

Sutter Road Project FAQ: Club, Community, and Construction

Crystal Downs has been studying the feasibility and design concept for improving safety for members, staff, and the community who regularly use Sutter Road. The proposed relocation of the southern portion of Sutter Road makes ingress and egress for the property safer, makes the club's property contiguous, and requires re-orienting the existing practice range.

Club Facts

Q: Why is the club proposing changes to Sutter Road?

A: The goal is to improve safety for club employees, visitors and members—particularly at the club's back entrance, at the maintenance facility near the driving range, and the maintenance facility/irrigation station. The project will also result in a safer commute for the community as well as an improved road which will be less costly for the Benzie County Road Commission to maintain.

Q: Why is this project suddenly a priority for the club?

A: The safety of Sutter Road has long been a concern, and the Club has explored various ways over the years to address the issues. In 2021, a committee was formed to explore the concept of moving Sutter Road to correct safety issues at the maintenance facility and back entrance—the very issues that had been discussed for years without resolution or action. In 2022, the Board of Governors assigned the current committee (in cooperation with the Long-Range Planning Committee) to execute a feasibility study for moving Sutter Road. The club retained Mansfield Land Use Consultants to provide the feasibility study and guide the club through the steps of permitting, design, and construction—a process that is still underway.

Q: Have speed enforcement and signage been deployed to remedy safety issues?

A: The club and local officials have attempted numerous solutions in this regard.

1. The club requested a sign by the back gate to warn traffic, and the Road Commission installed a sign that warns drivers of vehicle crossing.
2. The club inquired about speed limits. The State Police determines the speed limit for roads based on the speed vehicles travel without accidents and other factors. This was not an option.
3. The township designated the road as “A Natural Beauty Road” several years ago, with a speed limit of 35 mph. Residents expressed objections to the speed limit, and adherence to the special designation proved problematic. The designation was eventually removed.



Q: Has the club investigated other road and driveway construction options to address the safety concerns?

A: When the Club began learning about “close calls” at the back entrance and maintenance facilities, club officials began looking for solutions. For over a decade, committees have investigated tunnels, bridges, automatic flashing lights, and reconfiguring entrances at each of these locations—comprehensive solutions proved to be cost prohibitive and problematic, and each would have only tried to solve issues at one of the three dangerous entrances. For example, bridges and tunnels did not address the back entrance issue and relocating entrances posed awkward or atypical engineering and design solutions. Over the years, the Board seriously considered all options and consulted with third party experts to no avail.

Q: What data is there to support safety concerns?

A: There have been no deaths or serious police reports related to Sutter Road and club ingress and egress along club property. Staff and members have repeatedly reported close calls and near misses related to the speeding traffic and blind corners. Engineering assessments of the current road geometry prove that:

1. The existing 10% slope near the back entrance gate and the horizontal and vertical curves at the top and bottom of the hill exceed current road construction standards for the speeds regularly traveled on Sutter Road.
2. The corner and site distance at the back entrance is designed for maximum 35 mph traffic on a road where traffic regularly exceeds 55 mph.
3. The site distances and driveway entrances at both maintenance facility locations have inadequate site distances and radii.

Q: If there have been no reported accidents, why is safety a concern now?

A: As stated above, the club and local officials are on record regarding safety concerns observed on Sutter Road—otherwise, there would have been no discussion about signs, speed limits, and road improvements. Just like faulty steps, uneven sidewalks, or black ice one does not need to experience a serious accident to acknowledge that a real danger exists and should be addressed.

Q: What are the specific vehicle, maintenance, and delivery activities associated with safety and Sutter Road?

A: The specific issues are:

1. Ingress and egress for all vehicles at the maintenance drive near the practice tee: Large trucks take up both lanes when entering and exiting the facility, often slowly backing into the driveway.



2. Maintenance staff have reported close calls turning right and left, leaving the property, due to the blind corners and speeding traffic.
3. Making a left turn into the club at the back gate: Vehicles must watch for oncoming traffic cresting a hill, on a curve, while also attending to golfers on #12 tee.
4. Making a left turn, leaving the maintenance facility / irrigation station across from #12 fairway: Oncoming traffic is accelerating northbound, up the hill, and around a corner, leaving little time to react for maintenance vehicles crossing the road, and for semi-trucks that take up both lanes to make the turn into and out of the facility.

Q: What are the club's concerns with staff safety, and why are staff using Sutter Road?

A: The club wants staff to be safe when they arrive and leave the property and when they are at work. Sutter Road is frequently used by staff in their personal vehicles, club owned licensed vehicles, and tractors with implements (street legal, slow-moving vehicles). Non-licensed vehicles must cross Sutter Road to access the Maintenance/Irrigation/Sod Farm Facilities at the top of the hill and to access the brush and organic waste site across from the lower maintenance buildings.

Q: Is moving Sutter Road an excuse to develop Crystal Downs Property east of the road?

A: Absolutely not. The Board of Governors has only authorized the funding for road construction, necessary restoration, and reorienting the practice range, since its current location will be in the way of the project.

Q: Was there a membership vote for the project?

A: A survey of the membership in August 2022 indicated that 78% of members favored the road project and the Club intends to continue to seek input in various ways from its membership as the project evolves.

Q: In addition to safety, how will moving Sutter Road benefit the club and community?

A: Safety is essential to the project. Moving Sutter Road also will improve the site by...

- Improving stormwater runoff management, decreasing the impact on the Crystal Lake Watershed
- Making club property contiguous.
- Making deliveries for the clubhouse and maintenance operations more efficient.
- Reducing interference of deliveries at the practice facility.
- Providing direct and unimpeded access for residents on Sutter Road without interference from maintenance vehicles and other club traffic.
- Providing a safer experience for walkers, joggers, and cyclists due to the improved shoulders.



Community Facts

Q: What is required in terms of state and local approvals for the project?

A: The Road Commission must approve and oversee the design and construction of the road and must formally approve vacating a portion of Sutter Road—all in accordance with an approved Letter of Understanding between Crystal Downs and the Road Commission, which is being developed. MDOT will need to approve the intersection with M-22.

Q: What is Lake Township's official position and involvement with the project?

A: The Lake Township Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners have been informed of the project. Club representatives and the club's consultant have presented the concept on several occasions. The township has stated that they have no say in the construction and relocation of a county road - it is a road commission decision.

Q: What is Benzie County Road Commission's official position and involvement with the project?

A: The Road Commission and Crystal Downs are currently working to complete a Letter of Understanding which is acceptable to both entities. The Road Commission welcomes the improvements if construction engineering and execution completely conform to the road commission's written standards, and if Crystal Downs pays for the construction of the new roadway and vacating the old roadway. Road commission officials state that the newly constructed road will be significantly better than the existing road with respect to safety, maintenance, and water management. The county and road commission will be granted right of way for the new road and will assume responsibility for upkeep and seasonal maintenance in perpetuity. Load restrictions and through-traffic will be determined by an agreement between Lake Township and the County Road Commission.

Q: Will there be an opportunity for public input or a public hearing?

A: There have been many opportunities for the public to weigh in with concerns at various township and road commission meetings and they have done so. We have invited concerned citizens to contact us directly to answer their questions. We will continue to provide correct and updated information through our website and at various events in attempt to correct the many misleading statements and rumors that are being circulated.

Q: Will the new intersection with M22 be safe for travelers and residents?

A: The design plans for the new intersection will be safer than the existing intersection—better angle of approach, better sight lines, and better headlight distances. MDOT (Michigan Department of Transportation) will regulate the construction of the new intersection according to their safety and design standards, as well as their on-site inspection.



Q: Who assesses and determines the environmental impact on water, wildlife, and native species in the construction areas?

A: Environmental concerns will be addressed according to Benzie County Road Commission and Township regulations—i.e., wetlands protection and township zoning ordinances. The control of runoff will be addressed by established engineering standards based on the volume of runoff produced in a major event. Engineered bioswales will contain and filter runoff from banks and roads. All construction and restoration of disturbed areas will be designed to conform with the natural landscape, and only native trees and shrubs will be planted as part of the project's naturalization and restoration. The Crystal Downs team has been working with the Crystal Lake and Watershed Association to share our plans and seek their input.

Construction Facts

Q: If the project moves forward to construction, when will work begin?

A: Planning, engineering, and cost analysis are on-going. There is currently no proposed start date. Funding, the abovementioned approvals, and many other details must be finalized before determining a groundbreaking date. Construction will be scheduled during the late fall, winter, and early spring to avoid the season of heaviest traffic.

Q: What will happen to the existing, vacated road?

A: The current plan is to completely remove and restore the landscape between the existing practice range and a point to the east of the upper maintenance facility. The southernmost portion of Sutter Road would be retained by the club as a service drive for maintenance building and clubhouse deliveries - up to the current practice range. A portion of the current Sutter Road between the maintenance facility and the top of the hill will be removed and naturalized. Sutter Road to the east of that portion will remain unchanged.

Q: How will this affect property owners along Sutter Road during construction?

A: The existing Sutter Road will remain open until the new section of road is completed. 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.

Q: A main use of Sutter Road is as a time and distance-saving short cut on M-22. This project would appear to increase both time and distance for the short cut. By how much?

A: The time and distance for the short cut will be very similar, but safer. At 55 mph it will only make a 12 second difference in drive times. Since it will be built to current road design standards and since all intersections along this section will be built to current safety and



stopping distance standards, it will be safer to drive the whole segment at 55 mph, and will be safer to jog or bike along this segment.

Q: How long will the road project take, from groundbreaking to completion?

A: The project is estimated to take 180 days.

Q: How will the old roadbed be restored?

A: The club will engage Mike DeVries to supervise restoration of the landscape. This will include a comprehensive naturalization and construction of safe and efficient paths for golf carts and all maintenance vehicles. Planning and cost analysis for this part of the project are ongoing. Only native trees and shrubs will be planted as part of the roadbed restoration.

Q: Will there be a shoulder for bikes and walkers on the new road?

A: There will be a hard-surface shoulder built to current standards, which will be safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

