

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · SAN JOSE

San Jose Car Registration, Smog Check and Toll Guide 2026

For cars brought from another state, cars bought in California, Silicon Valley Express Lanes, Bay Area bridge tolls, and getting around by VTA, Caltrain and BART.

SHORT ANSWER

New residents in San Jose 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. There are no toll roads inside San Jose itself, but the Silicon Valley Express Lanes on SR 237 and US 101 require a FasTrak tag, and the Bay Bridge, Dumbarton and other state bridges cost \$8.50 in 2026. On transit, an adult VTA single ride is \$2.50.

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. Santa Clara County is a smog check county; confirm the rule for your vehicle and ZIP code 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. The DMV offices around San Jose are at 111 W Alma Ave and 180 Martinvale Ln (San Jose), 3665 Flora Vista Ave (Santa Clara) and 600 N Santa Cruz Ave (Los Gatos); book through dmv.ca.gov.

What to bring to the DMV

DOCUMENT	NOTES
☐ Identification	Valid photo ID.
☐ 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.

Tolls: Express Lanes and bridges

There are no toll roads inside San Jose, but the **Silicon Valley Express Lanes** (SR 237 and US 101, up to the county line) require a FasTrak tag. The lanes are tolled Monday to Friday 5 a.m.-8 p.m. and free outside those hours. A solo driver on SR 237 pays a toll that varies with traffic, from \$0.30 to \$8.00. Vehicles with 3 or more people count as carpools; to get the carpool rate, set a FasTrak Flex tag to the number of occupants,

because a standard tag is charged the full toll. When traffic is heavy the lanes can switch to "HOV ONLY" mode, and a solo driver who enters then can be cited \$491. FasTrak customer service: (877) 229-8655. Details: vta.org/go/express-lanes.

When you cross the bay, a different agency takes over: the Bay Bridge, Dumbarton (Fremont to Menlo Park), San Mateo-Hayward, Richmond-San Rafael, Carquinez, Benicia-Martinez and Antioch bridges are run by the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA). The Golden Gate Bridge belongs to its own district with a separate rate schedule. One FasTrak tag usually works on all of them; confirm account details at bayareafastrak.org and goldengate.org. Los Angeles Metro ExpressLanes and Orange County's Toll Roads are entirely different accounts.

CROSSING	TOLL
Bay Bridge, Dumbarton and the 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
Silicon Valley Express Lanes (SR 237), weekdays 5 a.m.-8 p.m., solo driver	\$0.30 to \$8.00 depending on traffic · FasTrak required

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.). The state bridge tolls are scheduled to rise every January through 2030.

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: VTA, Caltrain and BART

- **VTA bus and light rail (adult, ages 19-64):** single ride \$2.50, day pass \$7.50 and monthly pass \$90 (both Clipper only), annual pass \$990. A Clipper single ride includes 2 hours of transfers across VTA buses and light rail. Seniors (65+), riders with disabilities and Medicare holders pay \$1 per ride; youth 5-18 pay \$1.25; children under 5 ride free. Express buses cost double the local fare.
- **Clipper START:** Bay Area residents aged 19-64 with income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level get 50% off VTA single-ride fares.
- **There are no fare gates on light rail.** It runs on proof of payment with random inspections; tap your Clipper card or validate your ticket, or you risk a citation. An 8-hour light rail pass is \$5.
- **Caltrain:** an adult one-way fare runs from \$4.00 (1 zone) to \$15.25 (6 zones) by distance. San Jose Diridon is in zone 4 and San Francisco in zone 1. The Clipper discount ended on January 1, 2026. Work out the exact fare at caltrain.com/fares.
- **BART:** fares rose 6.2% on January 1, 2026 and depend on distance; Clipper works on BART. BART reaches the Berryessa/North San Jose and Milpitas stations today. The extension into downtown San Jose, Diridon and Santa Clara is not built yet; VTA's schedule runs tunneling construction to about 2036, so do not plan on taking BART downtown any time soon. Check current fares at bart.gov.

- **San Jose airport (SJC):** VTA's Route 60 Airport Flyer is free in both directions from SJC, to Milpitas BART, Santa Clara Transit Center (Caltrain) and Winchester. Transfers to light rail and boardings elsewhere on the route need a fare.

One Clipper card works on VTA, Caltrain, BART and most other regional transit. Fares: vta.org/go/fares.

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 JOSE

Have a question about your immigration status?

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

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