



FACT SHEET

SHARED LANE PAVEMENT MARKINGS "SHARROWS"

The shared lane marking (or sharrow) is an experimental roadway marking installed in limited locations in the United States. This marking is used within travel lanes shared by bicyclists and other vehicles.

The Shared Lane Marking is intended to:

- Assist bicyclists with lateral positioning in a shared lane with on-street parallel parking in order to reduce the chance of a bicyclist's impacting the open door of a parked vehicle,
- Assist bicyclists with lateral positioning in lanes that are too narrow for a motor vehicle and a bicycle to travel side by side within the same traffic lane,
- Alert road users of the lateral location bicyclists are likely to occupy within the traveled way,
- Encourage safe passing of bicyclists by motorists, and
- Reduce the incidence of wrong-way bicycling.

The concept for this marking was originally developed in Denver, CO in the 1990s. The original design consisted of an outline arrow with a bicycle symbol inside. The widened shape of the arrow, combined with the bike symbol, gave rise to unofficial names such as "bike in a house" or "sharrow".

The principle behind sharrows is simple: They reinforce existing rules of the road. In most states, cyclists are required to stay as far to the right as possible, except under unsafe conditions. One of these conditions is when the travel lane is too narrow for side-by-side passage of an automobile and a bicycle.

Sharrows are used to show motorists that cyclists may "take the lane" and help show cyclists good lane positioning, especially where lanes are too narrow to share safely. In San Francisco, which studied design and placement of sharrows in 2004, sharrows were shown to improve lane positioning of cyclists and improved passing distance by motorists. Sharrows also cut down on the number of sidewalk cyclists and wrong-way cyclists.



Example of a Sharrow in San Francisco, CA

Wide outside lanes and bike lane markings may be preferred by many cyclists, but widening lanes is often difficult because they take away parking or sidewalk space, especially in built-up urban areas where parking is already scarce.

Sharrows have been proposed for addition as a nationally-standardized marking or sign in the Manual for Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) in its next update, projected to be published in 2010. (The MUTCD is a book published by the Federal Highway Administration and used by state transportation departments for to ensure consistency of street signs and lane markings.) Addition of these markings to Metroplan's METRO 2030 long range transportation plan at this time will allow Arkansas cyclists and other roadway users to take more timely advantage of improved roadway safety while awaiting publication of the national standard.

Frequently-asked Questions about Sharrows:

What are Sharrows?

"Sharrow" is the short term for "shared lane pavement marking." They consist of an image of a bicycle or bicyclist with a series of chevrons, and are painted on the surface of the traffic lane to indicate that motorists and bicyclists are required to share the travel lane.

Can I still drive where these bicycle markings exist?

Yes. If there is no accompanying white stripe paired with the bicycle marking, then it is not a designated bicycle lane. Sharrows are painted on the lane surface to

indicate that cars and bikes have equal rights to use the traffic lane, and to indicate where the cyclists should ride in order to increase their safety. You may still drive in a travel lane marked with a sharrow, and if you need to pass any vehicle, you may do so in the same manner as you would any other vehicle, when and where it is legal and safe to do so.

Why are these markings on the street? What is their purpose?

The principle behind sharrows is simple: to reinforce existing state law and the rules of the road in order to create safer conditions for bicycling. Where there are no bike lanes on busy streets, cyclists tend to ride too closely to parked cars. If somebody were to open a car door as a cyclist passed (against state law, but it still happens) the cyclist could get “doored” and possibly be injured or killed, especially if there was passing automotive traffic. Also, when cyclists ride too far to the right in narrow travel lanes, passing motorists often don’t see cyclists and/or are tempted to pass them too closely. This is not only scary and unnerving for the cyclist, but it leaves little margin for error. Arkansas law requires motorists who pass cyclists to give at least 3 feet of space when passing.

Inexperienced cyclists often ride on the wrong side of the street, facing oncoming traffic. Placement of sharrows on the streets commonly used by cyclists shows them where to ride safely – with the flow of traffic, not against it.

Why not just paint bicycle lanes?

Sharrows are used in areas where there simply isn’t enough room on the street or roadway to add bicycle lanes. This is typically due to high-demand for on-street parking, inability to further narrow existing traffic lanes, or a combination of the two. Sharrows are an effective, flexible alternative to striped bike lanes and can be used to improve cyclist safety and make needed connections in the Metroplan area’s bicycle route system.

Most streets in Pulaski County are shared by cyclists and motorists already, and don’t have sharrows. Why mark only some streets?

While bicyclists are allowed on all streets in Little Rock, North Little Rock, and the Metroplan planning area, the cities have designated some streets as part of their Bicycle Routing System in order to help bicyclists safely navigate to their destinations. Many of these streets carry lower volume traffic with relatively low speeds, and special markings aren’t needed. Sharrows will be placed on streets where traffic on the Bicycle Routing System is relatively heavy, average speeds are a little higher, and/or the streets should be marked with bicycle lanes but cannot because of street width, on-street parking, or the number of travel lanes.

As a cyclist, what should I do in the presence of sharrows?

Sharrows are marked outside of the “door zone” adjacent to parked cars, and in the part of the lane where bicyclists should ride in order to be more visible to other drivers. Because the travel lane in these streets is too narrow for safe side-by-side travel by a motorist and a cyclist, we expect the cyclist to ride through the center of the sharrow, while still paying attention to potential door openings.

As a motorist, what should I do in the presence of sharrows?

Slow down, and drive carefully. Because the travel lane here is either too narrow or too busy for safe side-by-side travel by motorists and cyclists, we expect motorists to slow down and either wait for the cyclist to turn off the roadway, or wait until you can pass safely. You probably won’t have to wait long, and gunning it past a cyclist

to save 20 or 30 seconds on your travel time isn't worth the risk of causing a collision and/or injuring someone!

Why not put sharrows on all busy streets?

We want to encourage cyclists to use the Bicycle Routing System as a part of the safest means to reach their destinations. We will use sharrows to facilitate cyclists through a busy part of the Bicycle Routing System that is too narrow for bike lanes, and has a large cycling presence. Depending how well they work, we may expand their use.

What do you hope to accomplish with the sharrows?

We want to create safer conditions for bicyclists on busy streets where we should have bicycle lanes, but cannot. We hope to do this by moving cyclists a little further away from parked cars than they would normally ride in the absence of sharrows, creating a little more separation between passing motorists and cyclists than would normally exist, and reinforcing the law that requires riding with the flow of traffic, not against it.

Do sharrows work?

They seem to. A 2004 study conducted in San Francisco, CA showed that in the presence of sharrows cyclists moved farther away from parked cars, and motorists moved farther away from cyclists than they did on streets where sharrows were not used. The State of California has adopted sharrows as a statewide standard roadway marking, and San Francisco has gone on to paint hundreds of them on their streets. Many other cities nationwide such as Portland, OR, Chicago, IL, and Louisville, KY are now using sharrows in their bicycle routing plans.

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