

CCO REVIEW

15 SEPTEMBER 2004 TO 28 FEBRUARY 2005

**Michael Arnold
CityLink Customer Ombudsman**

CITYLINK CUSTOMER OMBUDSMAN REVIEW

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Introduction

The CityLink Customer Ombudsman service came into operation in mid-September 2004 with the objective of providing a free and independent service for CityLink customers who had an unresolved complaint with CityLink.

My appointment as the CityLink Customer Ombudsman broke new ground by offering customers an independent review and determination on any grievance that had not been able to be resolved directly with CityLink.

As a consequence the terms of my appointment for the position prevent me from being in a position where there may be a conflict of interest during the period of appointment. As CityLink Customer Ombudsman I have administrative support independent of CityLink and located outside CityLink or related corporate premises. However, I am a CityLink e-TAG account customer who uses the CityLink system.

CityLink funds the dispute resolution role so there is no cost to customers trying to resolve a problem. CityLink agreed to be bound by my decisions as Ombudsman on individual customer complaints.

The establishment of a CityLink Ombudsman was done with the determination that CityLink would ensure the Ombudsman's workload would be a modest one. CityLink's commitment was to minimise the cause for customer concern, deal with any issue raised at first point of call, then resolve any outstanding issues through its Independent Customer Resolution Group.

CityLink, at the same time, released a Customer Charter that publicly strengthened its customer-focused business behaviour. CityLink's objective was that the appointment of an Ombudsman with binding powers and the release of the Customer Charter would further strengthen CityLink's customer relationships. The aim was that only as a matter of last resort would matters need to go to the Ombudsman.

The Review

As part of the accountability of the CityLink Customer Ombudsman I am required to make a report to the Chief Executive Officer of CityLink each six months. CityLink will then publicly report on its Customer Charter commitments each six months. This is the report on my activities for the first six months of the Scheme.

At the outset I can say that my workload has been modest. Further, CityLink has been responsive to the complaints that have been referred to the CityLink Customer Ombudsman and then referred to them for action. Thirty-five complaints have been received to-date and of these eighteen were promptly resolved directly with the customer by CityLink.

A number of other complaints related to infringement notices issued by Victoria Police in respect of which the CityLink Customer Ombudsman does not have jurisdiction. However, I contacted these complainants by correspondence and usually by telephone. In discussions that I had with these complainants there was considerable support for the proposed changes whereby there will be an opportunity for invoices to be issued to non-CityLink customers, giving these travellers time to pay for their travel on CityLink before Victoria Police issue an infringement notice. It is my understanding that this system will be implemented during the second half of 2005. This will be a particular help for interstate travellers who on occasions inadvertently fail to obtain passes to use CityLink and subsequently receive infringement notices.

There were complaints from CityLink customers about damage done to their vehicles from debris that was on CityLink roadways. This is a difficult issue as although CityLink has a duty of care to its customers, it is not liable for the negligence of third parties nor cannot provide an absolute guarantee that its roadways are debris-free at all times. Further, Section 37A of the Transport Act 1983 (the highway rule) provides that a road authority is not liable to pay compensation for any failure to inspect and maintain a road.

Nonetheless, the CityLink customers would expect CityLink to have in place road maintenance and a management strategy link that as far as could be reasonably expected would keep the roadways debris-free. CityLink does, in fact, have in place such a strategy

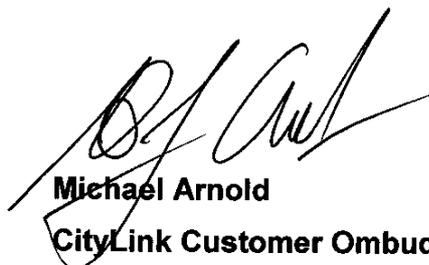
but again, its customers would assume that this would be regularly monitored and upgraded to ensure its efficacy.

I have included below a table of complaints and outcomes.

	Sept 04	Oct 04	Nov 04	Dec 04	Jan 05	Feb 05
Tolling	1	7	2	2	2	2
Damage by Debris		1				1
Other Damage				1		
Service	1		1	5	6	3
TOTAL	2	8	3	8	8	6
Answered by CCO	1	2	2	1	1	
Resolved by ICR	1	5	1	7	3	1
Pending		1			4	5
Determinations By CCO						

Conclusion

The first six months of the CityLink Customer Ombudsman has seen CityLink respond efficiently and with flexibility to the overwhelming majority of complaints that I have referred back to it. Further, there have been occasions in which a complaint may not have been resolved completely to the satisfaction of the complainants but it has been the catalyst for improvement in CityLink processes.



Michael Arnold
CityLink Customer Ombudsman

March 2005