

EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE REPORT

Q2 2024 (1 APRIL 2024 – 30 JUNE 2024)



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1. EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE'S MESSAGE

19 July 2024

This report covers the Q2 2024 quarterly period (1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024).

The number of cases raised in Q2 2024 (52 cases) was within the nominal case rate (50 to 60 cases per quarter), and was a significant reduction compared to the previous quarter (72 cases).

The elapsed time to close EastLink Customer Advocate (ECA) cases during Q2 2024 (2.1 calendar days) was significantly less than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (2.6 calendar days).

Two cases in Q2 2024 took a relatively long time to close (12 calendar days and 10 calendar days respectively):

- > In the first of these cases, the delay was attributed to identifying and clarifying website technical information which took longer than expected.
- > In the second of these cases, the delay was attributed to waiting for a third party tollway operator to provide information to assist with investigation of the case.

Excluding these two cases, the average time to close ECA cases during Q2 2024 would fall to just 1.7 calendar days.

More than half of the cases raised during Q2 2024 related to the following:

- > Toll invoices (31%) – which is a lower proportion than the longer term average for this case type over the preceding seven quarters (45%).
- > Customer service (23%) – which is higher than the longer term average for this case type over the preceding seven quarters (15%). However, there is no indication of a specific or systemic customer service failure contributing to this increase, and of the 12 cases raised in relation to customer service during Q2 2024, 10 were of finding type “service expedited (no valid complaint)”.

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q2 2024 (\$1,492) was 55% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$960). However, the Q2 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

Five years and more than 1,200 cases

I have now been serving as the EastLink Customer Advocate for the past five years. During this time, I have considered more than 1,200 cases, working diligently to provide assistance and support to EastLink's customers. It has been a privilege to help resolve concerns, explain misunderstandings, and ensure for many a more positive experience with EastLink.

Thank you for your trust and continued support.

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 (excluding 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 half of the cases raised during Q2 2024 related to the following:

- > Toll invoices (31%)
- > Customer service (23%)

Table 1: ECA cases raised

ECA CASES RAISED	Apr 2024	May 2024	Jun 2024	Q2 2024
Toll invoice	6	5	4	15
Toll invoice communications	0	1	0	1
Account charge	1	0	1	2
Account charge for a sold vehicle	1	5	0	6
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle etc	0	0	1	1
Account charge for an LPN error	0	1	0	1
Account closure	1	0	0	1
Trip pass	0	0	2	2
Customer service	3	7	2	12
Website	0	0	2	2
Hardship assistance	0	2	1	3
Third party scam	2	0	0	2
Infringements (fines)	1	0	1	2
Landscaping, public artworks	1	0	0	1
Unknown (withdrawn, insufficient details)	0	0	1	1
TOTAL	16	21	15	52

2.2 CASES CLOSED

All of the cases raised during Q2 2024 have been closed. The last of these cases was closed on 26/6/2024, with the customer notified of the ECA's finding on the same day.

Table 2: ECA cases closed

ECA CASES CLOSED	Apr 2024	May 2024	Jun 2024	Q2 2024
Q2 2024 cases closed (as at date of report)	16	21	15	52
Q2 2024 cases still open (as at date of report)	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	16	21	15	52

2.3 CASE FINDINGS

In 52% of cases during Q2 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.

13% of cases in the quarter were fully upheld, and a further 17% of cases were partially upheld.

In 12% of cases the complaint was rejected with no practical customer service assistance identifiable.

Two customers were referred to another tollway operator or other body.

One customer 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	Apr 2024	May 2024	Jun 2024	Q2 2024
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	8	11	8	27
Complaint upheld	4	2	1	7
Complaint partially upheld	3	4	2	9
Complaint rejected	1	3	2	6
Complaint referred to another tollway operator etc.	0	1	1	2
Insufficient details provided	0	0	1	1
TOTAL	16	21	15	52

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 usually 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	Apr 2024	May 2024	Jun 2024	Q2 2024
Refunds & credits awarded	\$424	\$939	\$129	\$1,492

2.4 ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE CASES

The average elapsed time to close ECA cases during the quarter was 2.1 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	Apr 2024	May 2024	Jun 2024	Q2 2024
Average time to close cases (calendar days)	2.1	1.5	2.8	2.1

Case Study – hardship request

The customer contacted the ECA to say they couldn't afford to pay an EastLink debt pending the sale of their house.

The ECA confirmed that there was an outstanding EastLink debt for this customer.

The ECA advised the customer to contact EastLink's customer service team to arrange a payment plan, or for hardship assistance (e.g. payment deferral) the customer should contact EastLink's hardship team directly.

Hardship applications include sensitive information about the nature of the customer's hardship. By having a customer contact EastLink's hardship team directly, this sensitive information is limited to a "need to know" basis.

3. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE TRENDS

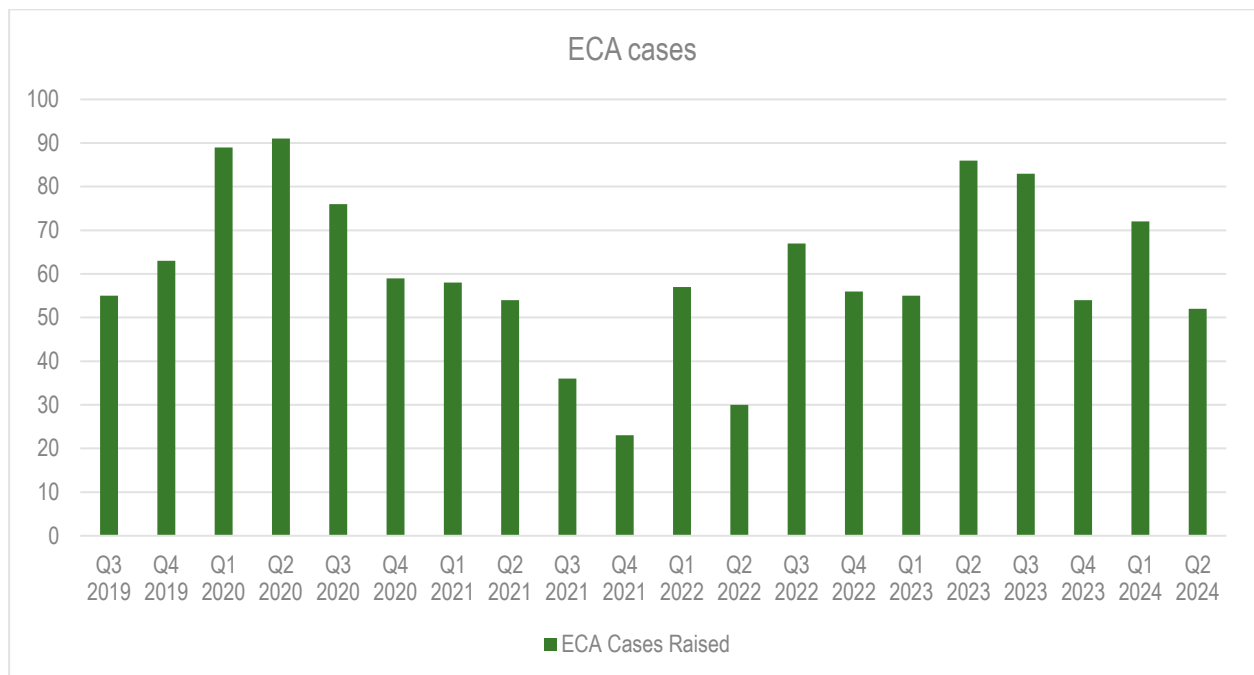
3.1 HISTORICAL TRENDS

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 in 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.

The number of cases raised in Q2 2024 (52 cases) was within the nominal case rate.

Chart 1: ECA cases trend



31% of the cases raised during Q2 2024 related to toll invoices, which is a lower proportion than the longer term average for this case type over the preceding seven quarters (45%) – see Table 6.

Of the 16 cases raised in relation to toll invoices during Q2 2024:

- > 3 of these toll invoice cases were of finding type “complaint upheld”
- > 4 of these toll invoice cases were of finding type “complaint partially upheld”
- > 5 of these toll invoice cases were of finding type “service expedited (no valid complaint)”
- > 3 of these toll invoice cases were of finding type “complaint rejected”
- > 1 of these toll invoice cases was of finding type “referred to another tollway operator etc.”

A further 23% of the cases raised during Q2 2024 related to customer service, which is higher than the longer term average for this case type over the preceding seven quarters (15%). However, there is no indication of a specific or systemic customer service failure contributing to this increase, and of the 12 cases raised in relation to customer service during Q2 2024, 10 were of finding type “service expedited (no valid complaint)”.

Table 6: ECA cases trend

ECA CASES	2022		2023				2024	
	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Toll invoice	31	18	15	35	35	31	39	15
Toll invoice communications	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	1
Toll invoice payment	0	0	1	1	0	0	3	0
Account notice	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Account payment	1	0	1	2	0	1	0	0
Account charge	6	5	2	6	9	5	2	2
Account charge for a sold vehicle	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	6
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle etc	1	0	1	3	5	2	1	1
Account charge for an LPN error	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Account suspension	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Account closure	0	1	5	4	1	0	1	1
Deceased account	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tags	2	0	2	1	0	2	1	0
Tolls	0	0	0	2	2	1	2	0
Tolling class	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Trip pass	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Debt recovery	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Customer service	10	9	6	11	24	4	8	12
Payment options	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Website	0	1	0	0	1	3	4	2
Hardship assistance	4	4	9	7	2	1	0	3
Payment plan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Third party scam	6	7	5	0	1	0	3	2
Infringements (fines)	2	6	3	4	0	1	3	2
Incident response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Debris damage	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Abandoned vehicle	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Road maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0
Signage	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Litter	0	0	0	1	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, public artworks	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1
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	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Police enquiry	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
CCTV request	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Insurance claim	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	67	56	55	86	83	54	72	52

As outlined earlier in section 3.1, the number of cases in Q2 2024 (52 cases) was within the nominal range (50-60 cases).

The distribution of these cases across each category of case findings was not particularly unusual in Q2 2024 compared to previous quarters – see Table 7.

Table 7: ECA case findings trend

ECA CASE FINDINGS	2022		2023				2024	
	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	32	28	26	45	49	18	31	27
Complaint upheld	14	9	9	16	14	9	13	7
Complaint partially upheld	13	8	7	9	5	14	14	9
Complaint rejected	8	7	12	10	12	11	14	6
Referred to another tollway operator etc.	0	2	1	6	3	1	0	2
Insufficient details provided	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	67	56	55	86	83	54	72	52

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q2 2024 (\$1,492) was 55% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$960) – see Table 8.

However, the Q2 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. The Q2 2024 figure is also midway between the figures for the two previous quarters.

Although the mean average refund/credit per case during Q2 2024 (\$29) is 29% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$14), it is a bit less than in Q4 2023.

Table 8: ECA case findings – refunds & credits trend

ECA CASES – REFUNDS & CREDITS	2022		2023				2024	
	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Refunds & credits awarded	\$1,088	\$264	\$1,133	\$736	\$573	\$1,619	\$1,307	\$1,492
Mean average per case (all cases, rounded)	\$16	\$5	\$21	\$9	\$7	\$30	\$18	\$29

The elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q2 2024 (2.1 calendar days) was significantly less than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (2.6 calendar days) – see Table 9.

Two cases in Q2 2024 took a relatively long time to close (12 calendar days and 10 calendar days respectively):

- > In the first of these cases, the delay was attributed to identifying and clarifying website technical information which took longer than expected.
- > In the second of these cases, the delay was attributed to waiting for a third party tollway operator to provide information to assist with investigation of the case.

Excluding these two cases, the average time to close ECA cases during Q2 2024 would fall to just 1.7 calendar days.

Table 9: Elapsed time to close ECA cases trend

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	2022		2023				2024	
	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Average time to close cases (calendar days)	3.7	2.4	2.3	3.0	1.4	2.5	2.8	2.1

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 (EMAIL LINK NOT WORKING)

Customer A had received an invoice email from EastLink and requested a copy of the invoice. To make the request, Customer A forwarded the invoice email to the ECA. The ECA tested the “download invoice” link in the email and it did not work (an error message was generated). The ECA emailed a PDF copy of the invoice to the customer. The ECA also informed EastLink’s billing and credit team about the link error for investigation and to fix any IT issue.

4.2 CUSTOMER B (SOLD VEHICLE NOT REMOVED FROM ACCOUNT)

Customer B’s vehicle was sold in July 2023, however Customer B did not inform EastLink until April 2024 following the issuing of the most recent monthly account statement. Customer B did not make any contact following the issuing of the previous nine monthly statements, despite prominent messages on the front page of each account statement reminding account holders to check that the vehicles listed on the statement are up to date:

**CHECK THAT THE VEHICLES LISTED
OVERLEAF ARE UP TO DATE**

**To add/remove vehicles or request new tags,
login to your account at EastLink.com.au
or phone us on (03) 9955 1400 during
business hours.**

Digital message signs are also displayed regularly on EastLink:

NEW VEHICLE OR SOLD VEHICLE	UPDATE YOUR TOLLING ACCOUNT
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In the meantime, tolls for the sold vehicle had been charged to Customer B’s EastLink account in accordance with the terms and conditions that apply to the account. As a goodwill gesture, a credit was made to cover the charges for the vehicle as listed on the most recent statement. This equates to approximately 25% of the total account charges for the vehicle since it was sold.

4.3 CUSTOMER C (SUSPENDED ACCOUNT)

Customer C’s account had been suspended for two months and was still suspended. EastLink toll invoices had been issued and while some were initially paid, most remained unpaid. Customer C’s vehicle had ceased travelling on EastLink. Customer C’s vehicle has a history of relatively frequent tollway travel. As a gesture of goodwill and to help break the impasse, an account credit was provided to cover the outstanding invoice fees as well as the two most recent toll invoices.

4.4 CUSTOMER D (NUMBER PLATE ERROR WHEN ADDING VEHICLE TO ACCOUNT)

Customer D incorrectly entered the licence plate number when attempting to add a rental vehicle to their EastLink account via the website. This led to more than \$70 in account charges for travel by another vehicle being charged to the EastLink account. Customer D had disputed the travel, and a goodwill credit had already been provided by EastLink’s customer service team to partially refund the account charges. While the error was made by Customer D, throughout subsequent contacts that Customer D had with EastLink’s customer service team the opportunity was not taken to identify the error, explain it, and handle the customer contacts better. The fact that both the rental vehicle and the other vehicle were coincidentally both 2023 Suzuki Sedans was a confusing factor in this case - for Customer D when attempting to add the rental vehicle to their account (make and model are displayed to help confirm the input) and for customer service operators when responding to the dispute. An additional credit was awarded to fully refund the account charges incurred by the other vehicle.

4.5 CUSTOMER E (VEHICLE CARRYING A TAG BUT NOT ADDED TO ACCOUNT)

Customer E disputed an EastLink toll invoice, claiming to have a tolling account. However, there was no record of an EastLink account in Customer E's name, and Customer E's vehicle was not listed on any tolling account (including Transurban Linkt, EastLink and E-toll accounts). A review of a toll point image relating to the EastLink toll invoice indicated a tag on the vehicle dashboard, not installed correctly on the windscreen (thereby impacting tag readability). There was no record on EastLink's systems of a tag ID associated with Customer E's vehicle, therefore it was not possible to determine whether the tag shown in the toll point image is an EastLink tag or a Transurban Linkt tag or an E-toll tag, and not possible to determine the related account number. There was no error by EastLink. Advise customer that before further travel on EastLink, the vehicle should be added to the tolling account and the tag should be installed correctly on the windscreen using a tag holder. For further enquiries about the account or tag, contact the issuer of the account (either Transurban Linkt or EastLink or E-toll). The EastLink toll invoice should be paid.

For further information:

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