

What's New on Worthen Road and Spring Street? Sharrows!



What are sharrows?

Sharrows is short for “**shared lane pavement markings.**” The marking combines an image of a bicycle with a series of chevrons to indicate that motorists and cyclists are to share the travel lane. This marking is placed in the travel lane to indicate that **a bicyclist may use the full lane.**

According to Massachusetts General Law, bicycles **do not have to stay all the way to the right** and can take the full lane to avoid car doors, debris, bad pavement, or other hazards. (Bicycles may even ride side-by-side when it doesn't interfere with safe passing, especially when cars can safely move into another lane to pass.)

Why not just stripe bicycle lanes?

The town is using the sharrows on streets that are not wide enough for bicycle lanes, such as Worthen Road, where there is a high demand for on-street parking, and on streets where existing travel lanes are narrow, such as on Spring Street. Although separate bike lanes may be the ideal situation, sharrows are an effective, flexible alternative to striped bike lanes and can be used to improve cyclist safety.

Why is the purpose of placing these markings on the street?

The principle behind sharrows is to reinforce the existing rules of the road to create safer conditions for bicycling. In the absence of bicycle lanes on busy streets, cyclists often ride too closely to parked cars. If somebody were to open a car door as a cyclist passed, the cyclist could get “doored” resulting in serious injury, especially if the cyclist impacts the edge of the door or is pushed into passing automobile traffic. Also, when cyclists stay far right in narrow travel lanes, passing motorists often don't see cyclists or pass too closely to them. This is unnerving for the cyclist and leaves little margin for error.

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

The town has placed the sharrows outside of the parked car's “door zone.” Because the travel lane is too narrow for safe side-by-side travel by a motorist and a cyclist, cyclists should ride through the center of the sharrow, while still watching for potential door openings.

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

Slow down and drive carefully. Because the travel lane is either too narrow or too busy for safe side-by-side travel by motorists and cyclists, motorists should slow down and either wait for the cyclist to turn off the roadway, or wait until there is sufficient room to

pass safely. Gunning it past a cyclist to save 30 seconds on your travel time isn't worth the risk of creating an accident with the cyclist or oncoming vehicle!

What does the Town hope to accomplish with the sharrows?

The town wants to create safer conditions for bicyclists and motorists on busy streets where bicycle lanes are not possible due to roadway conditions. Sharrows direct cyclists to ride at a recommended distance of at least three feet away from parked cars, and create a little more separation between passing motorists and cyclists than would normally exist in the absence of sharrows.

You may also see these signs on roadways in town, indicating that bicycles and motorists should share the travel lane:

