

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · SAN FRANCISCO

San Francisco Car Registration, Smog Check and Bridge Toll Guide 2026

For cars brought from another state, cars bought in California, Golden Gate and Bay Area bridge tolls, and getting around by Muni, Clipper and BART.

SHORT ANSWER

New residents in San Francisco 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. Bridge tolls come from two separate agencies: the Golden Gate Bridge runs its own district (\$10.25 southbound with FasTrak), while the Bay Bridge and six other state bridges are run by BATA (\$8.50 in 2026).

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. Confirm the rule for your vehicle and address at bar.ca.gov.
- 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. In San Francisco that means the office at 1377 Fell Street; book through dmv.ca.gov.

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.

San Francisco bridges: two separate toll systems

There is no single toll system for the bridges around San Francisco. The **Golden Gate Bridge** is run by its own agency, the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District. The **Bay Bridge** and the San Mateo-Hayward, Dumbarton, Richmond-San Rafael, Carquinez, Benicia-Martinez and Antioch bridges are run by the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA). Both use the FasTrak name, but the agencies and rate schedules are separate. One FasTrak tag usually works on both; confirm account details at goldengate.org and bayareafastrak.org. Los Angeles Metro ExpressLanes and Orange County's Toll Roads are entirely different accounts.

BRIDGE	TOLL
Golden Gate Bridge (FY2026-27, since July 1, 2026), southbound only (Marin to San Francisco)	FasTrak \$10.25 · License Plate Account or one-time payment \$10.50 · toll invoice \$11.25 · eligible carpools \$8.25
Golden Gate, northbound, walking and cycling	Free
Bay Bridge and the 6 other state bridges (regular two-axle vehicle), since January 1, 2026	\$8.50 (up from \$8.00)
State bridges, planned schedule (FasTrak / plate / invoice)	2027: \$9.00 / \$9.25 / \$10.00 · 2028: \$9.50 / \$9.75 / \$10.50 · 2029: \$10.00 / \$10.25 / \$11.00 · 2030: \$10.50 / \$10.75 / \$11.50

The Golden Gate figures are from the bridge district's toll page (goldengate.org/bridge/tolls-payment). The district raises the toll each July under a multi-year schedule, so check before you budget. On the Bay Bridge, vehicles with 3 or more occupants get a carpool discount during peak hours (weekdays 5-10 a.m. and 3-7 p.m.).

NOTE FOR IMMIGRANTS

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

Getting around without a car: Muni, Clipper and BART

- **Muni (SFMTA):** adult single ride \$3.00 cash, \$2.85 with Clipper, MuniMobile or a contactless bank card, good for 120 minutes. Day Pass \$5.70, monthly pass \$86. Riders 18 and under ride Muni free (cable cars excepted).
- **Coming changes:** SFMTA's adopted budget plans to drop the Clipper discount and move to a daily fare cap in a later phase. Check sfmta.com for the rules in force. Keep your proof of payment after boarding; inspectors can write tickets.
- **Seniors (65+) and riders with disabilities:** \$1.40 with Clipper, \$1.50 cash, \$43 monthly.
- **BART:** fares rose 6.2% on January 1, 2026 and depend on distance; Clipper works on BART. SFO connects to BART by the free AirTrain. Check the current fare at bart.gov.

One Clipper card works on Muni, BART and most other regional transit. Fares: sfmta.com [Muni fares](https://bart.gov).

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 SAN FRANCISCO

Have a question about your immigration status?

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