

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · HOUSTON

Houston Car Registration, Emissions and EZ TAG Guide 2026

For cars brought from another state or country, cars bought in Texas, and Houston toll roads.

SHORT ANSWER

New residents have 30 days to register a vehicle in Texas. The order is: Texas insurance (at least 30/60/25), an emissions test (required in Harris County), then title and registration at the Harris County Tax Office with Form 130-U. Offices are closed on Wednesdays; new residents can walk in 8 a.m. to noon on the other weekdays. Since March 5, 2026, a first registration needs a passport plus an I-94 or a green card. The new resident tax is \$90.

Step by step

- 1 **Buy Texas insurance.** Minimum liability: \$30,000 per person, \$60,000 per accident, \$25,000 property damage. Out-of-state insurance that meets these minimums is accepted; a policy from a "no fault" state is not.
- 2 **Get an emissions test.** Required in 17 counties, including Harris, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria and Galveston (not Chambers, Liberty or Waller). Gas vehicles 2 to 24 years old are tested; up to \$18.50. Bring your insurance card. Find a station: [DPS station locator](#).
- 3 **Complete Form 130-U.** [txdmv.gov Form 130-U](https://txdmv.gov/Form130-U). Enter your Harris County address.
- 4 **Visit the tax office.** Walk in Monday, Tuesday, Thursday or Friday between 8 a.m. and noon. At other times, book a "New Resident (First time TX registration)" appointment at hctax.net. All branches are closed on Wednesdays.
- 5 **Then get your license.** Bring the Tax Office receipt and your insurance to DPS.

Harris County's new-resident page still mentions a safety inspection. Safety inspections for passenger vehicles ended on January 1, 2025; in the Houston area only the emissions test remains.

What to bring

DOCUMENT	NOTES
☐ ID that meets the new rule	One of the "List A" IDs below, unexpired.
☐ Previous title or registration	If you keep your out-of-state title, you can register under "Registration Purposes Only" with the out-of-state registration in your name.

DOCUMENT	NOTES
☐ Form 130-U	Completed and signed.
☐ Proof of Texas insurance	At least 30/60/25.
☐ Vehicle Inspection Report	Emissions test, required in Harris County.
☐ Lienholder information	If a lender holds the title, the office can request it from them.

NEW ID RULE (MARCH 5, 2026)

- A first Texas registration, including for new residents, now requires an unexpired "List A" ID.
- Accepted: a REAL ID-compliant U.S. license or ID (including a Texas license), a U.S. passport, or a **valid foreign passport plus an I-94 (not in parole status), a green card or an unexpired immigrant visa.**
- A Turkish passport alone is no longer enough. If your I-94 shows only parole, the passport route does not work.
- From January 1, 2027, registration renewals will also include an ID check.

Fees (2026)

ITEM	AMOUNT
Yearly registration, most cars and light trucks up to 6,000 lb (Harris County)	\$78.25
State registration fee inside that	\$51.75 (+ Harris County road & bridge \$10, child safety \$1.50)
Title application	\$33
New resident tax	\$90, once (if you apply within 30 days of moving)
Inspection program replacement fee	\$7.50 per year
Emissions test	up to \$18.50
Sales tax on a car bought in Texas	6.25%
Electric vehicle fee	\$200 per year
Card payment fee	2.40% + \$1.00

After 30 days, instead of the \$90 you pay the difference between the sales tax paid in your old state and Texas's 6.25%.

Harris County Tax Office branches

BRANCH	ADDRESS
Downtown	1001 Preston St, Houston 77002
Tomball	101 S. Walnut St, Tomball 77375
Cypress Hill	4290 Cypress Hill Dr, Spring 77388
Humble	7900 Will Clayton Pkwy, Humble 77338
Burnett Bayland	6000 Chimney Rock Rd, Houston 77081
Kyle Chapman	7330 Spencer Hwy, Pasadena 77505
Mickey Leland	7300 N. Shepherd Dr, Houston 77091
Clay Road	16715 Clay Rd, Houston 77084
Spring Branch	1721 Pech Rd, Houston 77055
Jim Fonteno	14350 Wallisville Rd, Houston 77049
Baytown (Clinton F. Greenwood)	701 W. Baker Rd, Baytown 77521
Raul C. Martinez	1001 SGT Macario Garcia, Houston 77011
Palm Center	5300 Griggs Rd, Houston 77021
John Phelps	101 N. Richey, Suite E, Pasadena 77506
Scarsdale	10851 Scarsdale, Houston 77089
Bay Area	16603 Buccaneer Ln, Houston 77062

Phone: 713-274-8000. Open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. [New resident page](#). If you live in Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria or Galveston County, use your own county tax office.

Importing a car from abroad

- Harris County gives the extra requirements for foreign vehicles by phone: call 713-274-8000 first.
 - Federal paperwork: customs entry form (CBP Form 7501) and DOT Form HS-7.
 - The one-time \$90 new resident tax.
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EZ TAG: Houston toll roads

Houston toll roads are cashless. The local tag is EZ TAG from the Harris County Toll Road Authority (HCTRA). Since November 9, 2024, HCTRA also bills TxDOT toll roads in the Houston and Austin regions, and old TxTag accounts became EZ TAG accounts.

TOPIC	DETAILS
Open an account	hctra.org or an EZ TAG store. Check hctra.org for current account terms
Pay with cash	Walmart, H-E-B and other HCTRA retail partners
Without a tag	One "EZ Invoice" from HCTRA for HCTRA and TxDOT roads. Drivers with a prepaid tag always pay the lowest rates
Fort Bend toll roads	Tag only: no cash and no pay-by-mail. Driving without a tag brings a violation notice at double the tag rate
Where it works	Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado and most toll roads in Florida. Keep only one tag in the car
Rental cars	Ask the rental company about its toll plan

NOTE FOR IMMIGRANTS

Toll bills go to the address on your vehicle registration, so update it and your EZ TAG account after you move. Pay only on hctra.org; lookalike payment sites show up in searches. If you are subject to the address-reporting requirement, you must also report your new address to USCIS within 10 days (AR-11).



TURKISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY IN HOUSTON

Have a question about your immigration status?

Attorney Asim Clinch serves clients in Houston and the surrounding area, in Turkish and English.

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