

## Season 2, Episode 2: Van Ness Finished by 2030?

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

Thank you for tuning in on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Radio Public, PodBean and everywhere else fine podcasts are available.

Listener shout-out today goes out to Kelly. She left me a comment that she recently discovered this podcast! She tunes in while out walking and is hooked! Kelly, this episode goes out to you.

Despite the title of this week's show, I really have no idea when the construction on Van Ness Avenue will be complete, but based on what I've seen recently, I'm betting on 2030.

As you may recall, the "improvement" project to the Van Ness corridor, which is really code for, "we want to create even more dedicated bus lanes to reward the incompetence of MUNI," began about five years ago and was supposed to be finished in three years. Quick replay: started five years ago...was supposed to be done three years later. Hmmm, five minus three is two...we've been in a pandemic for a year, but that shouldn't have delayed the project. Why on earth is this project two years over schedule? Well, besides the fact that no project in San Francisco ever finishes on time, the delays on Van Ness can be attributed to two things:

1. A change, then subsequent change back to an important detail of the project, and
2. the way the crews do the work.

Let's look at each of these in more detail...

When the project originally kicked off the plan was to install dedicated bus lanes running down the center of Van Ness. I've seen setups like that in other places and, for the most part, they work well. Of course, in those cities, the public transit is actually good, clean, on time, and safe. We don't really have any of that going on with MUNI.

As the story goes, someone in City Hall saw the plans, after the work had begun, and commented how dangerous it was to put bus lanes in the middle of the street, because people running for their bus, might get hit by a car. This presupposes the runner would pay no attention to traffic, being too focused on hopping on the bus, thus getting struck by an automobile. Now, this is San Francisco folks, and people here do silly things like walk right into oncoming traffic all the time, so someone took note of the concern, raised it up the flagpole and like that, the project plan changed, presumably to have the buses run in the right lane, as they always had, and spare any possible accidents with pedestrians.

The problem is MUNI buses regularly hit pedestrians, so it really doesn't matter where you run the bus lane, these accidents are bound to happen just based on track record. So, I guess

someone raised that point and like that, the project reverted to its original plan with the usual cost implications and of course, time delays.

So, now we're back to center bus lanes, which mean no lovely trees down the boulevard, which I guess doesn't matter because we have hardly any trees in the city anyway and those we do have are all sick and get cut down eventually.

On to the second factor in this project taking forever to finish: the way the crews work.

For the past couple months, I've had occasion to drive down or cross Van Ness and have observed a peculiar staffing model that may shed light on the timing of completion. I call it 5-gets-you-1. What does that mean exactly?

Just last week, I observed on the corner of Van Ness and Post, 20 workers – 5 per corner – and this is what they were doing. I'll use a single corner as the example, as they all worked the same way. Here we go.

One worker was doing some heavy-duty work – handling a piece of machinery. One worker was standing by a barricade, resting his arm on it, possibly to protect it, while watching the worker who was working. Another guy, was watching the guy who was standing by the barricade, watching the worker, possibly to make sure he – the barricade guy, not the worker - didn't need help. The next worker was holding a clipboard, watching whatever was on the clipboard but pretending to note what one of the other three workers was doing. The last worker was on break, as evidenced by the fact that he was sitting down, sipping a beverage – though he may too have been watching one of the other four, I can't be certain.

So, we have five people on one corner, one of whom is doing actual work in furtherance of finishing the job at Van Ness, while four others stand around. And that was just one of four corners - it was a similar ratio on the other three.

But now it makes sense...a three-year project assumes fulltime work but only achieves 20% of that each day – that 3-year project becomes a 15-year project. Let's assume break guy does pitch in, which may get us to a 40% work rate, that gets the project to completion by about 2030.

None of these models include the sign person who makes sure that traffic piles up as much as possible, because, hey, it's San Francisco so we **must** mess with drivers.

In a few weeks I'll bring you an update on the newest decade-long construction project – the repaving of 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue. I'd take MUNI to get there, but there's no dedicated bus lane...yet.



Have you been on Van Ness lately? What have you seen? Leave a comment or two at [gildedgarbagecan.com](http://gildedgarbagecan.com) and I'll read it next episode.

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