

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · HUNTSVILLE

Registering a Car in Huntsville and Getting the Plate: 2026 Guide

Three counties, three counters, and a tax district that can change without you moving far. We give the structure of the annual value tax, not a figure.

SHORT ANSWER

This city's three-county theme becomes concrete in money for the first time here. **Vehicle registration is handled in the county where you live**, so Huntsville has **three separate counters** and which one you use depends on **your address**: one inside the city, two at county seats outside it. Registration also carries **an annual tax on the value of the vehicle**, and one multiplier in that calculation is **the county rate**: two people living in the same city can pay different amounts for the same car. **We publish no figure**, because the rates of the three counties could not be verified in this research; and on top of that **two official pages disagree on a class rate** that enters the calculation, and we print that contradiction as it stands. One county license department's own warning matters especially here: **your tax district may have changed**.

Three counties, three counters

Read from the state revenue department's directory of county counters on **October 10, 2026**:

WHICH COUNTY YOUR ADDRESS IS IN	PLATE AND REGISTRATION COUNTER	PHONE
Madison side (most of the city)	1918 N. Memorial Parkway, Huntsville, AL 35801 (inside the city)	256-532-3315
Limestone side	100 S. Clinton St., Suite B, Athens, AL 35611	256-233-6430
Morgan side	302 Lee St., N.E., Decatur, AL 35601	256-351-4770

For most of the city the counter is inside the city, but if you live on the Limestone or Morgan side you have to go to **a county seat outside your own city**. **Look up your address first**; going to the wrong county is a real risk here and the offices are not interchangeable. **We publish no distance or driving time**. Lookup tool: geocoding.geo.census.gov.

YOUR TAX DISTRICT MAY HAVE CHANGED

That sentence is not ours, it is **a county license department's own renewal warning**: if your address or insurance information has changed since the last renewal, call the office, because **your tax district may have changed and the amount printed on your renewal notice may be wrong. In a city that spans three counties this means**: you stayed in the same city, you even moved two streets over in the same neighborhood, but **your tax district and the amount you owe may have changed**. Call the counter when you move.

The annual value tax: structure yes, figure no

In this state registering a vehicle is not a single fee: **a tax on the value of the vehicle** is paid every year, and it is separate from the sales tax paid once at purchase. The department's own formula has three multipliers: **the market value of the vehicle, the vehicle's class rate, and your county's millage rate**. The valuation date is fixed too: the administrative rule states that valuation is made as of **October 1** and used for **the following calendar year's** tax.

FEATURE	WHAT IT MEANS
Collected before the plate is issued	Budget for it before you go to the counter; the department states on its own page that accrued tax must be collected before registration
It runs even if the vehicle is not driven	The department's own sentence: this is a property tax, not a use tax , and it follows the property from owner to owner; a car sitting in a garage does not stop it
The amount depends on the tax district	The agency's own language: the amount of the tax depends on the owner's tax district and the district can change when you move
There is a credit on sale or removal	On sale, trade, total loss, permanent removal from Alabama or unrecovered theft, a prorated credit for the remaining period ; the claim window is 60 days and the credit voucher is valid 12 months

We publish no figure and we say why plainly: one multiplier in the calculation is the county rate, **Huntsville has three counties**, and this research **could not verify the millage rate of any of them**. Three different amounts can come out for the same car in the same city. **Ask the county counter for your own rate**.

A PRINTED CONTRADICTION: TWO OFFICIAL PAGES DISAGREE ON A CLASS RATE

The state revenue department's **general property tax page** and its **vehicle valuation page** do not agree on which class private passenger vehicles fall into and what that class rate is. Two official sources give two different rates for the same thing. **We take no side**; both are linked below and we tell you to **confirm at the counter** which one applies to your vehicle. The pages: [vehicle valuation](#) and [general property tax](#).

Registration order, deadlines and fees

- 1 Insurance first.** The policy must come from **an insurer authorized to do business in Alabama** and must start **before** registration; the clerk checks it through the electronic verification system and asks for an insurance card if it cannot be verified.

- 2 Then the title and the inspection.** For vehicles that require a title, the title application comes first; whenever ownership changes, the license official or an authorized deputy **physically inspects the vehicle**. There is no such inspection at renewal.
- 3 The counter last:** the clerk collects the registration fees and the annual value tax and issues the plate.

ITEM	AMOUNT OR DEADLINE
Alabama title	15 dollars , plus 3 dollars to the license official
Standard passenger plate	23 dollars , plus a 1.25 dollar issuance fee
Added on top	Local fees, the annual value tax and sales tax ; the counter adds them
Moving in from another state	30 days from the vehicle entering the state
Buying a vehicle in Alabama	20 calendar days ; if the last day falls on a Sunday or a holiday, the next business day
Late penalty	15 dollars plus interest ; for late registration, late transfer, missing your renewal month and exceeding the thirty days
Not keeping the document in the vehicle	a fine of at least 50 dollars if current registration cannot be shown to law enforcement
Emissions test	None . The state revenue department's own question and answer page states plainly that Alabama law does not provide for emissions testing of motor vehicles
Periodic safety inspection	Does not appear on the agency's list of registration prerequisites . We do not say there is none, we say we did not find it on the list

The emissions line is one of the rare items in this series where we do not say **we could not find it**: the agency says no in its own words. **But we do not say the same thing on the line right below it** and we keep that distinction deliberately. The only inspection on the list is the **vehicle identification number and document inspection** performed when ownership changes.

Identification is asked of every owner

This item is critical for this readership. The state department's compulsory insurance brochure asks, **in addition** to proof of insurance, for **a valid state driver license or non-driver identification card for every owner shown on the title**; two separate counties state the same requirement on their own lists, and one of them adds that **the names must match the names on the documents**.

- **What it means in practice:** the **lawful presence requirement on the license side reaches the registration door too**. If that requirement creates a problem in your file, **talk to your attorney** before you go to the counter.
- **The document lists of this city's three counties were not read separately in this research**, so **confirm by phone** what the counter you are going to asks for.
- The brochure also uses the phrase **national driver license**; **no agency text explains whether that phrase covers a foreign license**, and we do not write that **a vehicle can be registered on a foreign license**.

Your renewal month follows your surname

- This state renews plates in stages **by the first letter of the surname**, from January to November. **The full table is not on the state department's page**; one county license department publishes it in full and the two texts agree.
- **For a vehicle registered to two people**, the month follows the surname of **the person listed first** on the registration.
- **No equivalent was found in the agency's table for letters specific to the Turkish alphabet.** The letter may be taken as your surname is spelled on your documents; **we did not verify that**, so confirm your renewal month at the counter.
- **The reminder letter may not arrive.** The department's own answer: many counties send a renewal notice, **many do not**, and not receiving one does not remove the obligation.

Checklist for the counter

TASK	WHERE OR HOW
☐ Find out your county	The address lookup service . Which counter you use depends on it and there are three addresses
☐ Start an Alabama policy before you register	The counter checks the electronic verification system; if it cannot verify, it asks for a card
☐ Bring money for the annual value tax	It is collected before the plate is issued and the amount depends on your county
☐ Confirm the class rate at the counter	Two official pages disagree on this rate and we take no side
☐ Prepare identification for every owner	A valid license or state ID is asked of every owner on the title
☐ Ask for your renewal month and put it in your calendar	It follows the first letter of the surname; no equivalent was found for Turkish letters
☐ Call the counter when you move	Your tax district may have changed even if you stayed in the same city
☐ Close the registration properly if you sell or remove the vehicle	The tax runs even when the vehicle is not driven; the credit claim window is 60 days



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Attorney responsible for this guide: Asim Clinch, Esq., Clinch Law Firm P.C. Attorney Asim Clinch is a member of the Missouri Bar (No. 76084) and practices U.S. federal immigration law.

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