



**Tolling Customer Ombudsman**

# **TCO REVIEW**

**1 September 2011 – 29 February 2012**

**Michael Arnold  
Tolling Customer Ombudsman**

# **TOLLING CUSTOMER OMBUDSMAN REVIEW**

**1 SEPTEMBER 2011 – 29 FEBRUARY 2012**

## **Introduction**

This report deals with issues relating to all toll operators under the Tolling Customer Ombudsman (TCO) dispute resolution system, including **go via** for the first time in a substantive way. It has provided the opportunity to raise issues that are common to all toll operators for comment.

Evaluating the toll operators' responses to complaints since the last report, I am satisfied that the vast majority of complaints have been resolved by negotiation and that this approach reflects the operators' on-going commitment to customer service. It is inevitable that not all complaints can be resolved in this way and the TCO made four formal written Decisions in this period. These have been published on the TCO website for public scrutiny and examination by toll operators.

There has been a range of complaints related to service issues. These touch upon the competence and timelines of the operators in the handling of complaints, as well as the difficulties of use of toll operators' services online. The complaints reflect the high expectation of consumers and the level of sophistication they have in relation to services provided by organisations today. There is an expectation of efficient service and user-friendly websites for the purchase of passes or topping up of accounts.

Such complaints must be kept in perspective in view of the number of customers, both contracted and casual, that use toll roads but the TCO has an obligation to comment upon what appear to be systemic problems in the experience of some consumers.

Further, complainants can raise an operational issue that might not be of a systemic nature but still may need attention and possible remedy by a forward-looking toll road operator.

## **Particular Complaints**

### *Vehicle Ownership*

There continue to be issues in relation to the charging of tolls to previous owners of vehicles as a consequence of their failure to notify operators of the sale of their vehicles or a lag in the time of a transfer of a vehicle ownership by the State motor vehicle registration authority. These owners, as tag holders, have forgotten to notify the toll operator of the change of ownership whilst others have relied on the fact that they have lodged the transfer of vehicle with the relevant motor vehicle registration authority.

Despite their failures, such customers continue to query why toll operators cannot pursue the new owners of the vehicles incurring tolls in their name, particularly when they have lodged the required documents transferring ownership to the new owner with the relevant motor vehicle registration authority or have subsequently provided details of the new



owners to the operator. Operators have nomination procedures but it appears that there are varying policies in relation to the pursuing of these tolls from the previous owners.

It is understood that the prime obligation is on the customer, as a tag holder, to notify the toll road operator of a change of ownership and any vehicle owner to ensure that there has been lodgement of the necessary transfer of ownership. However, with the number of toll roads increasing this is a matter deserving of a common policy. I look forward to further submissions and discussions with toll operators in this regard.

### *Recording of Information*

Another issue raised is the accurate registering of the vehicle Licence Plate Number (LPN), both over the telephone and online, when passes are being sought. There has been a particular difficulty with customers who use rental or hire cars on toll roads which may not specify the State of registration in their hire documentation.

This has led to failures to record the correct State of registration by a customer when providing LPN details to the toll road operator. The customers have focussed on the LPN required by the operator and not the State of registration. This has led to vehicles not being identified by toll operators.

It would be advantageous if toll operators had a designated space for State of registration of vehicle on their online registering service for customers to complete as well as having their telephone operators trained to ask specifically for the State of registration to avoid such problems.

Discussions could also be had with rental or hire companies in relation their documentation to avoid such problems. Some hire companies incur work and charge administration fees to customers for dealing with toll operators' requests for information about details of persons hiring vehicles. Customers would benefit if such fees were avoided.

The other difficulty that arises with operators who do not record telephone conversations is the incorrect recording of letters and sometimes numbers in an LPN. There have been disputes when the LPN recorded by the toll operator is different from the actual LPN.

I understand that letters are taken phonetically but disputes have arisen over similar sounding letters, for example V for B, or the recording of a letter next to the correct letter on the computer keyboard, for example M for N. It is difficult to see how this problem can be completely avoided without recording telephone conversations but there should always be a second recording of the information to avoid the problem.

There also have been issues raised in respect of **go via's** automated telephone system which involved the fixing of the period for which a customer was to use a hire car on the toll roads. By way of example, a customer registered the day of the start of the hire period and the day of the end of the hire period. There was no opportunity to specify the times the vehicle was to be used on the respective days. He, in fact, returned the vehicle early on the final day of the hiring period but was charged for two toll fees after its return to the hire company. The matter was resolved by **go via** but there appears to be an issue in relation to a customer being able to specify the times of hire on the relevant days of use that needs to be addressed.



## *Vehicle Rental or Hire Companies*

There have been issues raised in respect of the relationship between car rental or hire companies and toll operators. I have sought information from all toll operators in respect of their experiences with such companies and intend to produce a report when all information is collated.

## *Interstate Visitors and Tourists*

Interstate visitors and tourists continue to experience difficulty in understanding and navigating tolling operators when visiting different States. States with toll roads have or will have multiple toll operators and it would be advantageous if there could be a common or standard approach to the issue of short term passes which would cover all toll roads within a State. Such passes could be promoted to visitors. I understand that there is work being done in this regard and I will report on any outcome.

## *Customer Service*

In view of complaints containing allegations of poor service and difficulties in using online services, it would be useful if toll operators had, from time to time, independent shadow shopping to test customer service and the customer friendliness of their online systems.

A short term customer has queried the need for signing up to a long and detailed Customer Service Agreement. I note that **go via** has indicated that it will be reviewing its Agreements and other toll operators should examine the necessity for unnecessary documentation.

## **Conclusion**

The Tolling Customer Ombudsman has conducted seminars for tolling operators on a regular basis over the last few years. It has provided the opportunity for discussion of common issues and has led to improved liaison between operators. The seminars have been held in Victoria in the past but steps will be taken to have upcoming seminars at a venue that would more suit New South Wales and Queensland operators. There will be discussions with operators on the suitability of a venue and the topics for discussion.

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



**Michael Arnold**  
**Tolling Customer Ombudsman**

|              |
|--------------|
| CityLink     |
| EastLink     |
| Go Via       |
| Roam         |
| Roam Express |



| Category                                | Sept 2011 | Oct 2011 | Nov 2011 | Dec 2011 | Jan 2012 | Feb 2012 |
|---|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Account Management                      | 12        | 13       | 10       | 8        | 19       | 14       |
|   | 4         | 5        | 9        | -        | 5        | 3        |
|   | -         | 7        | 8        | 2        | 4        | 10       |
|   | 3         | 3        | 4        | 2        | 6        | 9        |
|   | 2         | 1        | -        | 2        | -        | 1        |
| Tolling                                 | 5         | 7        | 2        | 2        | 10       | 3        |
|   | 2         | 6        | 4        | 1        | 4        | 5        |
|   | -         | 10       | 13       | 5        | 16       | 13       |
|   | -         | 2        | 3        | 1        | 1        | -        |
|   | 1         | 1        | 2        | 2        | 2        | -        |
| Damage to Vehicle                       |           |          |          |          |          |          |
|   |           |          |          | 1        |          |          |
|   |           |          |          |          |          |          |
|   |           |          |          |          |          |          |
|   |           |          |          |          |          |          |
| Service                                 |           |          |          |          |          |          |
|   |           |          |          |          |          | 2        |
|   |           |          |          | 1        |          |          |
|   |           |          | 1        |          |          |          |
|   |           | 1        |          |          |          |          |
| Website                                 |           | 2        | 1        |          |          |          |
|   |           |          |          |          |          |          |
|   |           |          | 1        |          |          |          |
|   |           |          |          |          |          |          |
|   |           |          |          |          |          |          |
| Enquiry/Copy to TCO only                |           |          |          |          |          |          |
|   |           |          |          |          |          |          |
|   |           |          |          |          |          |          |
|   |           |          |          |          |          |          |
|   |           |          |          |          |          | 1        |
| TOTAL                                   | 17        | 22       | 13       | 10       | 29       | 17       |
|   | 6         | 11       | 13       | 2        | 9        | 10       |
|   | -         | 17       | 22       | 8        | 20       | 23       |
|   | 3         | 5        | 8        | 3        | 7        | 9        |
|   | 3         | 3        | 2        | 4        | 2        | 2        |
| Resolved/Closed by Customer Resolutions | 17        | 22       | 13       | 10       | 26       | 16       |
|   | 6         | 11       | 13       | 2        | 9        | 10       |
|   | -         | 17       | 22       | 8        | 19       | 21       |
|   | 3         | 5        | 8        | 3        | 7        | 9        |
|   | 3         | 3        | 2        | 4        | 1        | 2        |
| Pending                                 |           |          |          |          | 3        | 1        |
|   |           |          |          |          |          |          |
|   |           |          |          |          | 1        | 2        |
|   |           |          |          |          |          |          |
|   |           |          |          |          | 1        |          |