

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · WASHINGTON STATE

Washington State Car Registration, Insurance and Good To Go! Guide 2026

For cars coming from another state or from Türkiye, cars bought here, the fact that emissions testing has ended, minimum insurance and all-electronic tolls.

SHORT ANSWER

First the Washington license, then register the car within 30 days. Registration is not at the DOL licensing office: it is at county auditor or subagent offices, and it is walk-in. Every vehicle starts with a \$43.25 base fee, with tabs, weight and local fees on top, and a \$50 service fee for vehicles from out of state. Minimum insurance is \$25,000/\$50,000/\$10,000. Emissions testing ended on January 1, 2020. All tolls are electronic: without an account, Pay By Mail costs \$2 more per trip.

Step by step registration

- 1 **Get the license, then register.** DOL wants a valid Washington license for vehicle registration. Vehicle licensing offices do not take appointments, you queue; they do not process licenses.
- 2 **Bring your documents.** Your current title and the odometer reading. A plate is issued the same day at the office, or by mail in up to 3 weeks.
- 3 **If you bought a car,** transfer the title within 15 days: a \$50 late penalty starts on day 16, then \$2 a day up to \$125.
- 4 **For a private-party purchase** you need the signed title, a Vehicle Title Application signed in front of the clerk, an odometer statement for 2011 and newer models, and a bill of sale showing the price. Quick Title (the \$89.50 rush) cannot be used for vehicles from out of state.
- 5 **A vehicle imported from abroad** must clear U.S. Customs, with the customs documents (year, make, VIN) signed and stamped by Customs.
- 6 **Renew your tabs every year.** Online through License Express, by mail or in person. Renewal is blocked if you have unpaid traffic tickets or tolls.

Fees (2026)

ITEM	AMOUNT
Base registration fee	\$43.25
Annual tabs	\$30
Filing and service fees	\$6 + \$11 on registration, \$12.50 + \$29 with a title

ITEM	AMOUNT
New license plates (each)	\$50
Title application	\$15
Service fee for out-of-state vehicles	\$50 (for the theft check)
WSP VIN inspection, when needed	\$65
Temporary trip permit (3 days)	\$36
Electric vehicle extras	\$75 electrification fee plus EV fees (\$100 + \$50)

- **Use tax:** if you bought from a private party, there is a 0.3 percent motor vehicle use tax plus your address's sales tax rate, on the vehicle's market value.
- **New resident exemption:** a private vehicle bought and used in another state more than 90 days before you moved is exempt from use tax if you register it in Washington within 30 days. A vehicle bought within 90 days of the move is not exempt; tax paid to the other state is credited.
- **Sound Transit district:** if you live inside the district in King, Pierce or Snohomish County, a 1.1 percent regional transit tax on the depreciated list price is paid at purchase and at every renewal.
- **City transportation fee:** Seattle adds \$50 per vehicle to tab renewal.

Is there an emissions test or inspection?

EMISSIONS TESTING IS GONE

The state's 38-year emissions program ended on **January 1, 2020**; no emissions test is needed to renew registration. There is also no routine safety inspection for private vehicles. It is still illegal to tamper with emissions equipment or drive a smoking vehicle. Under the Clean Car Law, new vehicles bought by Washington residents, and 2009 and newer models under 7,500 miles, must meet California emissions standards; look for "California," "50-state" or "Northeast" on the VECI label under the hood. Vehicles bought in another state before you moved are outside that rule.

Minimum insurance

COVERAGE	WASHINGTON MINIMUM
Injury or death, per person	\$25,000
Injury or death, per accident	\$50,000
Property damage	\$10,000

The penalty for driving uninsured starts at \$550, and if you are at fault in a crash and do not pay for the damage, your license can be suspended. Carry your insurance card. With no credit history here your quotes may come in high, so get several. A \$10,000 property damage limit is easy to exceed at today's car prices.

Good To Go! and toll roads

Every toll road in Washington is electronic: no booths and no cash on the bridges and the tunnel, a camera reads your plate. The cheapest way is a free Good To Go! account and a \$5 sticker pass. Without an account the bill is mailed to the address DOL has on file, and **Pay By Mail costs \$2 more per trip**.

- **Open an account:** MyGoodToGo.com or 1-866-936-8246 (free interpreters by phone). Pre-Paid (\$30 opening balance) and Pay As You Go; no monthly fee.
- **Passes:** sticker \$5, Flex \$15, motorcycle \$8, license plate pass \$12. If you add a plate without a pass (Pay By Plate), 25 cents is added per trip.
- **If unpaid:** a \$5 late fee after the due date, a \$40 penalty per trip 80 days after the trip, and a hold on tab renewal at DOL.
- **Scam warning:** the only official site is MyGoodToGo.com. WSDOT says texts come only from the number 75381 and bills are never sent by text.

ROAD	PASS RATE (2 AXLES)
SR 520 bridge (Seattle-Medina/Bellevue)	Weekdays \$1.35 to \$4.90, charged in both directions
SR 99 tunnel (downtown Seattle)	Weekdays \$1.25 to \$2.80, \$1.25 all day on weekends
I-405 and SR 167 express lanes	Weekdays 5 a.m. to 8 p.m., \$1 to \$15 by traffic; I-405 is free at night, on weekends and on 6 holidays
SR 509 Expressway (near Sea-Tac)	Weekdays \$1.20 to \$2.40 by time and direction, \$1.20 on weekends
Tacoma Narrows Bridge (SR 16)	Tacoma-bound only: \$4.50 with a pass, \$5.50 at the booth, \$6.50 by mail

Express lane prices change within minutes; check the WSDOT mobile app.

NOTE FOR IMMIGRANTS

Remember there are two offices and two separate clocks: the license through a DOL appointment, the registration at a walk-in vehicle licensing office, and the license comes first. Add your plate to your Good To Go! account the day you buy the car. If you move and do not update your address with DOL, the bill goes to your old address and can grow into a \$40 penalty and a tab hold. If you are subject to the address-reporting requirement, you must also report your new address to USCIS within 10 days (AR-11).



TURKISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY IN WASHINGTON

Have a question about your immigration status?

Attorney Asim Clinch serves clients across Washington State, in Turkish and English. Free evaluation: clinchlaw.com/free-evaluation · +1 866-491-7669

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