

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · TEXAS

Vehicle Registration, Emissions and Toll Roads in Texas 2026

The new identification regime for vehicle registration has two separate effective dates. A valid Texas license satisfies the list by itself, and because the four city guides do not say so, they alarm readers for no reason.

SHORT ANSWER

Read three sentences together. First: under the motor vehicle agency's own bulletin the new identification requirements take effect **March 5, 2026 for an initial registration** and **January 1, 2027 for renewals**. Second: **a valid Texas driver license, limited term included, satisfies the list by itself**, and **a United States passport also suffices on its own**; the passport that does not suffice is a **foreign** one. Third, a contradiction: **the public safety agency issues a driver license on an I-94 annotated with parole, while the motor vehicle agency does not accept the same document for a vehicle registration**. Two agencies, two regimes, and we take no side. **On emissions there is a date**: Bexar County enters the program on November 1, 2026, and **no registration renewal happens without passing the test**.

The calendar first: two separate effective dates

TRANSACTION	WHEN	WHAT CHANGES
Initial registration	March 5, 2026	New identification requirements in force
Renewal	January 1, 2027	Until then counties process renewals under the practice that applied before November 2025

We leave one thing out because the bulletin leaves it out: the bulletin does not say plainly **which list** will apply to renewals after January 1, 2027. Saying that **identification checks will begin on renewals too** is safe; saying that **the same list will apply** could not be verified this round. The bulletin also states that it supersedes the notices circulated in November 2025.

Identification accepted for an initial registration

- A valid, unexpired driver license or state identification card compliant with the federal identification standard, issued by any state or territory.
- A valid, unexpired license or identification card issued by **a state that requires proof of lawful presence**, even if it is not compliant with the federal standard. **Texas is on that list of states**.

- A license or identification card from any state, **together with** a United States birth certificate, certificate of naturalization or certificate of citizenship.
- A **valid, unexpired United States passport**.
- A **valid, unexpired foreign passport together with** one of the following: an **I-94 (provided it does not show parole status)**, a current permanent resident card, or an unexpired immigrant visa.
- A valid, unexpired license to carry issued by the public safety agency.

TWO SENTENCES THE FOUR CITY GUIDES DO NOT PRINT

- **If you hold a valid Texas driver license, even a limited term one, this list is already satisfied for you.** You do not need to carry a passport and an I-94 as well.
- **The passport that does not suffice is a foreign passport.** A United States passport is enough on its own. Some of the four city guides say only **passport**, and that is incomplete.
- **If you have no Texas license**, your foreign passport needs an I-94, a permanent resident card or an immigrant visa alongside it.

THE PAROLE CONTRADICTION: DO NOT COLLAPSE IT

- The motor vehicle agency's own definition: an unexpired passport issued by a foreign government is accepted together with an I-94, **but not if the I-94 shows that the bearer is only in parole status**.
- The rule text states its own reason: **because this status can be revoked at any time**.
- **By contrast the public safety agency's lawful presence guide accepts an I-94 annotated with parole for a driver license**.
- **Two official sources give two answers to the same document and we take no side**. The accurate sentence: **the license can be obtained, the registration cannot**.
- If you are on parole, **talk to your lawyer** before registering a vehicle in your own name.

Not every transaction uses the same list

TRANSACTION	WHICH LIST
Initial registration	Narrow list (above)
Title only, without registration	Broad list
Off-highway vehicles	Broad list
Exempt vehicles, temporary plates, short-term permits, 30-day plates	Broad list
Rental trailers, commercial registration, agricultural and other alternative registration	Broad list

The broad list accepts a foreign passport on its own and also includes state licenses, a license to carry, a United States passport, military identification and various federal agency credentials. The bulletin's own note: **only documents on the broad list may be expired by up to 12 months**; nothing on the narrow list may be expired. An agent acting for a company or a leasing firm presents **their own photo identification**, and meeting the broad list is enough for it.

Deadlines, fees and the new resident tax

The motor vehicle agency's own sentence: you have **30 days** to register your vehicle after moving to the state. The order the agency recommends: inspection and insurance first, then registration and plates, then the electric vehicle fee, and the driver license last.

ITEM	AMOUNT
Passenger car and light truck base registration	\$50.75
Registration fee including the insurance verification program share	\$51.75
Pickup, 6,001 to 10,000 pounds	\$54.00
Trailer up to 6,000 pounds	\$45.00
Motorcycle and moped	\$30.00
Electric vehicle annual additional fee	\$200.00
Processing and handling	\$4.75
State fee charged in place of the inspection	\$7.50
New plate	\$6.00 plus \$0.50 automation
New resident vehicle tax	\$90.00 , due within 30 calendar days of the vehicle's first use in Texas

- **The county share varies across the state:** the local fee can run from **\$0.00 to \$31.50**; counties may add up to **\$10.00** for a road and bridge fund, up to **\$20.00** for transportation and up to **\$1.50** for child safety. The same vehicle produces two different bills in two counties.
- For active duty service members the new resident tax deadline is **60 days**. A person who has never registered the vehicle in their own name elsewhere pays motor vehicle use tax instead, on **80 percent** of the sales price or the standard presumptive value.
- Renewal opens **90 days before the expiration date**; if your registration has lapsed and you have not been cited, you may renew for **up to 12 months** and **your expiration month does not change**.
- After a registration expires the vehicle may be driven for **up to five business days** without a citation; after that a fine of **up to \$200.00** may be issued.

Inspection: safety ended, emissions did not

The annual safety inspection for non-commercial vehicles ended on January 1, 2025. The motor vehicle agency's sentence: As of January 1, 2025, non-commercial vehicles are no longer required to obtain a safety inspection. The environmental agency says the same with the same date. A **\$7.50** state fee at registration took its place.

We print the contradiction: the public safety agency's own vehicle inspection section page still states in a general sentence that vehicles registered in Texas must pass an annual inspection. Two official sources disagree; the dated sentences from the motor vehicle agency and the environmental agency are newer and

more specific. **And we do not say something does not exist:** the inspection that ended was for **non-commercial** vehicles, and the regime for commercial vehicles and certain special classes was not measured this round.

Emissions testing and November 1, 2026

PROGRAM AREA	COUNTIES COVERED	INSPECTION FEE CAP
Houston, Galveston and Brazoria	Brazoria, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Montgomery	\$18.50
Dallas and Fort Worth	Collin, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Johnson, Kaufman, Parker, Rockwall, Tarrant	\$18.50
Austin	Travis, Williamson	\$11.50
El Paso	El Paso	\$11.50
San Antonio	Bexar, from November 1, 2026	\$18.50

The environmental agency's own sentence: Enhanced inspections will begin in Bexar County on November 1, 2026. The motor vehicle agency's bulletin dated September 15, 2026 says the same and adds that **the test costs \$18.50 at the station in Bexar County.**

TWO OFFICIAL SOURCES DISAGREE ON THE STATE SHARE

- The environmental agency's own page puts the share paid to the state at registration renewal at **\$2.50.**
 - The motor vehicle agency's Bexar County bulletin and the sample breakdown on its registration page say **\$2.75.**
 - **We publish both and take no side;** you will see which one you paid on the receipt.
- Gasoline vehicles are tested once a year **from the second model year through the twenty-fourth; electric vehicles, diesel vehicles, motorcycles and mopeds are not tested.**
 - **A vehicle that does not pass the emissions test cannot renew its registration.** If your renewal notice carries a compliance note, no renewal happens until the issue is resolved. The environmental agency runs a registration denial line for this: 1-888-295-0141.
 - **A planning tip:** renewals can be done 90 days before expiration and a valid emissions test can be obtained within that window. If you live in Bexar County, spread your November renewal across it.

Toll roads: who operates, who bills

By the transportation agency's own counts there are **12 toll road operators** in the state, and its sentence is this: each one **sets its own business rules, billing practices and toll rates.** The consequence for you: **when a bill arrives, the agency on it may not be the agency on the sign. You will dispute it with the agency that issued the bill.**

ROAD OPERATOR	REGION	AGENCY THAT BILLS
Texas Department of Transportation	Austin, Houston, Dallas and Fort Worth	Harris County Toll Road Authority (Austin and Houston) or North Texas Tollway Authority (Dallas and Fort Worth)
Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority	Austin	Itself
SH 130 Concession Company	Austin	Harris County Toll Road Authority
Harris County Toll Road Authority	Houston	Itself
Brazoria County Toll Road Authority	Houston	Harris County Toll Road Authority
Fort Bend County Toll Road Authority	Houston	Harris County Toll Road Authority
Montgomery County Toll Road Authority	Houston	Harris County Toll Road Authority
North Texas Tollway Authority	Dallas and Fort Worth	Itself
LBJ Infrastructure Group	Dallas and Fort Worth	North Texas Tollway Authority
NTE Mobility Partners and NTE Mobility Partners Segments 3	Dallas and Fort Worth	North Texas Tollway Authority
North East Texas Regional Mobility Authority	Dallas and Fort Worth	North Texas Tollway Authority
Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority	Rio Grande Valley	Itself

- **The tags recognize each other.** The shared program is called **Central United States Interoperability Partners**, and the agency's sentence says a single account lets drivers travel on most toll roads in **Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado and Florida**. The tags in the program: **TxTag, EZ TAG, TollTag, KTAG, PIKEPASS, ExpressToll and SunPass**.
- **Do not keep more than one tag in your vehicle;** the same trip can be charged twice. Tags do not share **parking** use.
- **One brand has effectively retired.** The old tag site no longer serves its own content and the address redirects to the transportation agency's toll roads page. The agency's sentence: **as of November 9, 2024** the Harris County Toll Road Authority handles toll transactions on the transportation agency's roads in the Austin and Houston regions.
- Existing TxTag tags keep working, but **anyone who needs a new or replacement sticker must order an EZ TAG through the Harris County Toll Road Authority. Your old account may not have been transferred;** ask whether it was.
- Paying in person is still possible at one location: the agency states that the TxTag customer service center in Austin (12719 Burnet Road) accepts **cash, check, money order and credit cards**, and that the counter is open weekdays from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and Saturdays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

TAG ACCOUNTS AND THE NUMBER QUESTION: WE LIMIT THIS TO ONE OPERATOR BY NAME

- **The North Texas Tollway Authority's own application page asks for only three things:** the vehicle plate number, the year, make and model of the vehicle, and a credit or debit card.
- The page **makes no mention of a Social Security number, a driver license or any card issued in the United States.** The agency's own note: **there is no monthly fee.**
- Account thresholds: **\$40.00** covers up to three tags per account and reloads when the balance falls below \$10.00; **\$10.00** covers a single vehicle and reloads when the balance falls to \$5.00.
- **We do not generalize this to the state.** The site of the agency that issues the Houston-side tag could not be reached this round, and **its account opening conditions, deposit amount and cash reload options could not be verified.**
- **So we write no sentence saying that a number is or is not required for a tag in Texas;** what we write is what one operator asks for on its own application page.

If you drive without a tag: three separate regimes

North Texas: billing from the plate

- Bills are issued on a **25-day cycle.** Careful: that is a **billing cycle, not a payment period.** The agency's measure for payment is **the due date printed on the bill.** The sentence in one of the four city guides saying **you have 25 days** confuses the two.
- The tiers: no additional charge on the first bill; **\$10.00 on the first notice of non-payment, another \$25.00 on the second;** after that collections, legal process and court costs.
- **The dispute window:** the agency's own agreement text requires disputes to be made **in writing within 120 days of the billing date;** items not disputed in time are treated as final.
- All four city guides state that the tagless rate is **twice** the tagged rate, but the agency's current rate page could not be reached this round. **We carry the claim from a secondary source and hedge it;** confirm the current difference with the agency.

Houston and Austin: bills, and a double bill in Austin

- If you have a tag account but your balance is short, a bill arrives by mail **at a higher rate and with additional fees.** A bill also arrives if your tag was not read and your plate does not match an existing account.
- The agency's one-sentence summary: **Under Texas law, the owner of the vehicle is responsible for any toll charges and fees, regardless of who was driving at the time.** So the responsible party is the **registered owner;** keep that in mind when you lend your car.
- **The double bill in Austin is real:** without a prepaid tag you can receive **two separate bills** depending on which roads you used, and **you have to pay both.**
- The Houston-side fee tiers could not be verified this round; **we publish no figures.** The agency's customer service number for disputes is 281-875-3279.

IN FORT BEND COUNTY THERE IS NO PAY-BY-MAIL ROUTE AT ALL

- From the county toll road authority's own pages: ELECTRONIC TOLL TAG ONLY and NO CASH, NO PAY BY MAIL
- The authority **offers no pay-by-mail or video tolling option.**
- A driver on these roads without a valid electronic tag can be issued a **citation for failure to pay a toll.**
- The plate is photographed and a **violation notice is sent to the registered owner by first class mail.**
- The violation payment center number is (855) 999-2024, weekdays 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. **The regime is clear; the fee amounts were not measured.**

The statutory side: two deadlines to memorize

- **A notice is deemed served on the fifth day after it is placed in the mail.**
 - **If a written request for a hearing is not made within 30 days of that day,** the decision becomes final and **cannot be appealed.**
 - **Habitual violator definition:** a registered owner who has received at least **two written notices of non-payment** within one year, whose notices together cover **one hundred or more unpaid tolls**, and who has not paid in full. Rental and stolen vehicle transactions are deducted from that count.
 - The hearing is held in a **justice court** in a county where at least a quarter of the transactions occurred; failing to appear waives your rights. An appeal to the county court is available within 30 days, but **an appeal alone does not suspend enforcement.**
 - At the end of the regime there is **denial of vehicle registration, a misdemeanor offense and vehicle impoundment.** The authority may also **publish** the name, city and state of residence, number of unpaid tolls and total amount owed.
 - **The good news, and the first thing to ask for:** the statute provides a **right to a payment plan;** the authority may enter an agreement spreading the debt over time.
 - **A separate regime for out-of-state and foreign plates:** the notice can be served in person, non-payment is an offense and **each transaction is a separate offense**, punishable by a fine **not to exceed \$250.00.**
 - **Fake messages:** the transportation agency's sentence is short and useful: **TxTag/TxDOT does not send texts or emails for past due tolls.** If you receive one, **the message itself is already a sign;** do not touch the link.
- 1 Start the insurance policy before registration** and have it written to your Texas address; a policy opened in another state does not become valid automatically when you move.
 - 2 Go to the counter with your Texas driver license.** Even a limited term card satisfies the identification list by itself; without one, bring a foreign passport plus an I-94, a permanent resident card or an immigrant visa.
 - 3 Put the 30 days for registration and the 30 days for the \$90.00 new resident tax on the same calendar.**
 - 4 If you live in Bexar County, mark November 1, 2026;** no renewal happens without passing the test and the renewal window is 90 days.

- 5 Get a tag and carry only one.** The cost of driving without one is not only a higher rate; it is a notice, added fees and a dispute window that closes if you miss it.
- 6 Update your address on the tag account too.** A notice sent to an old address can extinguish your 30-day hearing right without ever reaching you.
- 7 Ask for a payment plan before the debt grows;** that right is in the statute. If you receive a notice, **talk to a lawyer before the deadline passes.**
- 8 For stations, county tax offices and local rates,** see our [Dallas](#), [Houston](#), [Austin](#) and [San Antonio](#) guides.



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