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Funds for Heathcote Road



St George & Sutherland Shire Leader, Sydney

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BY MURRAY TREMBATH

THE state budget will provide \$35 million to plan the duplication of Heathcote Road, which will include investigating the feasibility of a high-level crossing of the Woronora River gorge.

Minister for Transport and Roads Andrew Constance announced the funding, which is additional to the \$73 million to be spent widening the existing bridge over Woronora River - retaining one lane in each direction - and \$183 million in state and federal funding to duplicate a section of the road at the Liverpool end.

Mr Constance also announced \$44 million in planning money for the duplication of Picton Road.

Heathcote MP Lee Evans sounded a cautionary note at the media conference on Monday with Mr Constance next to Heathcote Road.

"I appreciate the minister's announcement today, but I think the hardest days are going to be ahead of us to get this road fixed forever," Mr Evans said.

Labor MLC and spokesman for Heathcote and Oatley electorates, Mark Buttigieg, dismissed the announcement as "vague" and "not good enough" and called for the government to keep Mr Evans' election promise to duplicate the bridge.

Mr Constance said duplicating Heathcote Road would cost "well in excess of three quarters of a bil-

lion dollars".

The \$35 million new funding meant that, while the existing bridge was being widened, planning would be going on for long-term duplication of the entire road, he said.

Mr Constance said the existing bridge needed to be upgraded quickly because "it is way too narrow".

"If you go down there now and drive across it - and I have just done it with a wide trailer in front of me - there is next to no space," he said.

"So we are going to widen it by about a metre and a half so we get some safety into it."

Mr Constance said, in the long term, "We could actually be looking at a piece of major infrastructure across the gorge"

"We might not even need to be down at that level," he said. "I dare say it is probably the most technically difficult aspect of this project."

Labor's spokesman Mark Buttigieg said, "The announcement gives no undertaking the Heathcote bridge would be duplicated, which is what is needed and what was promised at the last election".

"It's not good enough to make vague announcements which talk about the duplication of part of Heathcote Road, but not the bridge when the bridge duplication was a rock solid election commitment."



Budget announcement.



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CONTROVERSIAL PLAN: The bridge on Heathcote Road is to be widened, but will still have only one lane in each direction. **Picture: John Veage**