

Bicycle Program Sharrows: Shared Lane Pavement Marking

Shared lane pavement markings (or “sharrows”) are bicycle symbols carefully placed to guide bicyclists to the best place to ride on the road, avoid car doors and remind drivers to share the road with cyclists. Unlike bicycle lanes, sharrows do not designate a particular part of the street for the exclusive use of bicyclists. They are simply a marking to guide bicyclists to the best place to ride and help motorists expect to see and share the lane with bicyclists.

What do sharrows mean for motorists and bicyclists?

Motorists:

- Expect to see bicyclists on the street
- Remember to give bicyclists two feet of space when passing
- Follow the rules of the road as if there were no sharrows

Bicyclists

- Use the sharrow to guide where you ride within the lane
- Remember not to ride too close to parked cars
- Follow the rules of the road as if there were no sharrows



Charlottesville Sharrow Pilot Project

During the summer of 2011, the City of Charlottesville is launching a pilot project to evaluate the effectiveness of shared lane pavement markings (sharrows).

Why? Sharrows create improved conditions for bicycling, by clarifying where cyclists are expected to ride and reminding motorists to expect cyclists on the road.

In the absence of bicycle lanes, motorists often pass too closely to cyclists, and cyclists feel compelled to ride closer to parked cars. If a car door were opened as a cyclist passed, the cyclist could get "doored" and possibly get injured,

especially if there was passing automobile traffic. Sharrows show cyclists and motorists where cyclists should be riding to safely avoid the "door zone."

Where? Based on an analysis by the City Traffic Engineer, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Committee, UVa Parking & Transportation and the Office of the Architect, the goal is to provide pilot routes in safe corridors that are unable to accommodate bike lanes, and that complete or add to the bicycle routing system under development. Sharrow routes will be initially installed in the following locations:

Water Street (McIntire/Ridge Street to 10th Street)

Alderman Road (Ivy Road to Jefferson Park Avenue)

What next? Prior to installation of the sharrows, bicycle counts were conducted to measure the use of these roadways. "After" counts will be conducted, and along with other measures, will be used to evaluate whether or not to install sharrows elsewhere around the City.

National Standards? The shared lane marking is now included in the current version of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), which was adopted, by the Federal Highway Administration on December 16, 2009.

Questions and Answers about Sharrows

Q. What exactly is a sharrow? A. A sharrow, or shared lane marking, is a white stencil of a bicycle with an arrow, intended to show both motorists and bicyclists the minimum distance that cyclists should ride from parked cars to avoid being hit by a suddenly opened car door. Although it is the motorist's responsibility to check before opening a door, riding too close to parked cars is a common mistake that can still lead to serious injury.

Q. What's the difference between a sharrow and a bike lane? A. Bike lanes provide a 4-to-5-foot-wide dedicated lane for bicyclists. Under circumstances where the street is wide enough (or residents agree to remove one or both parking lanes), they are usually the safest solution for children and people unaccustomed to riding in traffic. Sharrows are on-street markings that reinforce the existing rules of the road. They are not separate bike lanes: motorists can still drive over the sharrows. Sharrows tell motorists that they should expect to share the lane with bicyclists, while they indicate to bicyclists

the best place to ride in the lane.

Q. Why sharrows on Water Street and Alderman Road instead of bike lanes? A. The decision to implement sharrows in these pilot locations was based on the lack of road width to include bicycle lanes, combined with a stated need for a bicycle route in this location. This is part of the overall program in the City of Charlottesville and at the University to make safer environments for pedestrians and cyclists.

Q. As a cyclist, what should I do in the presence of these markings? A. The markings are placed as a guide to where cyclists should be riding. In general, cyclists should ride through the center of the sharrows. However, if there are no cars in the parking lane they can choose to ride there. And, by law, a cyclist is also free to move left, into the main part of the travel lane, when it is safe to do so.

Q. As a motorist, what should I do in the presence of the sharrows? A. Slow down and drive carefully. Because the travel lane is too narrow for safe side-by-side travel by motorists and cyclists, drivers should slow down and either wait for a cyclist to turn off the roadway or wait until the cyclist can move into the adjacent parking lane. Keep in mind that the cyclist may not want to weave in and out of the car parking lane and has a legal right to stay on the sharrows.

Q. Can I drive my car over these markings, or is this a bike lane only? A. Unlike a bicycle lane, which cars can drive in only when making a right turn, you may drive over these markings. They are meant to highlight that it is a shared roadway, point out to bicyclists the minimum distance to stay from parked cars, and instruct motorists to expect to see bicyclists out in the lane.

Q. Bicyclists riding over these markings often end up in the car travel lane. Aren't they supposed to move to the right? A. Not always. As with all slower-moving vehicles, cyclists are required to ride as far to the right as is practical. However, slower moving vehicles are not required to compromise their safety in order to allow a faster vehicle to pass.

To summarize, in all situations where the lane is too narrow for a bicycle and an overtaking motor vehicle to travel safely side by side, the motor vehicle is required by law to slow down, whether or not there are sharrows on the road. The sharrows are present as a reminder to cars to slow down and share the

road. If the slow speed of a cyclist or a group of cyclists (traveling two or less abreast and as far to the right as practicable) is a problem for a motorist, it is the motorist who must yield, not the bicycle. A cyclist is not required to take a different route so cars can go faster. Next time you see a bicycle on the road, remember that bicycling benefits motorists by reducing the number of cars on the road and freeing up parking spaces. More bicycles mean cleaner air and water, less reliance on oil, and improved public health. It's our hope that the sharrows will be a catalyst for change—the first of many further new elements that, over time, have the potential to make Charlottesville a world-class bicycle, pedestrian-friendly city.