

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · SAN DIEGO

San Diego Car Registration, Smog Check and SANDAG FasTrak Guide 2026

For cars brought from another state, cars bought in California, and San Diego-area toll roads (I-15 Express Lanes, South Bay Expressway/SR-125).

SHORT ANSWER

New residents in San Diego 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. San Diego's two toll roads, the I-15 Express Lanes and the South Bay Expressway (SR-125), are both run by SANDAG through one shared FasTrak account system; opening an account starts at a \$40 prepaid balance.

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.

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](#).

San Diego toll roads: SANDAG FasTrak

San Diego's two toll facilities, the [I-15 Express Lanes](#) and the [South Bay Expressway \(SR-125\)](#), are both operated by a single agency, SANDAG, sharing one FasTrak account system (myfastrak.511sd.com). Unlike Los Angeles's separate Metro ExpressLanes program, any FasTrak transponder from elsewhere in California (LA Metro, the Bay Area, or Orange County) already works here at the discounted rate.

TOPIC	DETAILS
I-15 Express Lanes toll	Recalculated every 3 minutes based on traffic, \$0.50 to \$8. Carpools, vanpools, motorcycles and transit vehicles ride free without an account; solo drivers must have a FasTrak account to use the lanes at all.
South Bay Expressway (SR-125)	Open-road tolling; FasTrak account holders pay a prorated, discounted toll based on distance, while drivers without an account or paying after the fact pay a higher rate.
Opening an account	\$40 prepaid balance minimum (or \$20 per transponder if you have more than two). Auto-replenishment triggers when the balance falls below \$10 or a week's average usage.
Customer service	(888) 889-1515

TOPIC	DETAILS
Veterans exemption	SANDAG runs a Veterans Toll Exemption Program; check sandag.org for eligibility.

NOTE FOR IMMIGRANTS

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

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. California restricts 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.



TURKISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY IN SAN DIEGO

Have a question about your immigration status?

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

Free evaluation: clinchlaw.com/free-evaluation · +1 866-491-7669

Office: 321 N Central Expy, Ste 206, McKinney, TX 75070

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.

Attorney advertising. This guide is general information only. It is not legal advice and is not a substitute for the advice of an attorney. Information compiled from official sources as of September 28, 2026; fees and procedures change, so check the official site before you act. Reading this guide does not create an attorney-client relationship. The choice of a lawyer is an important decision and should not be based solely upon advertisements. Latest version: clinchlaw.com/city-guides/san-diego-immigration-attorney