

# EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE REPORT

Q4 2024 (1 OCTOBER 2024 – 31 DECEMBER 2024)



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## 1. EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE'S MESSAGE

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21 January 2025

**This report covers the Q4 2024 quarterly period (1 October 2024 – 31 December 2024).**

The number of cases raised in Q4 2024 (28 cases) was significantly lower than the nominal case rate (50 to 60 cases per quarter), and it was the third lowest number recorded for any quarter to date.

The elapsed time to close EastLink Customer Advocate (ECA) cases during Q4 2024 (2.7 calendar days) was higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (2.4 calendar days), although within the normal range of variation.

Three cases in Q4 2024 took a relatively long time to close (20 calendar days, 13 calendar days and 11 calendar days respectively):

- > In the first 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. In this case the complaint was upheld.
- > In the second of these cases, the delay was attributed to the ECA taking longer than usual to consider the merits of the customer's complaint, which was complex in nature and related to a specific issue which the ECA had not encountered previously. In this case the complaint was partially upheld.
- > In the third of these cases, the delay was attributed to the Christmas break. In this case the complaint was upheld.

Excluding these three cases, the average time to close ECA cases during Q4 2024 would fall to just 1.2 calendar days.

More than two-thirds of the cases raised during Q4 2024 related to toll invoices, which is higher than the longer term average for this case type over the preceding seven quarters (45%). However, there is no indication of a specific or systemic customer service failure contributing to this increase, and the 19 cases raised in relation to toll invoices during Q4 2024 had a broad range of outcomes.

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q4 2024 (\$1,035) was 13% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$912)

For the first time, this quarterly report includes hardship assistance data that is sourced from EastLink's hardship team, who administer EastLink's hardship assistance programs. This will continue to be included in future reports.

- > The number of payment plans created during Q4 2024 (1,076 plans created) was 7% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (1,006 plans created), although within the normal range of variation. The average value of payment plan created during Q4 2024 was \$302.
- > The number of fines withdrawn by EastLink due to hardship during Q4 2024 (825 fines withdrawn) was much lower than the longer term average over the preceding five quarters (1,387 fines withdrawn), also within the normal range of variation. The number of people assisted with fines withdrawn during Q4 2024 was 59 people assisted.

**If you are experiencing financial hardship and are seeking assistance in relation to any EastLink debt, please email [hardship@connecteast.com.au](mailto: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](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

More than two-thirds of the cases raised during Q4 2024 related to the following:

- > Toll invoices (68%)

Table 1: ECA cases raised

ECA CASES RAISED	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Q4 2024
Toll invoice	8	4	6	18
Toll invoice payment	0	0	1	1
Account charge	0	1	2	3
Account charge for a sold vehicle	1	0	0	1
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle etc	1	0	0	1
Website	1	0	0	1
Hardship assistance	0	0	1	1
Landscaping, public artworks	0	1	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>28</b>

### 2.2 CASES CLOSED

All of the cases raised during Q4 2024 have been closed. The last of these cases was closed on 9/1/2025, with the customer notified of the ECA's finding on the same day.

Table 2: ECA cases closed

ECA CASES CLOSED	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Q4 2024
Q4 2024 cases closed (as at date of report)	11	6	11	28
Q4 2024 cases still open (as at date of report)	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>28</b>

### 2.3 CASE FINDINGS

In 43% of cases during Q4 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.

25% of cases in the quarter were fully upheld, and a further 11% of cases were partially upheld.

In 18% of cases the complaint was rejected with no practical customer service assistance identifiable.

No 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	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Q4 2024
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	3	2	7	12
Complaint upheld	3	1	3	7
Complaint partially upheld	2	1	0	3
Complaint rejected	2	2	1	5
Insufficient details provided	1	0	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>28</b>

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	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Q4 2024
Refunds & credits awarded	\$868	\$36	\$132	\$1,035

## 2.4 ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE CASES

The average elapsed time to close ECA cases during the quarter was 2.7 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 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Q4 2024
Average time to close cases (calendar days)	2.0	1.3	4.1	2.7

### Case Study – toll invoices ignored

An EastLink account holder claimed they were not informed by EastLink that they would need to deal with toll invoices issued by a third party tollway operator.

Investigation revealed that the customer’s EastLink account had been suspended for four lengthy periods amounting to more than eight months of suspension over 2 years.

A suspension warning notice and an account suspended notice were issued by EastLink to the customer’s verified email address for each of these four account suspension events. Each of these notices included specific information that toll invoices would be generated and would need to be paid for any tollway travel while the account is suspended.

While the EastLink account was suspended, nine trips were made on another tollway (not EastLink), which resulted in four toll invoices being issued to the customer by the third party tollway operator.

These toll invoices were not dealt with by their due dates, which resulted in four overdue notices being issued to the customer by the third party tollway operator.

No action was taken by the customer despite the warnings in the suspension warning notices and account suspended notices issued by EastLink, and despite the instructions and options laid out in each of the toll invoices and overdue notices issued by the third party tollway operator.

There was no error by EastLink and apparently no error by the third party tollway operator.

### 3. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE TRENDS

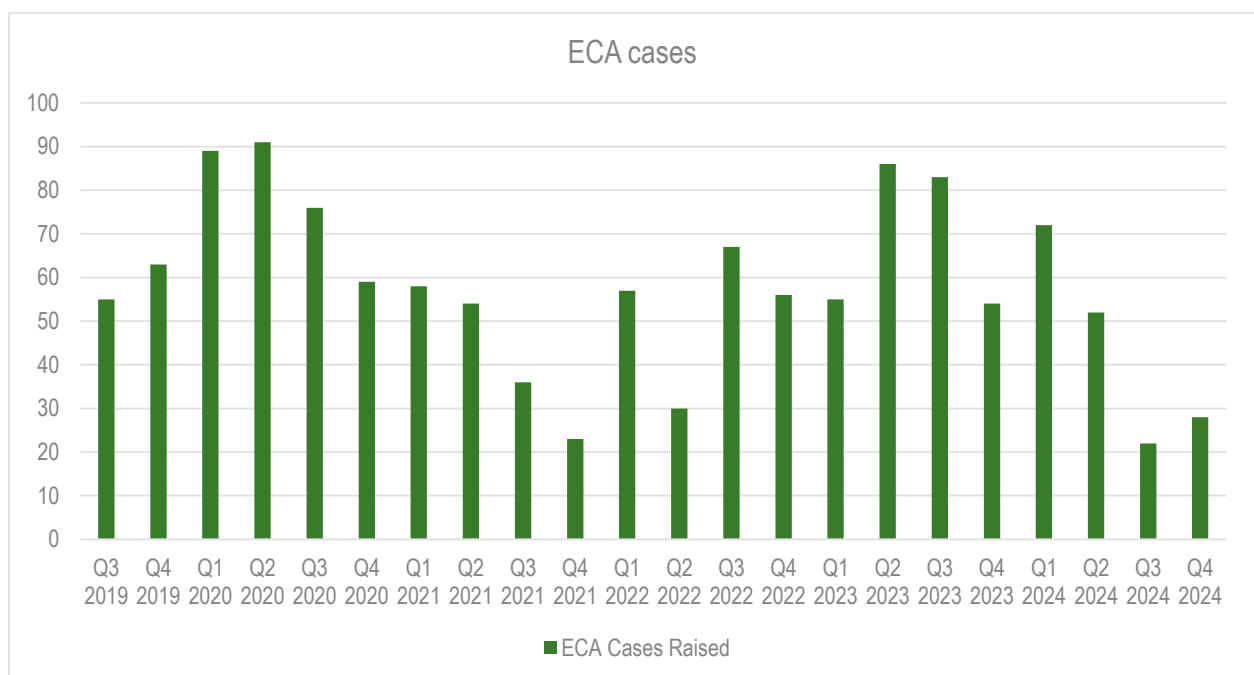
#### 3.1 HISTORICAL TRENDS

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 Q4 2024 (28 cases) was much lower than the nominal case rate (50-60 cases per quarter), and it was the third lowest number recorded for any quarter to date

Chart 1: ECA cases trend



68% of the cases raised during Q4 2024 related to toll invoices, which is higher than the longer term average for this case type over the preceding seven quarters (45%) – see Table 6.

However, there is no indication of a specific or systemic customer service failure contributing to this increase. Of the 19 cases raised in relation to toll invoices during Q4 2024, there was a broad range of outcomes:

- > 3 of these toll invoice cases were of finding type “complaint upheld”
- > 1 of these toll invoice cases were of finding type “complaint partially upheld”
- > 10 of these toll invoice cases were of finding type “service expedited (no valid complaint)”
- > 5 of these toll invoice cases were of finding type “complaint rejected”

Table 6: ECA cases trend

ECA CASES	2023				2024			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Toll invoice	15	35	35	31	39	15	10	18
Toll invoice communications	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	0
Toll invoice payment	1	1	0	0	3	0	0	1
Account notice	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Account payment	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
Account charge	2	6	9	5	2	2	4	3
Account charge for a sold vehicle	1	1	0	1	1	6	2	1
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle etc	1	3	5	2	1	1	0	1
Account charge for an LPN error	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Account suspension	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Account closure	5	4	1	0	1	1	0	0
Deceased account	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tags	2	1	0	2	1	0	1	0
Tolls	0	2	2	1	2	0	0	0
Tolling class	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trip pass	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0
Debt recovery	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Customer service	6	11	24	4	8	12	1	0
Payment options	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Website	0	0	1	3	4	2	1	1
Hardship assistance	9	7	2	1	0	3	1	1
Payment plan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Third party scam	5	0	1	0	3	2	0	0
Infringements (fines)	3	4	0	1	3	2	0	0
Incident response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Debris damage	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Abandoned vehicle	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Road maintenance	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0
Signage	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Litter	0	1	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, public artworks	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	2
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	0	0	0	1	0	0
Police enquiry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CCTV request	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Insurance claim	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>28</b>

As outlined earlier in section 3.1, the number of cases in Q4 2024 (28 cases) much lower than the nominal case rate (50-60 cases per quarter), and it was the third lowest number recorded for any quarter to date.

The distribution of these cases across each category of case findings was not particularly unusual in Q4 2024 compared to previous quarters – see Table 7.

Table 7: ECA case findings trend

ECA CASE FINDINGS	2023				2024			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	26	45	49	18	31	27	8	12
Complaint upheld	9	16	14	9	13	7	6	7
Complaint partially upheld	7	9	5	14	14	9	4	3
Complaint rejected	12	10	12	11	14	6	4	5
Referred to another tollway operator etc.	1	6	3	1	0	2	0	0
Insufficient details provided	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>28</b>

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q4 2024 (\$1,035) was 13% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$912) – see Table 8.

The mean average refund/credit per case during Q4 2024 (\$37) was two-thirds higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$22), although it was a reduction of 10% compared to the previous quarter Q3 2024.

Table 8: ECA case findings – refunds & credits trend

ECA CASES – REFUNDS & CREDITS	2023				2024			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Refunds & credits awarded	\$1,133	\$736	\$573	\$1,619	\$1,307	\$1,492	\$905	\$1,035
Mean average per case (all cases, rounded)	\$21	\$9	\$7	\$30	\$18	\$29	\$41	\$37

The elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q4 2024 (2.7 calendar days) was higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (2.4 calendar days), although within the normal range of variation – see Table 9.

Three cases in Q4 2024 took a relatively long time to close (20 calendar days, 13 calendar days and 11 calendar days respectively):

- > In the first 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. In this case the complaint was upheld.
- > In the second of these cases, the delay was attributed to the ECA taking longer than usual to consider the merits of the customer’s complaint, which was complex in nature and related to a specific issue which the ECA had not encountered previously. In this case the complaint was partially upheld.
- > In the third of these cases, the delay was attributed to the Christmas break. In this case the complaint was upheld.

Excluding these three cases, the average time to close ECA cases during Q4 2024 would fall to just 1.2 calendar days.

Table 9: Elapsed time to close ECA cases trend

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	2023				2024			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Average time to close cases (calendar days)	2.3	3.0	1.4	2.5	2.8	2.1	2.5	2.7



## 4. HARDSHIP ASSISTANCE

This is a new section within the ECA quarterly report, introduced for the first time in this report for Q4 2024.

This section includes hardship assistance data that is sourced from EastLink's hardship team, who administer EastLink's hardship assistance programs.

### 4.1 PAYMENT PLANS

The number of payment plans created during Q4 2024 (1,076 plans created) was 7% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (1,006 plans created), although within the normal range of variation – see Table 10.

The average value of payment plan created during Q4 2024 (\$302) was 8% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$278), although within the normal range of variation.

Table 10: Payment plans created

PAYMENT PLANS CREATED	2023				2024			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Payment plans created	880	818	1,007	885	1,178	1,169	1,107	1,076
Total value of plans created	\$308,051	\$219,580	\$268,666	\$204,248	\$283,100	\$310,302	\$367,300	\$325,471
Average value of plan created	\$350	\$268	\$267	\$231	\$240	\$265	\$332	\$302

### 4.2 FINES WITHDRAWN DUE TO FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

Fines for unpaid EastLink tolls are issued by Victoria Police and administered by Fines Victoria.

For a single vehicle, a maximum of one EastLink fine can be issued per seven day consecutive period.

In cases of financial hardship, EastLink can request withdrawal of EastLink fines.

EastLink commenced withdrawal of EastLink fines due to hardship in July 2023 (which is why data is not available for Q1 or Q2 2023).

The number of fines withdrawn by EastLink due to hardship during Q4 2024 (825 fines withdrawn) was much lower than the longer term average over the preceding five quarters (1,387 fines withdrawn), although within the normal range of variation – see Table 11.

The number of people assisted with fines withdrawn during Q4 2024 (59 people assisted) was lower than the longer term average over the preceding five quarters (77 people assisted), although within the normal range of variation.

The average number of fines withdrawn per person during Q4 2024 (14 fines withdrawn per person) was lower than the longer term average (18 fines withdrawn per person), although within the normal range of variation.

Table 11: EastLink fines withdrawn due to hardship

FINES WITHDRAWN DUE TO HARDSHIP	2023				2024			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Fines withdrawn	n/a	n/a	734	898	528	963	3,813	825
Individual people assisted	n/a	n/a	52	55	53	91	132	59
Average fines withdrawn per person	n/a	n/a	14	16	10	11	29	14

## 5. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE EXAMPLES

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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.

### 5.1 CUSTOMER A (COMPENSATION CLAIMED FOLLOWING ACCOUNT SUSPENSION)

Customer A demanded \$200 compensation, claiming that EastLink toll invoices had been issued instead of charging a tolling account. Investigation revealed that the vehicle was associated with a tolling account issued by a third party tollway operator and that the tolling account was suspended at the time of travel. An EastLink customer service operator had offered to transfer the toll invoice to the tolling account so that Customer A could then dispute the toll invoice's additional fees with the third party tollway operator. This offer was declined by Customer A. The EastLink toll invoice was then not paid by its due date, which resulted in an EastLink overdue notice being issued. Customer A had paid the EastLink overdue notice prior to making the demand for \$200 compensation from EastLink. However, there was no error by EastLink and Customer A's request for \$200 compensation was declined.

### 5.2 CUSTOMER B (VEHICLE ADDED TO TOLLING ACCOUNT INCORRECTLY)

Customer B complained that an EastLink toll invoice had been issued instead of charging a tolling account. Investigation revealed that Customer B had added a vehicle to a tolling account issued by a third party tollway operator, however the vehicle's licence plate number was specified incorrectly - a '0' (zero) instead of 'O' (oh). Although there were quite a few unpaid EastLink trips as a result of this error, they were all limited to a single EastLink toll invoice. The ECA confirmed that the licence plate number error had been corrected on the tolling account relatively quickly. The additional fees on the EastLink toll invoice were waived as a gesture of goodwill, and the remainder of the EastLink toll invoice (the tolls) were transferred to the tolling account.

### 5.3 CUSTOMER C (TOLL INVOICE DELIVERED LATE)

Customer C claimed to have received a posted EastLink toll invoice after its due date, which resulted in EastLink issuing an EastLink overdue notice with an additional overdue fee amount. Although there was no error by EastLink, there was no adverse history related to Customer C, and no reason to dispute Customer C's claim about a postal delivery delay. The overdue fee amount was waived as a gesture of goodwill and the recommendation was made to Customer C to get a tolling account or trip pass/es for future travel as that would be cheaper than toll invoices and not reliant on timely postal delivery.

### 5.4 CUSTOMER D (TOLL INVOICE FEES)

Customer D's vehicle travelled twice on EastLink resulting in two EastLink toll invoices being issued. Customer D told EastLink's customer service team that they were not the driver but Customer D refused to nominate the driver and Customer D also refused to pay the additional fees on the EastLink toll invoices, including claiming that the VicRoads lookup fee should be charged only once and not added to every toll invoice. Investigation revealed that EastLink's customer relations team had already waived the toll invoice fees (but not the VicRoads look up fees). The ECA explained in detail why there was no error by EastLink and waived one of the VicRoads lookup fees as a final gesture of goodwill to attempt to reset the customer relationship.

### 5.5 CUSTOMER E (COMPENSATION CLAIMED FOLLOWING TOLL INVOICE ISSUED IN ERROR)

Customer E demanded compensation equivalent to three months of their vehicle's state registration fees following an EastLink toll invoice issued in error to Customer E. Investigation revealed that another person's vehicle travelled on EastLink, however the damaged number plate on that vehicle resulted in the licence plate number being misread and the EastLink toll invoice issued to Customer E instead of the vehicle's owner. Customer E had contacted EastLink's customer service team, who did not dispute Customer E's complaint, and proceeded to investigate and resolve the complaint quickly and with respect (the EastLink toll invoice had been cancelled). EastLink had also taken steps to ensure the same error does not recur. The concluding email had been sent to Customer E within 25 hours after the first contact from Customer E. Financial compensation by EastLink is not warranted.



For further information:

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