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**Title:**  
Press release - Eyre Highway

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PRESS RELEASE: 18/2/71

FROM: The Minister of Roads and Transport

SUBJECT: Eyre Highway

The SA Government today made a one-for-two offer of up to \$3m. to the Commonwealth for the completion of the sealing of the Eyre Highway.

This was announced today by the Minister of Roads and Transport, Mr. Virgo.

The offer was made in a telegram sent by the Premier (Mr. Dunstan) to the Prime Minister (Mr. Gorton), and was conditional on the Commonwealth Government agreeing to provide a special subsidy of 2/3 of the total sealing costs.

Mr. Dunstan said in his telegram:

"My Government is extremely concerned at the rising death toll on the unsealed section of the Eyre Highway, and also by the economic loss this State suffers as a result of the highway's shocking condition.

Because of the seriousness of the situation the SA Government is prepared to make a re-allocation of funds for country arterial roads to make possible a contribution of a third of the cost of sealing the highway from Penong to the SA - WA border.

I have been informed by the Minister of Roads and Transport that the cost of the works would be about \$9m., and in view of this the SA Government would provide up to \$3m. conditional on the Commonwealth providing a special grant of \$6m.

My Government is making this offer in a genuine attempt to break the impasse between SA and the Commonwealth over the sealing of this vital stretch of highway. It views with considerable concern a statement in your letter of January 7, which describes the Eyre Highway as an arterial road in a rural area.

It is not a country road as you implied, but a section of National Highway Number One, which is a vital link between WA and the eastern States.

In the last 16 months the unsealed section has claimed the lives of 8 people, six of whom have died in head-on smashes in dust thrown up by passing vehicles.

The only way to stop these needless accidents is for the Commonwealth to recognise its financial responsibilities in ensuring that the Eyre Highway is fully sealed without any further delay.

Don Dunstan, Premier."

Mr. Virgo said the re-allocation of funds for country arterial roads would seriously hamper many other road construction and maintenance projects within the State.

He said that the Government was sure that the people of SA would welcome the decision realising that this re-allocation of funds was in the best overall interests of the State.

"The continued obstinacy of the Commonwealth Government has forced the SA Government, and the people of SA, to make this sacrifice in the interests of this important national project.

"The Government feels this to be far more preferable than to allow the rising death toll on the unsealed section to continue as a result of the apathy of the Commonwealth Government.

"The sealing of the Eyre Highway is a matter of national concern, despite the wafflings of the Minister for Shipping and Transport (Mr. Nixon) that the sealing of the SA section is a State matter only.

"This is too serious a matter for such irresponsible and stubborn neglect.

"The sealing of the remaining 300 miles is clearly a Commonwealth responsibility.

"There is very little settlement beyond Penong and traffic statistics show that 83% of all vehicles using the road emanate from outside SA.