

Allan's double shots on taxpayers

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EXCLUSIVE

Suburban Rail Loop executives have racked up thousands of dollars on coffee on their taxpayer-funded credit cards and been forced to repay \$1500 charged to the public for 10-pin bowling and arcade game nights.

The Australian has obtained SRL Authority credit card records revealing fat cats charged with delivering the unfunded and controversial project slapped almost \$8000 on corporate credit cards at two coffee shops in 2024.

The financial statements also reveal that on August 14 last year an SRL Authority credit card was used to pay a \$1000 bill for a team-building exercise at Fortress Games, a Melbourne bar where patrons can drink and eat while playing arcade games, computer games, and board games.

The venue promotes itself as perfect for patrons to “enjoy get-togethers, social groups, and parties in our cosy booths where you can play while enjoying delicious food and drinks”.

An SRL Authority credit card was also charged \$528 to cover the cost of another so-called team building event at Strike Australia, a 10-pin bowling venue.

The SRL Authority has confirmed both the Fortress and Strike events breached its guidelines and the cost was reimbursed by a staff member.

Another staff member was also forced to reimburse what the authority described as a “small personal expense” placed on a corporate card.

The SRL Authority has defended its use of credit cards despite acknowledging that the team-building exercises did fall outside what it described as com-

munity expectations.

The authority has ordered a review of its credit card use and as a result has slashed the number of corporate cards by a third.

“We regularly review the use of corporate credit cards to ensure all expenses are appropriate and relate to official business,” an authority spokesperson said. “It is routine for major projects to hold company credit cards to make appropriate purchases that benefit the project and local community.”

The SRL Authority, which is chaired by former deputy premier James Merlino, is charged with delivering Premier Jacinta Allan's signature rail project. It will cost at least \$35bn to build the first stage linking Cheltenham to Box Hill.

Among the hundreds of credit card records obtained by The Australian were statements listing dozens of purchases throughout last year at Axil Coffee and Upstate Coffee, which both have outlets near the SRL Authority's city headquarters at 80 Collins Street.

The SRL Authority's corporate credit cards were used for coffee shop purchases as small as \$5.05c, suggesting some public servants have been charging their morning takeaway coffee on taxpayers.

The SRL Authority claims expenditure at both coffee shops was for catering for extended board strategy meetings, external stakeholder meetings or daylong internal workshops.

The financial documents reveal \$28 a day was charged to a credit card on March 12, 13, 14 and 15 at Upstate Coffee. Many of the coffee shop bills are around the \$30 to \$50 range.

Some of the coffee shop bills are substantially higher, with \$575 racked up on April 11 and separate charges for \$572 and \$445 on June 20 at Upstate Coffee.

Another statement revealed

\$404 at BeeBeauty Glen, a specialist beauty shop, was charged to a corporate card in February 2024.

Taxpayer-funded credit cards were used by SRL Authority executives to cover three restaurant bills relating to what was described as “community engagement collateral”. On February 14, \$300 was spent at the House of Delight and \$303.60 at Trustee for Steak. On February 16, \$225 was spent at Ssum Pocha.

The SRL Authority has defended this expenditure from Glen Waverley traders as a means of supporting local traders impacted by construction of SRL ahead of the Lunar New Year festival.

The expenditure was for trader vouchers purchased from the restaurants and beauty salon and distributed to locals to encourage residents and visitors to support local traders, the SRL Authority has told The Australian.

The financial documents also show about \$2500 was spent on three events described as “first nations” services. The first for \$742 on May 19 which was described as “Kimberley Stolen G”, the second for \$742 on June 5 listed as “Wurundjeri tribe land: and the third for \$1149 on September 10 for “Aborigines advancement”.

The SRL Authority has defended the expenditure saying it covered educating specialist staff about Indigenous culture and to help involve the communities in the planning, development and delivery of the loop's first stage.

Among the biggest bills were to cover the cost of staff training and attending conferences. In March, more than \$10,000 was spent on what was described as “staff training”, while on April 12, \$2200 was spent on attending a conference. In October, about \$10,000 was spent on staff attending what was described as an “Ausrail event”.

Almost \$3000 was slapped on



credit cards to buy ergonomic office equipment, possibly a chair, and to cover medical expenses relating to a staffer's back care.

The SRL Authority said conferences such as Expotrade and Ausrail provided valuable insights into the rail industry and innovation and learnings from industry leaders.

The SRL Authority's caffeine high and other taxpayer-funded expenditure follows detail of the body's credit card expenditure in

2023, which revealed Victoria's Big Build senior executives and board members had been forced to repay the cost of alcohol "inadvertently" charged to taxpayer-funded credit cards at two dinners.

The SRL Authority said that the purchase of alcohol had been reviewed and reimbursed, including relating to the two "board dinners".

Credit card records show that on January 19, 2023, \$724 was slapped on a taxpayer-funded credit card for a "board dinner" at the

RACV Club in Melbourne.



29-Jan-24	Upstate Coffee	\$14.00
30-Jan-24	AXIL COFFEE	\$55.55
30-Jan-24	AXIL COFFEE	\$55.55
31-Jan-24	AXIL COFFEE	\$43.43
01-Feb-24	Upstate Coffee	\$580.00

14-Feb-24	BB8 BILLIARDS CLUB	\$100.00
14-Feb-24	BEEBEAUTY GLEN PTY LTD	\$404.40

05-Jun-24	WURUNDJERI TRIBE LAND	\$770.00
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Extracts from the credit card records

Victorian Premier Jacinta Allan at a Suburban Rail Loop announcement last Sunday