

SF takes 35 months to go from red to green when adding signals

By: [Will Reisman](#) | *Examiner Staff Writer* | 05/09/11

When people say Rome wasn't built in a day, they're usually referring to lengthy reform movements or massive public works projects. Traditionally, the phrase does not apply to the installation of a single traffic signal.

Except in San Francisco.

Due to interagency bureaucracy, funding shortfalls and mandatory planning studies, installing one traffic light in San Francisco takes nearly three years, or about as twice as long as a presidentially appointed commission took to complete an exhaustive report on the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

The City's snail-like pace for traffic light installation was highlighted at a recent meeting of the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency's board of directors.

SFMTA board member Leona Bridges asked the staff about adding some traffic-calming measures at the intersection of Geary Boulevard and Palm Street. Bond Yee, the SFMTA's sustainable streets director, replied that the agency had good news regarding Bridges' request — it was addressing the problem by installing a new traffic signal. But it would take "several years" before the light could be put in place.

That amounts to a pretty big "but."

"It's a huge problem that traffic signals take years to put in," said Elizabeth Stampe, executive director of Walk SF, a pedestrian advocacy organization. "We need to find a way to make it simpler, faster, and less costly to fix our streets."

According to agency estimates, securing funding for a traffic light takes about four months, perfecting a conceptual and detailed design takes 17 months, putting the project out to bid takes four months, and construction and signal activation takes another 10 months. All told, putting up a light in The City is a 35-month process — which equates to roughly 4 percent of the average U.S. citizen's life.

Along with carrying out that lengthy process, the SFMTA also has to work with a number of city agencies, such as the Department of Public Works, the San Francisco County Transportation Authority, and the Public Utilities Commission. In the end, the cost to install one new traffic signal is almost \$190,000.

SFMTA spokesman Paul Rose said all hoops that must be jumped through prior to installation of a traffic signal are necessary steps. The agency tries to expedite each project as much as possible, he said. In the case of Bridges' request at Palm Street and Geary Boulevard, Rose said the SFMTA has installed caution signs and painted red curbs to slow down traffic until a light can be installed.

San Francisco Supervisor Carmen Chu, who has been trying to get a traffic signal installed on Quintara Street and Sunset Boulevard, recently sent a memo to the SFMTA asking the agency if there was anything they could do to speed up the process.

In a reply to Chu, SFMTA executive director Nathaniel Ford said The City is working on streamlining the process by increasing coordination between various public agencies, hiring more traffic engineers, and adding language to contracts that would speed up the construction work.

Stop and go

What it takes to get a traffic signal installed in San Francisco:

4 months: Identify and secure funding for light 17 months: Prepare and develop conceptual design for light

4 months: Advertise and award contract for work

10 months: Construction and signal activation

\$187,500: Minimum cost to install new traffic signal in San Francisco

Source: SFMTA

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<http://www.sfexaminer.com/local/2011/05/sf-takes-35-months-go-red-green-when-adding-signals#ixzz1Ufmedfbf>