

## Episode 11:

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

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As I mentioned last time, the Better Market Street project is one that's getting some attention lately, especially downtown, where fliers are posted everywhere in an effort to get us all excited about it. The imagery on these propaganda pieces is stunning: clean sidewalks with people sitting on benches, standing near trees and sipping – hopefully through paper straws – at café tables all along Market Street. Bicyclists, one of whom sports a lovely basket full of overpriced groceries, peddle down this oasis of an avenue, while sparkling MUNI buses drive by in their dedicated bus lanes. All store fronts are leased and open and the city appears to have been magically transformed into a utopian paradise. There are no cars, no homeless people, no litter, no human waste on the sidewalks, no hypodermic needles in the gutters...in other words, none of those pesky things that currently define what the city is all about.

According to its own marketing material, this is what Better Market Street is all about: “The City’s multi-agency project is a transformational redesign of San Francisco’s busiest pedestrian, bicyclist and transit corridor. Better Market Street, which stretches from Steuart Street to Octavia Boulevard, will be built in phases to enhance safety for people traveling down Market Street, improve transit and create a vibrant and inclusive destination where people want to live, work and visit.”

I say: BS! If the city were being truthful, those unicorn-inspired words, would read something like this: “Better Market Street seeks to line the pockets of certain interested parties who don’t have the courage or the ability to tackle real problems in San Francisco. By the time it’s finished, Better Market Street will have taken 5 times the proposed time and 10 times the budget to complete and even then, it will fall short of the pictures in our fliers. There will still be a ton of litter, no trees, homeless everywhere, late buses, needles and human waste to be had, but what the hell, the contactors will make a fortune and we can, once again, pin all of the city’s problems on cars, because we have no idea what we are doing, but no one is wise to it because the people here think filth is normal and if we just close our eyes, the problems we have will go away.”

Now, if the City wants to use my proposed mission statement, they can have it at no charge.

The marketing materials then provide us with some “what to expect” statements, as follows:

First: “A safer street that meets the mobility and accessibility needs of all.” Wrong, because by definition, **all** would include drivers and they are excluded, so that statement is a lie. As to being safer, new pavement, bus lanes and no cars do not a safer street make – the city has to deal with a lot of other stuff before it can claim Better Market Street will result in a safer corridor.

Next: “A protected sidewalk-level bikeway.” Lovely, the bike lobby can add another victory to its cause.

Next: “Improved transit service for buses and the historic F Market streetcar.” I don’t think so...we are talking MUNI here. Bus lanes have done nothing to improve service – they only serve to reward incompetence. Check out episode 6 of this very podcast for more on that. By the way, the historic F Market streetcar is pretty cool, but most, if not all, of the trains they run came from other cities.

Next: “A vibrant streetscape with new furnishings, plantings and public art.” That sounds lovely, but they need to finish the sentence so it reads, “A vibrant streetscape with new furnishings, plantings and public art, that will be vandalized within days of debut and look like crap within a year because that’s what happens to nearly everything the city builds and, because SF doesn’t maintain anything, it goes to crap real quick.”

Finally: “Renewal and replacement of aging infrastructure.” Really? In the city where Mission Street floods because the storm drains get clogged because no one is bothering to check them? In the city where they repave Fulton Street and in 2 years, the potholes are back with a vengeance? In the city that marks trees as dead then just leaves them there so the wind can knock them down? In the city that cannot nail the basics of clean and on-time buses? In the city that brought us the Millennium Tower and the transit center that closed after a week – granted it’s open now - that won’t be able to accommodate the new Caltrain cars? That city is going to renew and replace aging infrastructure?

There are many things that need immediate attention in San Francisco – spending money on this Better Market Street project is a waste of resources and another example that City Hall is the place where intelligence and common sense go to die.

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