

Half baked – The \$22m gap between future and past.

By Neil Keene

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Plans to redevelop EnergyAustralia Stadium could be shattered if the Federal Government does not tip in its share of funding by the end of next month.

The Hunter International Sports Centre Trust will be forced to halve the original plans for a \$44million redevelopment if Prime Minister John Howard has not pledged the money by September 1.

The Trust has ordered its architects to draw up a vastly reduced 'contingency plan' which is based on the \$23.6million the State Government has already contributed.

'At the moment, all we have is a half-funded project,' Trust Chairman Ted Atchison said.

'We would be very disappointed if we don't get funding from the federal level.

'This has to be a city facility and that means it should be funded by both levels of government.'

Mr Atchison said while he was still 'quietly confident' of securing the money, it was always necessary to consider a worst-case scenario.

A spokeswoman for Mr Howard said although the 200-page stadium funding application was being processed, it was impossible to determine when a final decision would be made.

Member for Paterson Bob Baldwin said there was no way the funding would be approved by September.

'You can't present something 10 days before Budget and expect it to be included,' he said.

'It's a very worthwhile project and I will continue to lobby for it ... but the stadium is owned by the State Government and so true responsibility for full funding lies with them.'

Initial plans for the stadium include extending the 25,000, installing seating and developing the eastern grandstand.

Players' facilities, corporate boxes and media rooms would also be improved.

The overhaul was expected to transform the ground from the worst in the National Rugby League into Australia's top regional sports centres.

But with only \$23.6million, sports fans might get a new eastern grandstand and a refurbished western side.

A spokesman for NSW Premier Bob Carr said that was not good enough.

'The State Government has put up its share of the money. Now it is time for the Coalition members in the Hunter to stand up and secure the money from the Federal Government,' he said.

The Hunter International Sports Centre Trust will meet with representatives from the Premier's Department, Newcastle Knights and Newcastle United tomorrow to discuss in detail the contingency plan.