

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

Q. I've seen these new markings of a bike with two arrows above it on the streets. What do they mean?

A. These are "Shared Roadway Markings" also known as "sharrows." They designate that a road should be shared by motorists and cyclists alike. They also show where cyclists should ride on the street without being hit by a suddenly opening car door.



Q. But on some streets, cyclists riding over the sharrow will take the entire lane. Aren't riders supposed to move to the right?

A. Not always. According to RI State law, bicyclists have the legal right to operate a bike on the road. However, cyclists are to stay to the right except to pass other cyclists or vehicles, to prepare to make a left turn, or when necessary to avoid conditions that make it unsafe to continue along the right (including fixed or moving objects, surface hazards, or substandard width lanes too narrow for a bicycle and vehicle to travel side by side).

“Every person operating a bicycle upon a roadway shall ride as near to the right side of the roadway as practicable, exercising due care when passing a standing vehicle or one proceeding in the same direction except where official traffic control devices (signs or pavement markings) specifically direct bicyclists to do otherwise.”

RIGL § 31-19-6 Bicycles to right of road

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

A. This can be very difficult and dangerous to do. Cyclists, along with all road users, need to constantly scan the entire roadway for safety. Checking every car for a driver is tricky to do without compromising attention paid to the road. Also, it is often extremely difficult to see drivers due to large parked vehicles blocking the view of other parked vehicles, tinted windows, headrests, etc. Car drivers should check their side view mirror or look back prior to opening their door. Although it is the motorist's responsibility to check before opening their door, riding too close to parked cars (in the "door zone") is still a common mistake that can lead to serious injury.

Q. If I see these markings in a lane, is the lane only for bikes?

A. No. Sharrows are used in lanes that are 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 these markings, then it's not a shared lane and bicyclists aren't supposed to be there?

A. No, cyclists can ride on any street in Rhode Island except for Interstates and other controlled access highways with signs specifically prohibiting cyclists.

Q. Are these markings going to be on every street that does not have a bike lane?

A. No, these markings will be used on streets that are designated as part of the Rhode Island Bicycle Route Network, particularly on streets that do not have sufficient street width to allow for bicycle lanes and have a safe speed limit. Sharrows are currently being used to connect the East Bay Bike path to the Blackstone Valley Bikeway.