

“Rumor Has It”

Rumor 1: There are no safety issues with the existing road.

Truth: This section of Sutter Road could not be built today. As currently laid out, parts should have a maximum speed limit of 25-35 mph using current standards, not the 55 mph that drivers currently drive the road. The Benzie County Road Commission agrees with this assessment.

Although there have not been deaths or serious injuries on this section of Sutter Road, there are frequent near misses reported every year by our club employees, club members, and delivery drivers. One does not need to experience a serious accident to acknowledge that a real danger exists and should be addressed.

Rumor 2: There are more simple and less expensive alternatives than moving the road. A tunnel, bridge, flashing lights, or lowering the speed limit would solve the problem.

Truth: There are four dangerous intersections along the portions of Sutter Road that we propose moving or eliminating as part of this project. Many options have been considered by Crystal Downs and discussed collaboratively with the Road commission for at least 15 years. Some solutions would result in a partial solution for one of the four intersections. The Road Commission has recommended against many of the various option since they would not help or are unreliable. None of the other considered solutions would address the problems at all four intersections.

Rumor 3: The new intersection with M22 will be unsafe. The new M22 intersection would be more hazardous than the existing intersection.

Truth: The proposed new intersection has been designed by professional highway engineers and will be safer, with better sight lines and stopping distances in both directions than the current intersection, even at higher speeds than will be allowed by code. Both MDOT's and the Road Commission's engineers have studied these plans and agree that the proposed new intersection will be safer.

Rumor 4: Sutter Road will be closed during construction, and everyone living along the road will have a long detour to get to their homes.

Truth: The existing Sutter Road will remain open until the new section of road is completed. Near the end of the project there may be limited single lane closures for short periods of time for a 500' segment where the existing and proposed roads converge, as they are connected. Access will be maintained for all property owners and emergency vehicles throughout construction.



Rumor 5: The new road will be less convenient and create longer travel times for people using Sutter Road. Moving the road would inconvenience the thousands of people who travel it in the summer and could be delay an ambulance in case of an emergency.

Truth: The proposed new section of Sutter Road is designed to current road standards, to be safely driven at 55 mph. The new section of Sutter Road will be shorter than the existing segment, but the new M-22 intersection will be a little farther to the east. It will take only 12 seconds longer to drive when approached from the west shore, but that section could be driven safely at the posted speed of 55 mph. When approached from the north shore the drive will be 41 seconds faster.

Not all Sutter Road users are driving cars. The current stretch of Sutter Road has no shoulders. The new road will have hard shoulders built to current standards, which will provide a much safer route for joggers and cyclists.

Rumor 6: Crystal Downs wants to have the speed limit on Sutter Road reduced to 25 mph.

Truth: The proposal would allow safe travel throughout this part of the road at 55 mph. Crystal Downs has no say in determining the speed limits for the road and has no interest in reducing the speed limit. In Michigan speed limits are set by the State Police. When there is a request to change speed limits the State Police assesses existing speed on a section of road and set limits accordingly.

Also in Michigan, "primary roads" receive full funding from state and federal sources for road maintenance. If a road has a speed limit of less than 55 mph it is not considered a "primary road" and would lose part of the maintenance funding.

In short, neither the club nor the county has a desire to lower the speed limit. We both just want the road to be safe to drive at 55 mph.

Rumor 7: Crystal Downs wants the state to move M-22 to Sutter Road.

Truth: There is no reason why the club would want this. And in discussions with MDOT, they want to preserve the scenic route of M-22 along the north shore of Crystal Lake.



Rumor 8: The new M22 intersection and water runoff would be closer to Crystal Lake. The relocation would clear cut, fragment, and pave several acres of Crystal Lake watershed that reduce and purify runoff. The planned road's design would not equal the existing natural systems.

Truth: The current configuration of Sutter Road funnels all stormwater runoff from the road directly toward Crystal Lake. After heavy rainfall this also causes washout at the edges of the road, requiring frequent additional maintenance by the Road Commission. The proposed new configuration will capture stormwater runoff in carefully engineered bioswales and rain gardens on Crystal Downs property. These will use appropriate soils and native species planting to remove contaminants from the stormwater. These bioswales and rain gardens will also capture and treat runoff from the Crystal Downs golf course and property. The club has a long history of being good stewards of our land and the watershed, and is certified by the Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program for our use of best practices.

In addition, the old roadbed will be recontoured to natural slopes and replanted with native species. The restoration of the old roadbed is an area equal to or greater than the area to be cleared for the relocated section of road.

Rumor 9: The property across Sutter Road was “gifted” to the club with construction restrictions and covenants. The club is ignoring the wishes of previous owners.

Truth: The property across Sutter Road was not “gifted” to the club. Some of the land was acquired in an equitable land swap with a prior owner and some was purchased outright from other owners. No prior agreements are being violated.

Rumor 10: The project would endanger an eagle’s nest on the Crystal Downs property.

Truth: The new section of road will not come anywhere near the eagle's nest. The engineers we are using to design the road have frequently worked near sensitive habitats in the past and use best practices to avoid damage or disruption of these habitats. In addition, the club has been certified since 2003 by Audubon International for our best practices and achievements in environmental sustainability.

Rumor 11: The improvements are needed only for non-licensed maintenance cart travel.

Truth: The danger to slow moving maintenance vehicles is only one small part of the problem. There are frequent near misses reported every year by our club employees driving to and from their place of work, club members, and delivery drivers.



Rumor 12: The only reason to move the road is because it benefits Crystal Downs and its members. They want to enhance their property, but it creates additional problems for everybody else who uses the road.

Truth: The new configuration of the road will benefit everyone driving, jogging, and biking on Sutter Road. It will be built to the current improved road standards and will be safer with better road geometry, better sight distances, and better stopping distances, and will be safe to drive at 55 mph.

Rumor 13: The club has ulterior motives for future development of the property.

Truth: As we have said consistently, this project is being driven by our desire to correct long standing safety issues at four club access points, all of which have inadequate sight distances and stopping distances, and which result in many reports of near misses for our employees, members, and delivery drivers every year. Although moving the road does have some incidental benefits to the club, there are no plans to further develop the land or add additional amenities in the foreseeable future.

Rumor 14: Sutter Road is a township road, maintained by the Benzie County Road Commission, and this will be a burden on the taxpayers.

Truth: The entire cost of the project is being covered by the club. In addition, the new road section will be shorter and easier to maintain since it will not have the steep slope and stormwater washout issues which happens with the current configuration.

