

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles Car Registration, Smog Check and ExpressLanes Guide 2026

For cars brought from another state, cars bought in California, and Los Angeles toll lanes (I-10, I-110 ExpressLanes).

SHORT ANSWER

New residents in Los Angeles have 20 days to pay California registration fees to the DMV. Unlike Texas, there is no separate county tax office; everything runs through the DMV. The order is: California insurance (at least \$30,000/\$60,000/\$15,000), a smog check for most gas vehicles, then a REG 343 application and documents at DMV. Los Angeles toll lanes (the I-10 and I-110 ExpressLanes) are not run by a county authority but by Metro itself; an account opens with a \$40 prepaid balance by credit card, or \$50 by cash or check.

Step by step

- 1 **Get California insurance.** Minimum liability: \$30,000 per person, \$60,000 per accident, \$15,000 property damage (for policies issued or renewed on or after January 1, 2025).
- 2 **Get a smog check if required.** Required for most gasoline vehicles model year 1976 and newer (motorcycles exempt) and for diesel vehicles 1998 and newer under 14,001 lb. The certificate is valid for 90 days after the test.
- 3 **Complete Form REG 343.** All owners must sign.
- 4 **Gather your documents.** Your previous state's title (or a California card marked "Nontransferable"), your previous state's last registration or renewal notice, and a REG 31 Verification of Vehicle completed by a DMV employee, a law enforcement officer, or a licensed vehicle verifier.
- 5 **Submit everything and pay within 20 days.** File on time even if the title or smog certificate is still pending, to avoid a penalty.

California has no separate county tax office the way Texas does; your driver's license and vehicle registration both go through the DMV, just as two separate transactions.

What to bring to the DMV

DOCUMENT	NOTES
☐ Identification	Valid photo ID.

DOCUMENT	NOTES
☐ Previous title and last registration	If you do not have the title, the California registration card may be marked "Nontransferable."
☐ REG 343	Completed and signed by all owners.
☐ Proof of insurance	At least \$30,000/\$60,000/\$15,000.
☐ Smog certificate	For vehicles that require it; valid 90 days after the test.
☐ REG 31 Verification of Vehicle	Completed by a DMV employee, law enforcement, or a licensed verifier.

GOOD TO KNOW

- California restricts bringing in or registering a vehicle less than 2 years old with less than 7,500 miles unless it meets California emissions standards; see exemption Form REG 256F.
- Smog exemptions: gasoline vehicles 1975 or older; diesel vehicles 1997 or older or over 14,000 lb; natural gas vehicles over 14,000 lb; electric vehicles. Some newer gasoline vehicles pay a smog abatement fee instead of testing.

Fees (2026)

ITEM	AMOUNT
Registration base fee (includes alternative fuel/technology fee)	about \$76
Vehicle License Fee	0.65% of vehicle value
CHP fee	\$34 (standard) / \$56 (commercial vehicles under CVRA)
Transportation Improvement Fee	\$33 to \$231 by vehicle value
Smog abatement fee (where applicable)	\$20
Late penalty	starts around \$10 for 1 to 10 days late, rising past \$100 after two years

See the full breakdown on [DMV's registration fees page](#). County and district fees vary by address.

Los Angeles toll lanes: Metro ExpressLanes

The I-10 and I-110 ExpressLanes are not run by a county toll authority; they are Metro's own program (metroexpresslanes.net). This is a different account system from Orange County's Toll Roads or the Bay Area's bridge FasTrak, even though all three use the FasTrak name.

TOPIC	DETAILS
Opening an account (credit card)	\$40 prepaid balance, \$10 replenishment threshold, \$25 transponder deposit waived

TOPIC	DETAILS
Opening an account (cash or check)	\$50 prepaid balance, \$25 replenishment threshold, \$25 transponder deposit
Monthly account fee	\$1 (waived only for the Low-Income Assistance Plan)
Driving without a tag	First notice: toll plus a \$9 processing fee, due in 30 days; unpaid after 30 days: plus a \$16 past-due penalty; still unpaid: plus a \$30 delinquent penalty and a possible DMV registration hold or collections
Clean Air Vehicle discount	ended on these lanes October 1, 2025
Rental cars	the renter must add the rental's plate to their own FasTrak account and mount their own transponder, or risk violations from both Metro and the rental company
Customer service	(877) 812-0022 · service centers in Torrance and El Monte

Tolls change with traffic in real time. During peak hours (5 to 9 a.m. and 4 to 7 p.m.), a blank price sign means the default of \$0.35 a mile; the off-peak default is lower.

NOTE FOR IMMIGRANTS

Toll bills go to the address on your vehicle registration, so update both your DMV record and your ExpressLanes account after you move. Pay only through metroexpresslanes.net. If you are subject to the address-reporting requirement, you must also report your new address to USCIS within 10 days (AR-11).

Nearby: Orange County Toll Roads

South of Los Angeles, Orange County's toll roads (73, 133, 241 and 261) are a separate system (thetollroads.com). Three account types: a free Prepaid account with discounted tolls, a free Charge account with no discount, and a \$2 a month Invoice account. Without an account you can still pay online or in the app from 5 days before to 5 days after your trip.

Bringing a car from out of state or from abroad

If you are importing a car from abroad, federal paperwork applies in addition to the DMV process above: a customs entry form (CBP Form 7501) and a DOT Form HS-7. If you are simply moving from another U.S. state, the REG 343 process above is what you need.



TURKISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY IN LOS ANGELES

Have a question about your immigration status?

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

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