

Episode 8:

Welcome to Gilded Garbage Can, a podcast dedicated to defogging the image that is San Francisco.

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Special shout out to our military veterans on this Veterans Day. Thank you, thank you, thank you for your service.

Several weeks back, I mentioned I would comment on roundabouts in San Francisco or, as I like to call them, San Francisco's attempt at tricking you into thinking it is somehow as good as London, or pretty much any other European city. Since bringing that topic up, I've had fans of this show (at least one anyway), ask to hear more on this subject. So here it is...the roundabout episode.

Let's start with what the definition of a roundabout is. Here goes:

A modern roundabout is a circular intersection where drivers travel counterclockwise around a center island. There are no traffic signals or stop signs in a modern roundabout. Drivers yield at entry to traffic in the roundabout, then enter the intersection and exit at their desired street.

Sounds easy right? So, what is a roundabout in San Francisco? Here's my definition:

A San Francisco roundabout is something that the city spends a ton of money on, claiming it will make it easier for MUNI to run on time, when in reality, it accomplishes nothing because the roundabout itself is flawed. A San Francisco roundabout typically appears in the middle of four-way intersections that retain their stop signs even though that setup is totally antithetical to why roundabouts exist. San Francisco roundabouts, like every other project in the city, take years to build. After a while, because drivers have no idea how to navigate them and residents get fed up with the sounds of horns honking, coupled with the fact that on a two-lane street, the roundabout actually makes it more difficult for MUNI to drive, thus making the bus even later than usual, the city then decides to remove the roundabout at even greater expense and return everything to the way it was.

Let's break this down...

1. The city spends a lot of money to install these using a flawed pretense that MUNI will run better. We all know that MUNI is a lost cause and to keep rewarding its incompetence with civic projects is simply a waste of taxpayer dollars.

2. They then install these roundabouts on two-lane streets...let me be clear, these are streets that have 1 lane available to each direction. This alone goes against the point of a roundabout, where you need at least 2 lanes available to each direction of traffic.
3. The city retains the stop signs at the intersections where the roundabouts are installed. No further explanation necessary there...it's simply dumb.
4. Drivers in the city, already a pretty timid and poorly skilled group, approach roundabouts and have no idea what to do. It's really fun to watch.... I promise, I'll do a "just how bad are drivers in San Francisco" episode soon.
5. Buses can't maneuver around the roundabouts because the lane is too narrow.
6. Finally, roundabouts at four-way intersections are, simply, not needed.

I have no idea how much it costs to install a roundabout, but I suspect whatever the average cost is, the city of San Francisco pays about 10 times that. Given the recent decision to tear out several of these road impediments and knowing that they probably didn't come with a money-back guarantee, that multiplies the cost.

Meanwhile the overseers of the Gilded Garbage Can apparently neither have the money nor interest to plug the plague of potholes that exist throughout the city, but then again, those tend to mess with cars, and we know how San Francisco feels about drivers.

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