

Yesterday I followed the advice of FDOT to ride my bicycle in the right traffic lane of N. Roosevelt Blvd. I was encouraged by the cute “sharrows” painted on the asphalt and dozens of signs saying bicycles “MAY USE FULL LANE.” Yes, you “MAY,” but only if you're officially a “STUPID ASSHOLE.” Let me explain.

Like everyone else, I thought it was an amusing mistake when I saw the first two sharrows painted the week before the glorious ribbon-cutting celebration of our *840 Days of Hell*. My goodness, I thought, what a silly idea, encouraging bikes to use the deadly highway lane when they have their own wonderful promenade to bike on safely. I also wondered vaguely about all of those naked metal posts, but thought they might just be for a lot of speed limit signs.

Then, to mine and everyone's horror, a few dozen more sharrows sprouted the very next day after the ribbon-cutting, accompanied now with the “MAY USE FULL LANE” incitement. I hustled to FDOT's still-running office on Boog Powell Court to get the scoop. Their local director told me it was “policy” everywhere there was two lanes, even on federal highways like our U.S. 1 coming into town. “It was on every plan and was even verbally presented to the commissioners.” (Three said they remember no such thing.)

I said this is dangerous, especially with a wide bike promenade for us to use safely. Jackie argued it was terribly dangerous to pedestrians for us bicyclists to go racing by them. I said, how dangerous is my 8 mph to them, compared to the cars racing by my 8 mph at 40? She said I must go faster than that.

No I don't. I have a fat-tire conch cruiser with upright handle bars. It's built for comfort, not speed. In fact it looks exactly like the fat-tired, upright-handlebarred bikes pictured on both the sharrows and the signs saying such designed-for-slow bikes “MAY USE FULL LANE.”

She did add that when Jim Scholl astutely called to complain, she said they'd put off painting more sharrows and putting up more signs until the “issue was resolved.” Alas, her command didn't make it down the chain to the men actually doing the work that night, so a bunch more got added.

So maybe we're stuck with them. I decided I needed to give FDOT a fair shake and give it a try. Also, I could report my findings to you, dear readers, if I survived. At a relatively quiet time, 10:15 in the morning, I bravely turned out of the Meadows onto the boulevard at the 4 Presidents intersection, splitting the first sharrow just past the crosswalk.

For the first furlong, it is only one lane. One car immediately crossed the double yellow line to pass me illegally, but then I quickly had 7 cars lined up behind me. A cute lady in a small car coming my way gave me the finger barely 10 seconds into my experiment. But the cars behind me were polite and no one swore at me when the second lane began and they could pass.

I have a good rear-view mirror, and I could not take my eyes off of the cars, especially the big ones, racing up my tail before swerving into the left lane. It goosed my usual 8 mph all the way up to 9 mph, according to my speedometer. I'm pretty sure my heart rate went up more than that.

So I continued on past our retail centers feeling ridiculous until I got past Kennedy. There our promenade is its full 12 feet. Even bicycle-meister Tom Theissen rides his fast bike on the promenade between the Y and Overseas Market, though he then races on the right lane at his own car speed where the sidewalk narrows on the bridge.

At Kennedy a huge truck got right behind me and stayed there, and I advanced from feeling ridiculous to feeling like the above-referenced stupid asshole. Stupid, because what I was doing on my bike in the damned highway was scary and dangerous. Asshole, because the OED defines that as someone who doesn't give a hoot about how his own actions affect other people, while he is in his own happy world enjoying his “rights.”

Fortunately I was saved by the cops. Really. A *good* cop. Officer Fricke from the Sheriff's Department waved at me from his car and told me to use the sidewalk. I waved back at him to pull over

and talk.

He did, and at the Sears car repair turnoff I explained what I was doing, testing the advice given by the sharrows and signs to use the car lane. Was he commanding me not to? He said no, he couldn't do that, because it was indeed my legal right to be there. But he feared for my safety and implored me to call off my experiment.

I said I didn't care about the danger, I'd lived long enough already. And the night before I had passed two 20-ish gals riding their bikes on the boulevard into town, but not using the full lane, and being passed by cars in the gals' lane as they hugged the curb. I said I'd gladly have a few bones broken and spend a few months healing if it would cause this idiocy to be reversed, and save the life of one of such gals.

Officer Fricke allowed that I was one of the most "unusual" thinkers he'd encountered, but still begged me to get off the road. So, having dared what I had on the road, and argued with a Keys cop, definitely a life-threatening behavior in these parts, I decided to let the kindly officer get me off the hook. I caved, and rode the rest of the way off the island on the ample business sidewalk supplementing the waterside promenade.

Take the test yourself. If you are not already a stupid asshole, just a hundred yards of biking the boulevard between Kennedy and the Y in the car lane over the merry sharrows will vividly show you what it feels like to be one. But if you can bike blithely along without feeling anything, then indeed, all your friends are right, and you are officially an "SA," and you can add it to your resume.

Folks, we can fix all this with a stroke of a pen. Our municipality has exceptional laws governing riding bikes on the sidewalk. Thus we can overrule the general dictum regarding access to car lanes. Use the slow moving vehicle principle, disallowing Segways and motorized wheelchairs from car lanes, to apply to conch cruisers like mine. Repaint the sharrows and full lane signs to picture skinny-tire bikes with low racing handlebars so Tom and the fast bikers can jump in at car traffic speed if they wish.

Better yet, dump the sharrow paintings and signs. The fast bikers know the law already. We slow riders have no intention of leaving the wonderful bike promenades for the car lanes on North *or* South Roosevelt unless some idiots put up signs encouraging "SA" behavior. FDOT, Commissioners, step up to the plate and follow Jim Scholl's instant leadership as our new and greatly improved City Manager.