

Shared Lane Markings (aka “sharrows”) Frequently Asked Questions

Q. I’ve seen new pavement markings on streets in Alexandria. The marking is a bicycle with two arrows above it. What does it mean?

A. These are new Shared Lane Markings also known as “sharrows.” They suggest where cyclists should ride to avoid being hit by suddenly opening car doors. Although it is the motorists responsibility to check before opening doors, riding too close to parked cars (in the “door zone”) can lead to injury.



Q. But on some streets, bicyclists riding over the sharrows will take the entire lane. Aren’t they supposed to move to the right?

A. Not always. According to the Code of Virginia, bicyclists operating on a roadway at less than the normal speed of traffic shall ride as close as safely practicable to the right curb or edge of roadway. Exceptions to this are when bicyclists are overtaking and passing another vehicle proceeding in the same direction, preparing for a left turn, avoiding unsafe conditions such as parked cars, or when the lane width is too narrow to share with a motor vehicle. Specific code references and more information is available here: www.virginiadot.org

Q. Can’t bicyclists just look into parked cars as they ride and see if someone is about to open the door?

A. Checking every parked car for a driver can be very difficult. Also, it is often impossible to see drivers when large parked vehicles block the view or vehicles have tinted windows.

Q. If I see sharrows in a lane, is the lane only for bicycles?

A. No. Sharrows are used in lanes shared by bicyclists and motorists when there is not sufficient width or a need for a bicycle lane. In contrast, *bicycle lanes* set aside a pavement area for bicyclists and are marked by a solid white line and a different symbol.

Q. So, if I don’t see sharrows, then it’s not a shared lane and bicyclists aren’t supposed to be there?

A. No. Bicyclists can ride on any street in Virginia except for Interstates and other controlled access highways with signs specifically prohibiting bicyclists. Just as every street in Alexandria has a 25 mph speed limit unless stated otherwise, bicyclists are allowed on every street with or without sharrows, bike lanes or bike route signs.

Q. Are sharrows going to be on every street that does not have a bicycle lane?

A. No. These markings will be used primarily on streets designated as part of the Alexandria bicycle network, particularly on streets that do not have sufficient street width to allow for bicycle lanes and have a safe speed limit. Sharrows are also planned for use on some streets that already have heavy bicycle traffic, such as Mount Vernon Ave.

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