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Make Way for Sharrows

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Princetonians should be on the lookout for Sharrows -- a catchy name for shared lane markings, soon to be painted on Princeton streets. An image of a bicyclist with two directional chevrons, "sharrows" remind drivers to share the road with

bicyclists.

Proposed by the [Princeton Joint Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee](#) (PJPBAC), sharrows were recently designated as legitimate by the [Federal Highway Administration](#). The committee has been working for a decade to convert Princeton into a more bike-friendly town, a continuing effort supported by the Borough and the Township as well as [Sustainable Princeton](#).

A [policy paper](#), written by the committee in conjunction with Rutgers graduate student Jackie Yu, says Princeton needs sharrows, because there are typically 14-16 bike accidents per year in both municipalities.

Sharrows will be painted on the following streets:

- Harrison Street from Faculty Road to Mt. Lucas Road
- Witherspoon Street from Nassau Street to Valley Road
- Nassau Street from Harrison to Bayard Lane
- Paul Robeson Place/Wiggins/Hamilton Avenue from Bayard Lane to Snowden Lane



These four streets were the sites of roughly 60% of the bicycle accidents from 2008-May 25 2010. Nassau and Harrison Streets combined were involved in roughly 90% of bicycle-related accidents from 2009-May 25, 2010.

According to Janet Heroux, Chair of PJPBAC, there was no other obvious solution to making downtown Princeton safely accessible by bicycle. No off-street routes exist to downtown Princeton that could be used as bike paths, so the best approach was to designate roads with sharrows to indicate to drivers that they must share the road with bicyclists.

Once the Federal Highway Administration determined that the once-experimental sharrow markings were useful, PJPBAC seized on it as a way for Princeton to become bike-friendly.

The trouble with Princeton's downtown, says Heroux, is that some of the streets are narrow, and drivers need to know that they must accommodate bicyclists who are riding into town. "Bicyclists have a legal right to ride on the roads," says Heroux, "and sharrows indicate that the drivers should be alert for bikes."

PJPBAC considered using signs as a way to accommodate bicyclists, but there is so much sign pollution downtown that the road markings were given preference.

Drivers need to be especially aware of bicyclists when parking. "Dooring," which occurs when a driver suddenly swings open the door of a parked car,

a major cause of bicyclist accidents and fatalities. The bicyclist either crashes into the door and is possibly thrown into oncoming traffic or swerves into traffic to avoid crashing into the door. Sharrows help bicyclists to avoid “dooring” by indicating proper positioning in a shared lane with on-street parallel parking.

Other uses of sharrows include:

- Help bicyclists with correct positioning in lanes that are too narrow for a car and a bike to travel in parallel within the same traffic lane
- Alert drivers to the location bicyclists are likely to occupy in the road
- Indicate to bicyclists which direction they should be cycling and therefore reduce wrong-way cycling

Sharrows are not intended for young schoolchildren, who are allowed to ride on the sidewalks, but are meant for teenagers and adults who are more experienced bicyclists. PJPBAC hopes that the sharrow markings will begin “normative and cultural changes so drivers will view bicyclists as normal users of the road,” says Heroux.

The sharrows also intend to influence bicyclist behavior as well, causing bicyclists to behave more like vehicles on the road. PJPBAC regards it as an inexpensive fix at approximately \$13,000 per two-mile stretch of road to make riding safer and easier for bicyclists in Princeton.

Heroux feels that the more bikes that are on the road, the more drivers expect to see bikes. In countries like France or the Netherlands, there are so many people riding and walking that it is really quite safe, she says, because the drivers are acculturated to their presence.

Princeton is one of the early adopters of the sharrows, says Heroux.

Hoboken has sharrows, but Princeton is one of the first towns in New Jersey to mark sharrows on key streets in the community. Heroux feels that the Township and the Borough deserve a lot of credit for stepping up to the plate to support the sharrows.

Many cities, including New York City, have already adopted sharrows. In San Francisco, by reducing the number of bicyclists riding on the sidewalks, bicyclists riding against traffic, and increasing the distance between bicyclists and passing or parked vehicles, sharrows proved to reduce many of the problematic situations that result in a bicycle-related injury.

1 October 2, Sustainable Princeton will hold a [Committed Mass Bike and Skate ride](#) to celebrate the sharrow markings. Bicyclist and skaters will meet at Hinds Plaza and participate in a short ride to show their commitment to the sharrows and sustainable, healthy transportation alternatives.

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About the Author »



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Bonnie Schultz has worked as a technology and marketing writer in the Boston area. She moved here in 1997 and is the mother of two boys. Since 2007, Bonnie has been blogging about food and community happenings in the Princeton area, through her blog "[The Blog That Ate New Jersey](#)".

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