

EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE REPORT

Q3 2021 (1 JULY 2021 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2021)



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1. EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE'S MESSAGE

28 October 2021

This report covers the Q3 2021 quarterly period (1 July 2021 – 30 September 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have an unprecedented impact on the Victorian economy.

Early in Q3 2021, Melbourne was in recovery from its 4th lockdown (28 May – 10 June), which was the only lockdown during the previous quarter.

However, this recovery was set back by two extensive lockdowns during Q3 2021: Melbourne's 5th lockdown (16 July – 27 July); and Melbourne's 6th lockdown (5 August until after the end of the quarter).

Together, these two lockdowns were in place for around 75% of Q3 2021, and traffic volumes on EastLink decreased significantly.

This was reflected in a 33% reduction in the number of cases raised with the EastLink Customer Advocate during Q3 2021 compared to the previous quarter.

EastLink has recently published the [EastLink Sustainability Report FY2021](#), which includes the following highlights:

- > In 2021, the internationally recognised [GRESB Infrastructure Asset Assessment](#) awarded EastLink the top "5 Star" environmental, social and governance (ESG) sustainability rating for the sixth year in a row.

EastLink was ranked 24th globally out of the 549 infrastructure assets of all types that were assessed by GRESB, putting EastLink within the top 5%.

Furthermore, in GRESB's Transport (Road Companies) category, EastLink was ranked second in the world out of 48 road companies.

EastLink's overall GRESB asset score has increased from 75/100 in 2019, to 91/100 in 2020, and to 96/100 in 2021.
- > The number of infringement penalty notices for unpaid EastLink travel issued by Fines Victoria in FY2021 was 54% less than the previous year.
- > During FY2021, 17% fewer payment plans needed to be set up to help customers with debt repayments compared to the previous year.
- > In EastLink's 2021 customer satisfaction survey, EastLink account holders' satisfaction with EastLink reached a record high at 8.35/10, compared to 8.29/10 in the previous year's customer survey.

These measures indicate that EastLink's performance has been improving, even during the difficult times that EastLink and EastLink's customers have been experiencing during pandemic lockdowns and restrictions.

In early July 2021, EastLink introduced significant improvements to EastLink toll invoices (which are sent to motorists travelling without valid accounts or trip passes). Toll invoice design and content were redeveloped, to more clearly explain the reason for the toll invoice and the options available to the customer. Toll invoice delivery was also updated, with most toll invoices now issued by email and SMS instead of by post, in accordance with motorists' preferences identified through market research.

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.

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

53% of the cases raised during Q3 2021 related to toll invoices. This is slightly higher than the nominal range (40%-46%).

Table 1: ECA cases raised

ECA CASES RAISED	Jul 2021	Aug 2021	Sep 2021	Q3 2021
Toll invoice	6	1	9	16
Toll invoice SMS/email message	3	0	0	3
Account payment	2	0	0	2
Account charge	0	0	1	1
Account charge for a sold vehicle	0	1	0	1
Account charge for an LPN error	0	1	0	1
Account closure	0	0	1	1
Tags	1	1	0	2
Customer service	4	1	0	5
Hardship assistance	1	0	0	1
Infringements (fines)	1	1	0	2
Police enquiry	1	0	0	1
TOTAL	19	6	11	36

2.2 CASES CLOSED

All of the cases raised during Q3 2021 have been closed.

Table 2: ECA cases closed

ECA CASES CLOSED	Jul 2021	Aug 2021	Sep 2021	Q3 2021
Q3 2021 cases closed (as at date of report)	19	6	11	36
Q3 2021 cases still open (as at date of report)	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	19	6	11	36

2.3 CASE FINDINGS

In 39% 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.

28% of cases were fully upheld, and a further 3% of cases were partially upheld. In 22% of cases the complaint was rejected with no practical customer service assistance identifiable. Two cases were referred to a third party. In a single case, the customer was not able to provide sufficient details to allow the complaint to be investigated.

Table 3: ECA case findings

ECA CASE FINDINGS	Jul 2021	Aug 2021	Sep 2021	Q3 2021
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	7	3	4	14
Complaint upheld	6	2	2	10
Complaint partially upheld	1	0	0	1
Complaint rejected	3	0	5	8
Referred to another tollway operator etc.	1	1	0	2
Insufficient details provided	1	0	0	1
TOTAL	19	6	11	36

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 if the trip is subject to an 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	Jul 2021	Aug 2021	Sep 2021	Q3 2021
Refunds & credits awarded	\$217	\$388	\$42	\$647

2.4 ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE CASES

The average elapsed time to close ECA cases during the quarter was 1.9 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 2021	Aug 2021	Sep 2021	Q3 2021
Average time to close cases (days)	1.2	0.8	3.8	1.9

Case Study – vehicle transfer from seller to buyer not fully completed by the registration authority

A vehicle travelled many times on EastLink without an arrangement to pay the toll.

The registration authority advised EastLink that a specific customer was the person responsible for the vehicle.

EastLink issued seven toll invoices and seven overdue notice for the vehicle's travel to the customer.

There was no error by EastLink.

The customer subsequently complained that they had sold the vehicle prior to the travel on EastLink (providing evidence of sale) and now lived overseas.

The registration authority requires documentation from both the seller **and** the buyer before fully transferring responsibility for the vehicle from the seller to the buyer.

If the buyer fails to submit the required documentation to the registration authority, the vehicle transfer may not be fully completed by the registration authority.

With evidence of the sale now provided by the customer to EastLink, all of the EastLink toll invoices / overdue notices were cancelled by EastLink.

In the customer's complaint, the customer also mentioned Transurban Linkt / CityLink debts.

The customer was advised that EastLink cannot help with any Transurban Linkt / CityLink debts, and that the customer should contact Transurban Linkt directly.

3. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE TRENDS

3.1 HISTORICAL TRENDS

In Q3 2021, a total of 36 cases were raised with me.

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 in Q3 2021 (36 cases) was significantly lower than the nominal case rate, and is by far the lowest quarterly figure recorded. It's likely this reduction was due to Melbourne's 5th and 6th COVID-19 lockdowns, which were in place for around 75% of Q3 2021, and resulted in a significant reduction in traffic on EastLink during the quarter.

Chart 1: ECA cases trend

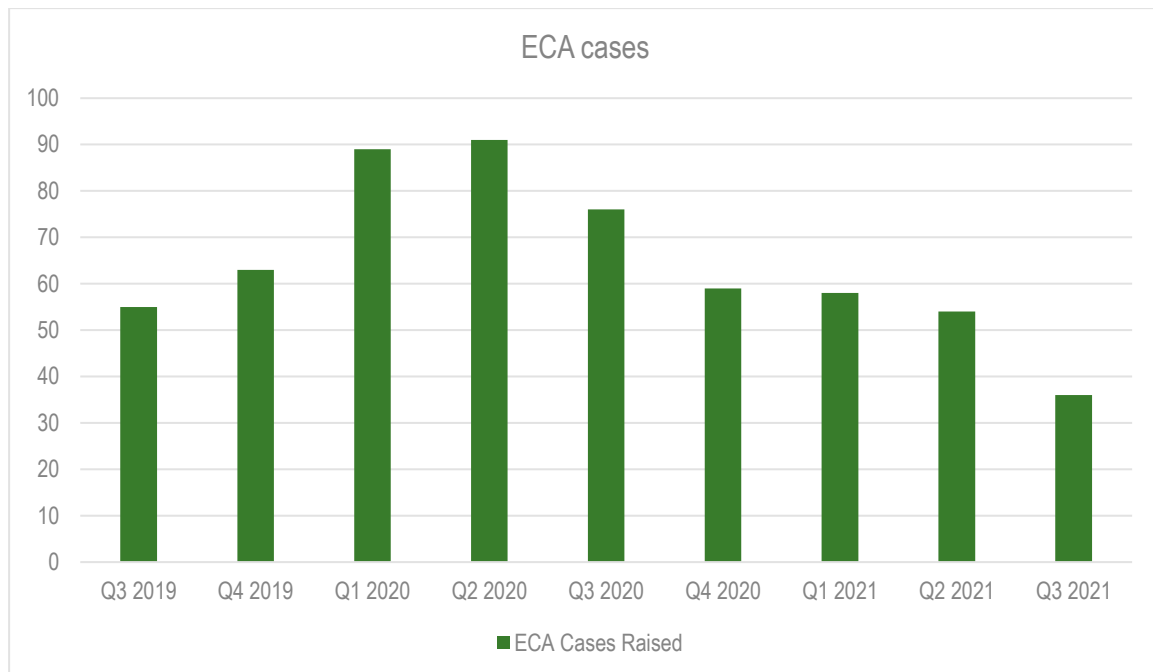


Table 6 shows the breakdown of cases across all case types over the past two years, with no surprises.

Table 6: ECA cases trend

ECA CASES	2019		2020				2021		
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	
Service request	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Toll invoice	27	44	31	31	18	19	23	16	
Toll invoice SMS/email message	0	1	3	0	1	2	1	3	
Toll invoice payment	0	1	3	2	1	2	1	0	
Account notice	2	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	
Account payment	0	4	4	0	4	1	0	2	
Account charge	2	2	10	8	3	3	7	1	
Account charge for a sold vehicle	2	4	3	1	0	4	0	1	

ECA CASES	2019	2020				2021		
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle etc	3	3	5	2	3	1	0	0
Account charge for an LPN error	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Account suspension	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Account closure	0	1	0	1	0	3	1	1
Deceased account	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tags	0	2	1	1	2	1	1	2
Tolls	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Tolling class	1	0	1	1	0	2	0	0
Trip pass	2	0	2	0	2	0	1	0
Rental vehicle toll payment	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
Debt recovery	1	0	0	2	1	2	2	0
Customer service	7	13	13	14	17	7	5	5
Payment options	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Website	3	0	1	0	3	0	1	0
Hardship assistance	2	1	3	4	2	5	8	1
Payment plan	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Infringements (fines)	3	4	3	2	0	1	1	2
Incident response	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Debris damage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Road maintenance	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Signage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Litter	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Noise	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Speed limit	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Graffiti	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Landscaping	2	2	0	3	1	2	0	0
EastLink Trail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wildlife	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Privacy	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Problem with another tollway operator	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown (withdrawn, insufficient details)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Police enquiry	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	63	89	91	76	59	58	54	36

The number of complaints that were fully upheld or partially upheld decreased from 22 to 11 (-50%). The number of complaints that were rejected decreased from 11 to 8 (-27%) – see Table 7.

On examination, 14 of the 36 cases raised during Q3 2021 were in fact found to be requests for customer service with no valid complaint, rather than unresolved customer complaints – see Table 7. For example, during Q3 2021: customers seeking to nominate toll invoices; customers seeking information about their account or toll invoice; a customer enquiring about payment options; and a request for assistance from a financial counsellor. Such cases are forwarded to the EastLink customer service team (or other department where appropriate) for expedited service.

Table 7: ECA case findings trend

ECA CASES	2019	2020				2021		
		Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	25	44	43	48	41	29	20	14
Complaint upheld	9	15	15	6	6	7	13	10
Complaint partially upheld	18	14	10	8	5	8	9	1

ECA CASES	2019	2020					2021		
Complaint rejected	11	14	22	11	7	14	11	8	
Referred to another tollway operator etc.	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	2	
Insufficient details provided	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	
TOTAL	63	89	91	76	59	58	54	36	

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q3 2021 was \$647, which is a reduction of 69% compared to the previous quarter, and one of the lowest amounts on record – see Table 8.

Table 8: ECA case findings – refunds & credits trend

ECA CASES – REFUNDS & CREDITS	2019	2020					2021		
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	
Refunds & credits awarded	\$590	\$1,707	\$974	\$737	\$1,131	\$2,789	\$2,103	\$647	

The elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q3 2021 was lower than the three previous quarters, and one of the lowest elapsed times on record – see Table 9.

The average 1.9 calendar days to close an ECA case is considered to be an exceptionally good response time.

However, one case in Q3 2021 took an unusually long 13 days to close. The delay in this case was due to the registration authority taking ten days to respond to a request for details about a vehicle's registered owner.

Excluding just that one case, the average time to close ECA cases during Q3 2021 would fall to 1.6 calendar days.

Table 9: Elapsed time to close ECA cases trend

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	2019	2020					2021		
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	
Average time to close cases (days)	2.8	2.2	1.8	1.3	2.5	2.8	2.1	1.9	

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 BATTERY EXPIRED)

For an unknown reason, Customer A removed a newer EastLink tag from a vehicle and replaced it with an EastLink tag that was 8 years older. After a certain date, the older tag was no longer detected when the vehicle passed toll points, as the tag had reached the end of its battery life. The vehicle continued to be tolled correctly based on toll point images of its licence plates, and incurring a total of \$62.94 in image processing fees before Customer A contacted EastLink to report the failure of the old tag (even though the old tag had not been beeping at tolling gantries for the previous year and image processing fees had been listed on account statements). Although there was no error by EastLink, it was noted that Customer A's account had been kept in generally good order with above average volume of EastLink trips. Accordingly, as a goodwill gesture, the EastLink account was credited with \$62.94 (the amount of the image processing fees that had been charged).

4.2 CUSTOMER B (VEHICLE WITH TAG BUT VEHICLE NOT LINKED TO TOLLING ACCOUNT)

Vehicles travelling with a tag should always be linked to the same tolling account as the tag. However, Customer B was using a Transurban Linkt tag in a vehicle that was not linked to the Transurban Linkt tolling account. When the vehicle travelled on EastLink it passed a number of toll points. During the EastLink trip the tag was detected at most of the EastLink toll points

passed, and the applicable toll was charged to the Transurban Linkt account. However, at one EastLink toll point the tag was not detected. As the vehicle was not linked to a tolling account, an EastLink toll invoice was issued for that toll point. There was no error by EastLink. However, as a goodwill gesture, the EastLink toll invoice was cancelled in full.

4.3 CUSTOMER C (CUSTOMER SERVICE OPERATOR ERROR)

Customer C added a vehicle (identified by Customer C at the time as a VW T Cross) to an EastLink account, however Customer C made an error by specifying the wrong licence plate details. This resulted in another person's vehicle (a Mazda Ute) being added to Customer C's account, with the customer service operator being presented with the make/model as a Mazda Ute. Subsequently, the other person's vehicle travelled on EastLink, incurring \$377.54 in charges on Customer C's account. EastLink's customer service operator should have identified the inconsistency in vehicle make/model, and explained to Customer C that the vehicle licence plate details were likely to be incorrect, and a request should have been made to Customer C to physically go to the vehicle and confirm the actual licence plate details as fitted to the vehicle. Customer C's EastLink account was credited with \$377.54 (the amount of the charges for the other person's vehicle charged to Customer C's account).

4.4 CUSTOMER D (LICENCE PLATES STOLEN)

A vehicle travelled on EastLink without an arrangement to pay the toll. The registration authority advised EastLink that Customer D was the person responsible for the vehicle. EastLink issued a toll invoice and subsequent overdue notice for the vehicle's travel to Customer D. There was no error by EastLink. Following Customer D's complaint, the registration authority was contacted to verify the status of the vehicle. The registration authority advised that the vehicle's licence plates were reported stolen around two weeks after the travel on EastLink. The toll invoice / overdue notice were completely cancelled by EastLink. As a courtesy, the Transurban Linkt website was checked, which indicated that many CityLink toll invoices had been issued by Transurban Linkt for travel by the vehicle on the CityLink tollway over the same period. It was recommended that Customer D also contact Transurban Linkt directly if not already done so.

4.5 CUSTOMER E (CUSTOMER FAILED TO NOMINATE DRIVER BY DUE DATE)

A vehicle travelled on EastLink without an arrangement to pay the toll. The registration authority advised EastLink that Customer E was the person responsible for the vehicle. EastLink issued a toll invoice and subsequent overdue notice for the vehicle's travel to Customer E. There was no error by EastLink. Following Customer E's complaint, the EastLink toll invoice / overdue notice were cancelled by EastLink, and a new EastLink toll invoice issued to the person nominated by Customer E in Customer E's complaint. It was also requested of Customer E that if Customer E receives any future EastLink toll invoices and wishes to nominate another person as the driver at the time of travel on EastLink, then Customer E must nominate that person no later than the Due Date specified on the toll invoice.

For further information:

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