

# **TCO Review**

**1 September 2018 to 30 April 2019**

**Michael Arnold  
TCO Tolling Customer Ombudsman**

# **TOLLING CUSTOMER OMBUDSMAN REVIEW**

**1 September 2018 – 30 April 2019**

## **Introduction**

I have extended the timing of this Review to accommodate the calling of the 2019 Federal Election to take into account the policies raised by the political parties in relation to a number of issues that are relevant to toll operators and their customers. It has been said that with the election of any Government there will be change, so irrespective of the outcome there will be future challenges for the community's transport needs.

It is not necessary to make a judgement on any particular policy measure as there appears to be broad agreement that attention needs to be given to infrastructure spending, road tax revenue, the environment and cost of living pressures on taxpayers.

There has been a general commitment to infrastructure development which includes roads and public transport, in order to relieve travel congestion in the future management of our travel and transport requirements. Such policies are essential and reflect steps taken by State Governments in recent years in the funding of transport projects for the rapidly expanding population.

There must be public funding to enable access to high quality transport services throughout Australia for the social and economic benefit of the community. However, as indicated in previous Reviews, the limit on Government resources will mean that the private sector will be part of the implementation of infrastructure programs. As part of this process, innovatively managed and cost-effective toll roads play a role.

There has been some debate about the impact of electric cars and how their use will affect our travel in the future. Environmental pressures have seen the relatively significant shift to electric cars overseas. Statistical information shows there has been a slow uptake in the use of such vehicles in Australia. Things are likely to change. A fall in price, improved battery performance and the availability of charging stations is bound to see an escalation in the growth of their purchase.

There appears to be a consensus amongst most that there will be environmental benefits from the usage of electric cars with the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, but it will come at a cost to Federal Government revenue in lost petrol taxes. Alternatives will have to be found to replace such revenue.

Consideration of these alternatives will have to factor in the cost of living for consumers, many of whom, on economic measures, are under pressure to make ends meet. There has been a recognition by the major parties of this problem. One has promised taxation cuts, another different taxation cuts in conjunction with a wage relief. Toll operators could not be immune from the cost of living issue. Future planning will have to take into account the cost pressures on their customers by having alternative pricing mechanisms to meet their needs.

## Customer Service

Although there is general satisfaction, customers still raise complaints about toll operators' tolling invoice processes. These complaints not only come from customers who travel without an account or who do not make an arrangement to pay tolls within the required time-frame, but also from those who hold accounts. There have been instances in which customers have been inconvenienced by problems not of their making and their problems have not been promptly resolved.

Compensation has been provided in the form of toll credits or refunds, but often these do not satisfy customers' concerns. It is essential when customers raise issues, that they be resolved prior to the lodgement of a complaint with the Tolling Customer Ombudsman. The failure to do so feeds into the dissatisfaction with the level of service provided by toll operators in the collection of outstanding tolls.

## Hardship Policies

The toll operators have implemented hardship policies which can be found detailed on their respective websites. Complaints involving hardship are processed by the Tolling Customer Ombudsman through its dispute resolution process. Sensitive issues are often involved and sympathetic handling is required.

Customers are advised to obtain the assistance of financial counsellors in making hardship applications to toll operators for relief. These counsellors are a valuable resource and can develop relationships with toll operators in assisting customers in financial difficulty.

It is apparent that the processing of hardship applications by toll operators has shown empathy and improved with time. However, it is a challenging work-in-progress and consultation should take place with financial counsellors and others representing those facing hardship to obtain the best outcomes.

## Conclusion

Below is table of complaints and outcomes for the period 1 September 2018 to 28 February 2019 in changed order for ease of reference. Please note, the statistics for March and April 2019 will be published in the subsequent TCO Review for the period ending August 2019.

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

EastLink
E-way
M5 South-West Motorway
Linkt New South Wales
Linkt Queensland
Linkt Victoria
Roam

Category	Sept 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Dec 18	Jan 19	Feb 19
Account Management	3	6	2	2	3	2
	-	1	1	-	3	5
	-	2	-	1	-	-
	2	3	-	4	4	5
	12	12	12	10	18	8
	12	15	17	11	6	14
	4	1	4	5	1	-
Billing & Tolling	5	6	6	4	14	8
	-	5	2	-	1	1
	12	10	10	2	9	4
	8	15	11	2	8	4
	8	8	10	10	5	5
	-	6	5	2	5	4
	9	10	6	4	8	2
Damage to Vehicle			1			
					1	
					1	
Vehicle Classification						
	1		1			
	1			1		
		1	2			
		1			1	
Website						
						1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>10</b>
	<b>-</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>
	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>
	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>14</b>
	<b>12</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>18</b>
	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>
Resolved / Closed by Toll Road Operator	8	12	9	6	17	10
	-	6	3	-	4	5
	13	12	9	2	8	4
	11	18	11	7	12	9
	20	21	24	20	24	14
	12	22	22	13	13	18
	13	11	11	10	10	2

Category	Sept 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Dec 18	Jan 19	Feb 19
Pending						
						1
			2	1	1	