

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · ST. PAUL

Vehicles, Snow Parking Rules and Towing in St. Paul 2026

A snow emergency runs 96 hours and the rule reads the sign on the street. Only the registered owner can collect the car, and the ticket and the tow are paid to two different places.

SHORT ANSWER

Three authorities, three separate rules. **Registration is the state's**: no inspection and no emissions test, a value-based tax, studded tires illegal, and we **found no** separate local vehicle fee added by St. Paul. **The ticket belongs to the courts**: a snow emergency ticket is **\$56** and is paid **to the Minnesota courts**, not at the impound lot. **The snow rule is the City's**, and here its logic bears no resemblance to its neighbor's: an emergency begins at 9 p.m., runs **96 hours**, and you read **the sign on the street, not your house number**. The item most often misunderstood is in the towing section: **in this city only the registered owner can collect the vehicle**.

Registration: the state's job, in brief

- **No inspection and no emissions test.** The metro emissions program was repealed by a 1999 statute and the revisor's site today shows only "[Repealed]". We also found no periodic safety inspection for an ordinary passenger car; **there is no appointment but the obligation does not go away**, since equipment such as tires, glass and lamps is enforced on the road.
- **The money goes to the registration tax rather than to an inspection**, and the tax tracks the vehicle's list price: on a car more than eleven years old the annual item drops to a fixed figure, while a new car costs real money. The formula and the counter fees are in [the vehicle section of the state guide](#).
- **Insurance is more expensive here, and the reason is statutory.** Minnesota is a no-fault state; the mandatory package includes personal injury protection and uninsured and underinsured motorist coverage. A quote from another state tells you nothing here. Two protections for a newcomer are in the same section: **where no score can be produced because there is no credit history, the insurer must exclude credit as a factor**, and the scoring methodology may not include gender, race, national origin or religion.
- **Studded tires are illegal, chains are allowed**, snow tires are not mandatory, and what people actually buy is a studless winter tire. The foreign plate exception **does not apply** to a person whose regular place of work or school is in Minnesota.
- **One question we cannot answer:** we **could not verify** whether a Social Security number or an ITIN is required for vehicle registration. There is an explicit provision removing the number requirement in the license sections, and we could not find its counterpart in the vehicle sections. Call the deputy registrar before you go to the counter, and take your passport, your I-94 record and, if you have one, your work authorization document.

Where the ticket is paid: the answer is different in this city

In the city across the river parking tickets are issued under county authority and paid to the county's violations bureau. **In St. Paul the mechanism is different:** the City's own snow emergency page gives the ticket as **\$56** and states that it is paid **to the Minnesota courts and cannot be paid at the impound lot**. The practical consequence: if your car has been towed you cannot settle the ticket and the tow in one visit; the lot collects only the towing and storage items, and the ticket runs on its own track. Two further items on parking belong to this city. First, **the 48-hour limit on one on-street spot runs all year**: snow or no snow, a vehicle may not be left in the same spot for more than 48 hours, so factor that in if you plan to leave the car on the street while you travel. Second, **reporting a car that has not moved is not always possible**: while the night and day plowing phases of a snow emergency are under way no report is taken, and from **5 p.m.** after the day phase Ramsey County's non-emergency dispatch line (**651-291-1111**) takes these reports, with the same number handling Saint Paul Police parking enforcement at other times. The City notes on its own page that **this number changed after last winter's season**, so do not rely on a number you see in an old listing. One reminder on plate tabs as well: if your tabs have expired, getting a towed car back becomes a second errand, so check your tab date before winter.

The snow emergency: 96 hours, three phases, and the sign

PHASE	HOURS	WHERE YOU MAY NOT PARK
Phase one, night plowing	From 9 p.m. on the day of declaration to 7 a.m.	Streets signed as a night plow route (some signs cover only one side of the street). All of downtown falls in this phase even though it is unsigned
Phase two, day plowing	The next day, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Streets and sides of streets with no night plow route sign , until plowed to the curb. If your block has no sign, it is a day plow route
Phase three, clean-up	The rest of the 96 hours	Crews do additional plowing, salting and push-backs. Any vehicle parked where the street has not been plowed to the curb is subject to ticketing and towing for 96 hours after the emergency took effect

The practical consequence of the sign logic is that you need to **read the sign on your block before winter arrives**. Night plow routes are typically both sides of the arterials, all of downtown and one side of north-south residential streets; day plow routes are typically both sides of east-west residential streets and one side of north-south streets. But that is a generalization, and the decision is **the sign on your block**. The thing to do today is take a photograph of it and keep it on your phone.

FOUR THINGS THAT SEPARATE THIS CITY'S WINTER RULE FROM ITS NEIGHBOR'S

- **There is no street parking ban that runs all winter, and the City explains why itself:** off-street parking here is very limited and a large share of residents park on the street, so banning street parking through the winter months, as suburban communities do, is not an option. In exchange the rules are hard once an emergency is declared. What is reported to trigger a declaration in practice is accumulation of about **three inches or more**.
- **Residential streets are plowed only during a declared emergency.** Outside an emergency crews concentrate on main roads and high-volume areas. The whole city, more than **1,800 lane miles**, is plowed in roughly **24 hours** with up to 80 pieces of equipment, and residents are typically given at least **six hours** of notice.
- **Alleys are never plowed.** That matters directly if you rent a house whose garage opens onto an alley: you may not be able to get the car out in winter. Ask when you look at houses, because there is no fix for it after you sign the lease.
- **The one-sided parking ban is a separate regime** and it is **suspended during a snow emergency**. Do not try to apply two rules at once; the moment an emergency is declared, what governs is the three-phase schedule above.
- **And the real trap is changing cities:** across the river the rule reads **your building's house number**, here it reads **the sign on the street**. A reflex learned in one city gets your car towed in the next, and for a reader who works in one and lives in the other that is the most expensive confusion of the winter. If you move from one settlement to another, **read the rule again**.

How to find out whether it is declared

- **Sign up for email and text alerts on the City's snow page.** Alerts come in **English, Spanish, Hmong and Somali**; **Turkish is not on that list**. Reading the rule in this guide and saving a screenshot to your phone is the smallest and most profitable thing to do before winter.
- **The City publishes its own parking map**, so you can see which street closes in which phase.
- **The City information and complaint line is 651-266-8989**, weekdays 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. **This city has no 311**; Saint Paul Public Works is **651-266-9700**.
- **We print one conflict as it stands:** an older City promotional item carries a separate snow hotline number, but **the current rules page does not use that number**. We do not pick a side; use the information line on the current page and do not rely on a number from an old brochure.
- **Two further notes.** Some declarations have opened a downtown parking ramp free for the first 24 hours, but **that does not happen with every declaration and it is not a general rule**, so do not plan on it without reading the notice. And in 2026 two neighborhoods ran **a pilot in which parking alternated by address side weekly** and the snow emergency rules did not apply there; we **could not confirm** whether that pilot continues this season, so if the signs in your neighborhood look different, ask the City.

If your car is towed: the amounts and who can collect it

ITEM	AMOUNT	WHERE IT IS PAID
Snow emergency parking ticket	\$56	The Minnesota courts. Not payable at the impound lot
Towing and impound, collected before midnight on the day of the tow	\$246 (\$143.89 towing, \$80 impound administration fee, \$22.11 sales tax)	The impound lot
Each additional day of storage	\$15	The impound lot
Fee to have the truck unhook the car after hooking up has started	\$75	On the spot

We give the last line with a caveat: that figure did not come from the text of the City's own ticketing and towing page but from a secondary capture, so do not plan on negotiating a drop fee once the truck has arrived; confirm the amount on the spot. The other three items come from the City's own page. The lot is at **1129 Cathlin Street** and the phone is **651-502-7480**; the lookup searches by plate or VIN and the lot takes cash and two major credit card brands. Remember that storage accrues every day: **the difference between going in the first 24 hours and waiting three days is \$45.**

- 1 Find out whether the car is at the lot.** The City's own lookup searches by plate or VIN; the phone is **651-502-7480**. If the vehicle is not listed, check again in an hour; it may be in transit.
- 2 Decide who goes, and do not take this lightly.** In this city **only the registered owner** can collect the vehicle. The same-surname relative and notarized authorization route used across the river **does not carry here**; research could not confirm that it applies in St. Paul. If the car is registered to your spouse or a relative, **that person** has to go to the lot.
- 3 Assemble the documents:** proof of ownership (title, bill of sale or lease), **valid photo ID or driver's license**, proof of insurance for that vehicle, and **the keys**. A valid license is required to drive the car off the lot.
- 4 Keep the payment items separate.** The ticket goes to the court, the towing and storage to the lot. Remember you cannot pay the ticket there.
- 5 Two things to do today:** find out whose name the car is registered in, and keep the lot's number and a copy of your title within reach. If the household has one car that several people drive, check **today, not on the night it is towed**, who holds the registration and whether that person has a valid license.

A VEHICLE TOWED BECAUSE OF IMMIGRATION DETENTION: WHAT WE CAN SAY HERE

- In this guide series we found a very valuable line on the impound lot page of the city across the river: **vehicles abandoned due to ICE detention are released to the owner or a representative at no cost**, on evidence of detention and proof of ownership. That provision belongs to that city and **we do not carry it into this guide**: research **could not confirm** an equivalent in St. Paul, nor in the other settlements this series covers.
- **That is not the same as saying no such option exists here.** We do not say there is none; we say it was not found, and those are not the same thing.
- **What to do:** if a family member has been detained and their car is still on the street, call the lot, explain the situation, ask whether there is a fee waiver or a payment arrangement, and note the answer. Do not give up without asking.
- **The clock is running.** Daily storage is \$15 and the ticket runs on its own track; in the days after a detention the car is the last thing anyone thinks about, so write this item down now.
- **The detention case itself runs on the federal side** and is not the City's business. We cover the court and the address reporting side in our official offices directory and our moving checklist.

Living without a car: light rail, the train station and the airport

- **One line ends here, the other does not come here.** The **METRO Green Line** leaves this downtown, passes the University of Minnesota and runs into the downtown across the river; it is the only line that genuinely serves both cities. The **METRO Blue Line**, which stops at both airport terminals, does not come to this city, so for the airport you transfer to it in that downtown. If you travel with luggage and children, build the transfer into the plan. The operator is **Metro Transit**.
- **Union Depot is here, and that is a real advantage.** The **Empire Builder** between Chicago and Seattle and the **Borealis** to Milwaukee and Chicago both leave from **Union Depot in this downtown** rather than from across the river. Bringing a visitor from Türkiye up from Chicago by train, or taking the train down to a consular appointment, is a genuine option for someone living here.
- **You tap the Go-To Card at a platform validator before boarding.** One card works on buses, on light rail and on the bus rapid transit routes. There are no gates; the system runs on proof of payment and fares are checked on the train, and a rider who skips the validator is treated as having evaded deliberately. Peak hours are weekdays 6 to 9 a.m. and 3 to 6:30 p.m.
- **Verified pass figures:** 7-day **\$20**, 31-day local **\$65**, 31-day express \$120. A card damaged by fare equipment is replaced for \$5, and cards expire roughly ten years after issue. **We do not print a single-ride fare**, because the Metropolitan Council facts page and the Metro Transit fares page did not agree on the adult local peak fare; check the Metro Transit fares page before you ride.
- **The Transit Assistance Program is the most valuable item in this section:** it cuts the fare to **\$1 a ride even at peak hours** and gives two and a half hours of transfers. Eligibility runs on income (at or below 50 percent of the area median, or no more than 185 percent of the federal poverty guideline), **or** on being supported by an organization enrolled in the program's Eligible Community Organization route. The second route is built for exactly this reader: for someone with no U.S. income documents, the organization's vouching takes the place of income papers. The discount ends **365 days** after first use and does not apply on Transit Link dial-a-ride or Metro Mobility paratransit.

- **One question we cannot answer:** we **could not verify** whether buying a Go-To Card or enrolling in the Transit Assistance Program requires identification or a number. Take your passport and a proof of address to a Metro Transit service center.
 - **The express lane, and a scam warning:** **I-35E**, running north out of this city toward White Bear Lake, has an express lane of about nine miles; northbound it operates weekdays from 3 to 7 p.m. and southbound from 6 to 10 a.m., a solo driver pays a **dynamic toll** and **two or more occupants travel free**. The state transportation department, **MnDOT**, also **warns about toll scam text messages** on its own page: if an unexpected message demands payment, do not tap the link, and check on the agency's own page instead.
 - **A note for immigration court:** there is a light rail stop at the court door and parking is free, but that stop is on the METRO Blue Line, which does not come to this city. From here build in a transfer; the detail is in our official offices directory.
- 1 **Look at the age of the car you buy.** The tax tracks the original list price; a new car is expensive here on an annual basis.
 - 2 **Call the deputy registrar before you go** and ask about the identification number and the document list; this guide does not answer that question.
 - 3 **Compare quotes on the coverage list**, not on the premium; personal injury protection is mandatory here.
 - 4 **Buy studless winter tires.** Studs are banned and the foreign plate exception does not apply to someone working or studying here.
 - 5 **Read and photograph the sign on your block** and sign up for the City's alert list. The rule reads the sign, not the number.
 - 6 **If your garage opens onto an alley, plan for winter now.** Alleys are not plowed.
 - 7 **Pay the ticket to the court and the tow to the lot**, and find out today whose name the car is registered in.
 - 8 **When you look at rentals, ask about a garage or a reserved space** and ask for the answer in the lease. A car towed twice in one winter usually costs more than a season of parking.



TURKISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY IN ST. PAUL

Have a question about your immigration status?

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