

TCO REVIEW

1 September 2008 – 28 February 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 following the seamless joining of the toll operator EastLink with CityLink, Hills M2, Roam and Roam Express under the jurisdiction of the Tolling Customer Ombudsman in the middle of 2008.

During the course of the past six months I have had the opportunity to observe and communicate with the Customer Relations team at EastLink. I have been impressed with their professionalism and responsiveness to issues raised by their customers.

The advent of a new toll road presented challenges for the toll operators of EastLink and CityLink in view of the commonality of customers as well as new users of toll roads. It is apparent from my discussions with CityLink and EastLink that every effort is being made to enhance the inter-operability of their respective tolling operations.

Despite these challenges, to date there have been relatively few complaints to me following the opening of EastLink from those that use this tollway. I am confident that the respective Customer Relations teams have provided efficient and speedy attention to issues raised by their customers.

Leaving this aside, in general terms, since my last Review there have been complaints about account management, billing/tolling, damage to vehicles, infringement/late toll notices, infrastructure/traffic management, service, vehicle classification and websites. Details are attached to this report.

I recently had the opportunity to attend and address the 2009 Toll Road Summit of Australia, New Zealand and the Asia Pacific Rim, on the role of the Tolling Customer Ombudsman. I believe that it is opportune to reiterate some of the points I made at that Conference.

There is a constant theme in the complaints that come to the Tolling Customer Ombudsman. The most common complaint that the Tolling Customer Ombudsman receives is in relation to account handling. They usually involve the imposition of additional fees and charges arising from the customer driving on a toll road whilst their account is suspended or without the required pass. From the customers' perspective, they relate to the operation of their e-TAGS or communications that they have with the toll road operators' call centres.

It is my view that toll road users who are required to use a cashless tolling system, expect that toll road operators will have efficient and transparent accounting systems. These systems must clearly spell out the trips travelled on the toll road, the tolls charged, whether their account is in credit or liable to be suspended. Call centre staff should be well trained and have the facility to inform a customer of the exact state of an account and the amount to be paid to avoid an account suspension and the imposition of further fines. There is no doubt that steps are being taken by the toll road operators to improve their systems in regard to their accounting, and communication is an essential element of any change to prevent disputes.

There continues to be complaints in relation to damage done to vehicles whilst travelling on toll roads. Toll road users have an expectation of a safe trip on a toll road, with protocols in place with the State Emergency Services including relevant policing, ambulance and fire brigade authorities, as well as radio stations in the case of severe accidents or breakdowns on the roadway. This is relevant as there was a serious accident in a tunnel in Victoria. A particular issue was raised by a disabled motorist who was concerned about how she could be evacuated from a tunnel in the event of an emergency. I was pleased to see the toll road operator did have a system in place for this situation, which was explained to the customer.

There is also an expectation of motorists that they will be able to easily access the toll road, exit it at appropriate points in the journey and complete their journey within expected time frames. Accordingly, there is a requirement for multiple and clear signage identifying entry and exit to the toll roads.

Customers generally will understand that there will be breakdowns and accidents on a toll road but believe that there should be measures in place to alleviate delay or to at least keep them informed. They expect signage informing those on the road of the likely time of travel to destinations, with warning notices of delays, information in traffic reports on radio stations and systems in place to restore traffic to normal as quickly as possible. I note that there is technology in place that allows access to information about traffic conditions on mobile telephones and GPS systems. Toll operators can assist by making their customers aware of this. The safe use of these systems by their customers whilst travelling on toll roads will lead to the avoidance of traffic problems and more efficient travel.

Conclusion

I am pleased to note that there is recognition by toll road operators that they have other more sensitive roles. They, CityLink in particular, reacted to the very recent Victorian bushfires by providing consideration and relief in relation to their customers affected by this disaster. EastLink should be particularly commended for their employment practices by using deaf or hearing impaired persons in the identification of number plates of their road users as part of their operations. I understand this initiative has been recognised by community awards.

These initiatives were not as a consequence of the TCO process but as recognition of the fact that infrastructure development has responsibilities to its users and to the community.

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	Sept 08	Oct 08	Nov 08	Dec 08	Jan 09	Feb 09
Account Management	3	2	3	4	1	3
	4	5	3	2	1	4
		2	1	3	5	1
		1			1	
Tolling/Billing			1	1	2	4
	2	6	6	1	2	2
	1		3	1	1	5
					1	2
Damage to Vehicle						
						1
Infringement / Late toll invoice			3	2	3	2
		1				
Infrastructure/Signage Traffic Management/ Safety			1	1		
	1	1				
Privacy/Service						1
	1					
Vehicle Classification			1			
	1					
Website					1	
Enquiry/Copy to TCO only/Outside jurisdiction	1	2			1	1
	1	2	3	1	1	
					2	2
					1	
TOTAL	4	4	9	8	8	11
	10	14	12	4	4	6
	1	3	4	4	7	8
	-	1	-	-	3	3
Resolved/Closed by Customer Resolutions/ Outside jurisdiction	4	4	7	4	5	4
	10	14	12	4	4	6
	1	3	4	4	5	4
		1			3	
Pending			2	4	3	7
					2	2
						3