

## You can buy a Mexican hooker on many San Francisco streets even today.

The vandalism alludes to the street's reputation as a hub for illicit sex work

By **Timothy Karoff**

This week, pedestrians walking around San Francisco's Mission District may encounter some unusual signs. In an anonymous act of vandalism, two street signs have been subtly altered to reference an oft-debated topic in the neighborhood.

The signs are on Shotwell Street, which runs through the Mission parallel to Folsom Street and South Van Ness Avenue. Shotwell is a Slow Street, a low-traffic, residential street that prioritizes cyclists and pedestrians over cars. And in recent years, a stretch of Shotwell between 19th and 21st streets has become a center of illicit sex work, according to multiple local outlets.

It's in this area that someone appears to have altered Shotwell's Slow Street signs. A sticker on one of the 19th Street signs features a graphic of a woman smoking a cigarette and a man handing her money. On 20th, a sticker on another sign shows two women leaning against a Slow Street sign, one smoking.

Slow Street signs at the intersection of 19th and Shotwell streets on May 19, 2025. A sticker alluding to illicit sex work covers part of the sign on the right, covering a graphic of a person pushing a stroller.

Timothy Karoff/SFGATE

A prank sticker covers part of a Slow Street sign at the intersection of 20th and Shotwell streets on May 19, 2025. The sticker depicts two women leaning against a Slow Street sign, one smoking, in reference to sex work on Shotwell Street.

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These stickers cover the graphics of families pushing strollers that typically appear on Slow Street signs. They also mimic the San Francisco Municipal

Transportation Agency's signs: Their purple hue is close to the color of SFMTA-issued Slow Street signs, and they appear to be reflective, just like SFMTA's.

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“We do not have any reports of this being widespread or ongoing,” SFMTA spokesperson Michael Roccaforte told SFGATE in an email Monday, adding that the agency plans to fix the signs. The vandals remain anonymous.

For years, Capp Street, two blocks west of Shotwell, had been a hotspot for sex workers and their clients. But after the city installed bollards on Capp in 2023, deterring the sex trade on that street, it shifted to Shotwell Street. By 2024, the stretch between 19th and 21st streets had reportedly grown into the new hotspot. That summer, a group of Shotwell residents sued the city, alleging that it had done little to enforce laws against sex work on the street, NBC Bay Area (KNTV) reported.

Slow Street signs on Shotwell Street in San Francisco on May 19, 2025.

Timothy Karoff/SFGATE

The city responded to the complaint by installing barriers and cameras on Shotwell Street, Mission Local reported, and announced plans to send “Dear John” warning letters to the owners of cars regularly spotted in the area.

The stickers resemble others that appeared on the signs in the summer of 2024, before the lawsuit was filed. Those stickers also mimicked the existing Slow Street signs, SFist reported at the time, but featured a graphic of a woman leaning into a car's window.