	0	2	0	0	0
Toll invoice payment	2	1	0	2	0	0	0	0
Account notice	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Account payment	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	0
Account charge	3	7	1	1	4	4	6	5

ECA CASES	2021				2022			
Account charge for a sold vehicle	4	0	1	1	0	0	1	0
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle etc	1	0	0	1	2	0	1	0
Account charge for an LPN error	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0
Account suspension	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Account closure	3	1	1	0	1	0	0	1
Deceased account	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tags	1	1	2	0	0	0	2	0
Tolls	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tolling class	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trip pass	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	1
Rental vehicle toll payment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Debt recovery	2	2	0	0	2	0	1	0
Customer service	7	5	5	4	17	4	10	9
Payment options	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Website	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Hardship assistance	5	8	1	0	2	4	4	4
Payment plan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Third party scam	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	7
Infringements (fines)	1	1	2	1	0	1	2	6
Incident response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Debris damage	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Abandoned vehicle	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Road maintenance	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Signage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Litter	0	0	0	0	0	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	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
EastLink Trail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wildlife	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Privacy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Problem with another tollway operator	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown (withdrawn, insufficient details)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Police enquiry	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
TOTAL	58	54	36	23	57	30	67	56

As outlined earlier in section 3.1, the number of cases in Q4 2022 (56 cases) was within the nominal range (50 to 60 cases).

The distribution of these cases across each category of case findings was not particularly unusual in Q4 2022 compared to previous quarters – see Table 7 (overleaf).

Table 7: ECA case findings trend

ECA CASE FINDINGS	2021				2022			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	29	20	14	7	24	12	32	28
Complaint upheld	7	13	10	5	17	9	14	9
Complaint partially upheld	8	9	1	6	5	3	13	8
Complaint rejected	14	11	8	5	11	4	8	7
Referred to another tollway operator etc.	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	2
Insufficient details provided	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
TOTAL	58	54	36	23	57	30	67	56

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q4 2022 (\$264) was significantly lower than normal – see Table 8.

This reduction in refunds and credits is not expected to be indicative of a trend and is considered to be simply a statistical outlier.

Table 8: ECA case findings – refunds & credits trend

ECA CASES – REFUNDS & CREDITS	2021				2022			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Refunds & credits awarded	\$2,789	\$2,103	\$647	\$781	\$690	\$511	\$1,088	\$264

The elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q4 2022 (2.4 calendar days) was lower than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (2.7 calendar days) – see Table 9.

Three cases in Q4 2022 took a relatively long time to close (19 calendar days, 14 days and 14 days respectively). In each of these three cases, this delay was attributed to waiting for a third party tollway operator to provide information to assist with investigation of the respective case.

Excluding these three cases, the average time to close ECA cases during Q4 2022 would fall to just 1.6 calendar days.

Table 9: Elapsed time to close ECA cases trend

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	2021				2022			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Average time to close cases (calendar days)	2.8	2.1	1.9	2.8	2.3	3.5	3.7	2.4

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 (DISPUTED TOLL INVOICE)

Customer A complained that an EastLink toll invoice had been received for a vehicle that was linked to a tolling account issued by another tollway operator.

Operational data received by EastLink from the other tollway operator had indicated that the vehicle was not linked to a tolling account.

However, following the complaint, the other tollway operator was contacted to verify the customer's claim.

The other tollway operator confirmed (without providing any further explanation) that the vehicle should indeed have been covered for travel on EastLink by the tolling account. This may have been an error by the other tollway operator.

Accordingly, the EastLink toll invoice was completely cancelled.

4.2 CUSTOMER B (TOLL INVOICE FOR TRAVEL BY UNREGISTERED VEHICLE)

Customer B residing in Queensland complained that they had received an EastLink toll invoice for a motorcycle which Customer B had disposed of several years previously. Customer B claimed they have not been resident in Victoria or had a vehicle in recent years.

Following the complaint, the registration authority provided advice that the vehicle had become unregistered in 2016. Customer B's contact details were provided to EastLink as 'last known owner' of the vehicle rather than current owner.

This was consistent with the basis for Customer B's complaint.

Accordingly, the EastLink toll invoice was completely cancelled.

4.3 CUSTOMER C (UNABLE TO RESET WEBSITE PASSWORD)

Customer C complained that they were unable to reset the password used to access their EastLink account online.

Upon receiving a password reset request, the EastLink website sends a password reset link to the email address recorded on the EastLink account.

Following this complaint, investigation revealed that the customer's email address recorded on the EastLink account had a spelling error.

The email address was corrected, and the customer was informed of the corrected spelling error and that they could now proceed with the password reset.

4.4 CUSTOMER D (TRIP PASSES PURCHASED TOO LATE)

Customer D complained about receiving an EastLink toll invoice when EastLink trip passes had been purchased.

Investigation revealed that Customer D travelled on EastLink twice. While Customer D purchased two trip passes for the correct vehicle, the passes were purchased 5 days after travel instead of within the required 3 days after travel.

Although EastLink did not make an error, as a gesture of goodwill the EastLink toll invoice was cancelled.

4.5 CUSTOMER E (INTERSTATE VISITOR)

Customer E from South Australia travelled on EastLink four times over an 11 day period without any arrangement to pay the toll. Customer E received three EastLink toll invoices and complained about the fees in addition to the tolls. Customer E also complained that there was insufficient signage.

There is however prominent signage designating EastLink as a toll road (including prior to each entry point to EastLink) and communicating the EastLink website address, at which accounts can be opened, EastLink trip passes purchased, and call centre contact details found.

As Customer E was visiting from South Australia where there are no toll roads, as a gesture of goodwill the toll invoice fees were waived but not the tolls or the interstate look up fees (which are a pass through of actual costs incurred by EastLink to determine the contact detail for the owner of an interstate vehicle).

Customer E paid the remaining outstanding amounts for the three EastLink toll invoices.

For further information:

Doug Spencer-Roy, EastLink Customer Advocate
(03) 9955 1700 | EastLinkCustomerAdvocate@connecteast.com.au
www.eastlink.com.au/customeradvocate

© Copyright 2023 ConnectEast Group. All Rights Reserved.