

Which looks like the safer road to ride? If you ride West Old La Honda, please read.



On the left, a hill that's continuing to slide into the uphill lane on 84, west of Skyline. On the right, the section of West Old LaHonda that has been closed to all traffic, for "safety" reasons. Which looks more dangerous for a cyclist?

I recently spoke with Joe LeCoco, Deputy Director of Road Services for San Mateo County. The County's position has not changed; the county is still telling cyclists to stay off West Old LaHonda. They are sending someone out "soon" to take core samples and determine the level of activity of the slide. The present damage was apparently set off by a propane truck that went off the road in that section.

This is a tough one, because from a standpoint of relative safety the alternative route, 84, has a very active mudslide (shown in the photo above), and represents a very real hazard to cyclists. You'll notice that the shoulder has entirely disappeared underneath the mud, and of course it's slippery.

Mr. LeCoco insists that the county sees West Old LaHonda as a very important road to keep in place; there are no plans to abandon it. It's an alternate route in the event West 84 gets closed again, which was quite possibly the very thing that caused the pavement on West Old LaHonda to give way (with help from a lot of rain). The straw that broke the camel's back was the previously-mentioned propane truck.



A sign at the lower end of West Old LaHonda, saying it's specifically closed to cyclists. The signs at the top end simply say "Road closed ahead."

Where does that leave you, the cyclist? Obviously, if the county is actually working on the road, you have to assume you're not getting through. Period. End of story. Until then? Just as obviously the county is telling you that it's dangerous, and bad things could happen to you. Those of us who have ridden West Old LaHonda many hundreds of times (100+ times/year for the past 20 years in my case) feel that we're extraordinarily familiar with it, having seen the road slip away in a few other places, and have the historical sense of never having seen the road being here one day, gone the next. In other words, a dose of skepticism regarding the potential danger, which may be just plain stupid on our part.

I did not ask Mr. LeCoco if the county would consider actively policing and recommending tickets for cyclists crossing the "closed" section of road. That's probably not practical, since the road isn't closed until you get to the damaged section, and reopens immediately after. They could, of course, post a "Local residents only" sign, but I really have no idea what that legally means, for a county-maintained road. Long way of saying I don't think there's any way someone could end up getting ticketed by the Sheriff by surprise. You might have to turn around. But I doubt it would make sense to devote law enforcement resources to stop cyclists from taking a rarely-used (by cars) road.

In the end, the important thing is that the road is repaired as quickly as possible. I realize the county is a mess (although thankfully San Mateo County didn't get hit anything like Santa Cruz!) and they've got a lot on their plate. But I have concern that a road that likely has far greater cyclist traffic than motorist may not rate as highly on the list of important roads to repair as it should.

At the very least I would like to see a statement from the County that says yes, we understand the importance of this road to the cyclists of San Mateo County and consider it a high priority to get back in service. Even better would be an indication that perhaps it might take a long time to make the road available for cars, but priority will be given to at least make it suitable for cyclists. Either is preferable to what has been done so far- reaching out to the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition, requesting they encourage cyclists to stay off the road. -Mike Jacoubowsky