

TCO REVIEW

1 March 2009 – 31 August 2009

**Michael Arnold
Tolling Customer Ombudsman**

TOLLING CUSTOMER OMBUDSMAN REVIEW

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Introduction

I am pleased to present a further report as the Tolling Customer Ombudsman on the operation of CityLink, EastLink, Hill M2, Roam and Roam Express over the past six months.

The trend of the toll road operators managing the great majority of the customer complaints in a timely and efficient manner continues. Inevitably there may well be instances in which a particular customer is not satisfied by an operator's response to a complaint, so it is important that a complaint is responded to quickly and courteously to avoid them escalating into other service issues. I am satisfied, in the main, this is done.

Credit Letter Process

Complaints have been received about toll operators' credit letter process and the suspension of accounts. It is important for operators to have a credit cycle and suspension process that enables timely communication to their customers about their account status. The emphasis should be on giving customers the best lead time to contact operators to replenish their account and a system they can readily understand. This will avoid unnecessary disputes by customers and a reduction of disputes about unpaid tolls.

Classification of Vehicles

A very small number of complaints have been raised in respect of the appropriateness of certain vehicle classifications for the purpose of the charging of tolls. The contention being a vehicle has been incorrectly classified as a light commercial vehicle. This is a matter over which I do not have jurisdiction but I have referred them to relevant toll operators for consideration. I understand that toll operators have an independent process that they follow in making vehicle classifications but I would recommend they monitor such complaints in order to avoid any anomalies as a consequence of the classification process.

Change of Ownership of Vehicles

Another issue which I have raised before relates to charges imposed on toll road customers for non-compliant use of toll roads after they had sold/transferred ownership of their vehicles. The responsibility at first instance lies on the customer to inform the toll operator of any such change but consideration should be given again to some publicity by toll road operators to reinforce the need to give them notice of such change and the development of an early warning system in relation to some unusual non-compliance by the customer's former vehicle. Such a system could extend to such non-compliance by existing customers who previously had a good track record with the operator.

Goodwill Payments

I note there have been a number of complaints in which claims for compensation or goodwill payments have been made for failure of service. Such claims often have no substance and there is no automatic right to compensation. It is pleasing to see, however, that toll road operators waive charges, and in some cases "write off" modest amounts of tolls, in circumstances where it is recognised that good industry practice has not been met and customers have suffered inconvenience as a consequence.

Tunnel Safety

The safety of CityLink and EastLink customers is a paramount concern. Accordingly, I believe it is appropriate to recognise and endorse the joint CityLink/EastLink driving safety strategy for Melbourne's major roadway tunnels.

EastLink's Melba and Mullum Mullum Tunnels and CityLink's Burnley and Domain Tunnels are vital parts of Melbourne's roadways and it is essential that driving conditions in these tunnels be as safe as possible for motorists.

A joint campaign between CityLink and EastLink has seen the provision and distribution of pamphlets on issues such as:

- Things to do to make sure travel is safe;
- When the tunnels should not be used;
- What to do if a breakdown occurs in a tunnel;
- If you are stopped in tunnel traffic;
- The safety features of tunnels.

In addition to the pamphlets, information can be accessed from the respective road operator's websites. This campaign is representative of proactive thinking on safety. The more publicity that can be achieved the better for the users of the toll roads.

Conclusion

Dealing with complaints is not always an easy task, so it is pleasing when a customer expresses an enthusiastic comment. I will not name the operator but it was satisfying to be copied in to an email from a customer that said:

"I really wanted to contact you and tell you how grateful I have been having the [Name] now open and running! There are 3 main areas I want to applaud and thank you all for..."

The customer went on to compliment the timeliness of her travel, the safety features and the attractiveness of the trip.

This certainly set a benchmark for customer satisfaction.

Below is a table of complaints and outcomes for the reporting period.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Arnold
Tolling Customer Ombudsman

CityLink
EastLink
Roam
Roam Express

Category	March 09	April 09	May 09	June 09	July 09	Aug 09
Account Management	5	6	4	9	7	5
	3	1	9	7	3	1
	2	6	7	7	5	5
				1		1
Tolling/Billing	2	3	1			3
	1	2	2	1	1	1
	4	1	1	1	2	
			1			
Damage to Vehicle						
			1			
Infringement / Late toll invoice	3					
	2				2	
Infrastructure/Signage Traffic Management/ Safety			1	1		
			1			
Privacy/Service		1				
Vehicle Classification	1		1			1
					1	
Website						
Enquiry/Copy to TCO only/Outside jurisdiction						
	1	1				
	1					
TOTAL	11	10	7	10	7	9
	5	4	13	8	5	2
	9	7	8	8	9	5
	3	-	1	1	-	1
Resolved/Closed by Customer Resolutions/ Outside jurisdiction	11	10	7	10	6	8
	5	4	11	7	5	2
	9	5	8	6	6	4
	3	-	1	1	-	1
Pending					1	1
			2	1		
		2		2	3	1