
 Northern Region Traffic Engineering Practice	No. 902.1
Signing and Marking For Sidewalks and Sidepaths	July 5, 2013

According to the Code of Virginia, a shared-use path is “a bikeway that is physically separated from motorized vehicular traffic by an open space or barrier.”¹ In addition to bicyclists, shared-use paths may be used by pedestrians, skaters, and joggers, among others.

Where a shared-use path is “located immediately adjacent and parallel to a roadway,”² it is known as a sidepath. Paths on independent alignments are not addressed by this practice.

This practice shall apply to new or reconstructed sidewalks and sidepaths maintained by VDOT, and it shall be used to make decisions about new traffic control devices on existing paths. Existing paths may be retrofitted to comply with this practice where appropriate. This practice may be used as a reference for paths not maintained by VDOT, since it represents VDOT’s preferred traffic control approach.

In general, signs along sidewalks and sidepaths have not been shown to assist adjacent motorists in anticipating (and avoiding collisions with) path users when the motorist turns onto an intersecting roadway that also crosses the path. Furthermore, bicyclists traveling on sidewalks and sidepaths have been observed to take their right-of-way cues not from signs or other traffic control devices on the path, but rather from traffic movements on the parallel roadway.


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¹ Code of Virginia, [§ 46.2-100](#)

² *Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities*, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. Washington, DC, 2012.

STOP AND YIELD SIGNS

Neither STOP nor YIELD signs shall be installed where they apply to users of sidewalks or sidepaths in any of the following circumstances:

- **Where a sidewalk or sidepath crosses a roadway or driveway at a traffic signal**
- **Where a sidewalk or sidepath crosses an unsignalized intersection at which traffic on the roadway parallel to the sidewalk or sidepath is not required to stop or yield**
- **Where a sidewalk or sidepath crosses a driveway at an unsignalized location**

At crossings where a locality has adopted an ordinance pursuant to § 46.2-924(D) of the Code of Virginia, the locality may install STOP signs that apply to path users.

Where a sidepath crosses a roadway or driveway at a traffic signal, path users must comply with the traffic signal indications³.

Where a sidepath crosses a roadway at an unsignalized intersection, it is a “crosswalk,” whether or not crosswalk markings are present.⁴ In crosswalks, bicyclists and many other path users have “all the rights and duties of a pedestrian under the same circumstances.”⁵ As such, pedestrians and cyclists have the right-of-way when crossing a roadway at an unsignalized intersection on a sidepath (though they may not cross in disregard of approaching traffic).⁶

Where a sidepath crosses an unsignalized driveway, motorists on the driveway must stop prior to the path crossing and yield to path users before proceeding.⁷

WARNING SIGNS

Warning signs shall not be installed where they apply to users of sidewalks or sidepaths for conditions that also apply to traffic on the adjacent roadway. This prohibition shall apply whether or not a sign is posted to warn roadway traffic of the condition.

Warning signs may be considered where appropriate on sidepaths when they warn of conditions that do not apply to the adjacent roadway. A PATH NARROWS sign (W5-4a) is one example.

Since they normally travel slower, path users are less likely than roadway users to need warning signs for conditions that are readily apparent, such as roadway curvature and grades. Unnecessary signs may be fixed-object hazards for path users.

³ Code of Virginia, [§ 46.2-925](#)

⁴ Code of Virginia, [§ 46.2-100](#)

⁵ Code of Virginia, [§ 46.2-904](#)

⁶ Code of Virginia, [§ 46.2-924](#)

⁷ Code of Virginia, [§ 46.2-826](#)

CYCLIST BEHAVIOR SIGNS

No sign shall require a cyclist to dismount from his or her bicycle, except where a locality has adopted an ordinance prohibiting cycling on the specific sidewalk or sidepath.

Absent such an ordinance, VDOT does not have legal authority to require cyclists to dismount.

No sign should advise or warn a cyclist to dismount from his or her bicycle, except where site conditions are so constrained that a competent cyclist would not be able to safely traverse the area without dismounting.

No sign shall direct or advise a cyclist to ride on a sidewalk or sidepath, except where cyclists are prohibited by law from using the roadway.

Cyclists are usually permitted to travel on either a roadway or its adjacent sidewalk or sidepath. Each cyclist may make his or her own independent judgment about where to ride and whether to dismount, considering his or her skill level and site conditions, and recognizing that a sidepath may have more hazards than the adjacent roadway.

Signs advising of riding location may interfere with this judgment, and may inaccurately imply to motorists that cyclists are not permitted to use the roadway.

CENTERLINE MARKINGS

Sidewalks and sidepaths should not be marked with a centerline.

Path users are usually permitted to travel in both directions on a sidepath. However, research has shown that cyclists are more likely to be involved in collisions when riding in the direction opposite adjacent roadway traffic. This is often because motorists crossing the path on a driveway or intersecting roadway do not expect cyclists to be approaching from a direction opposite nearby motor vehicles. A sidepath centerline may encourage riding against traffic, which may increase cyclists' risk.