

FACTSHEET

Motor Vehicles in California

There are approximately 30.7 million vehicles registered in California including:

- 20 million passenger vehicles
- 5 million pick-up trucks
- 740,000 motorcycles
- 2.7 million trailers and trailer coaches
- 1.7 million heavy duty, commercial vehicles, subject to interstate registration
- 554,000 vehicles exempt from registration fees

Vehicle Registration: A motor vehicle must be registered and annually re-registered with the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) so that it can be legally operated on public streets and highways. To register a vehicle, the registered owner must submit proof of insurance, pay registration and other fees, and when required, provide proof that the vehicle passed a smog check inspection (smog checks are typically required every other year for motor vehicles that are at least six years old).

Registration Fee: State law establishes a basic vehicle registration fee of \$34, plus \$22 surcharge for additional personnel for the California Highway Patrol, for the new or renewal registration of most vehicles. State law also authorizes local agencies to impose separate vehicle registration fee surcharges in their respective jurisdiction for a variety of special programs, including \$1 to deter vehicle theft, \$1 to abate abandoned vehicles, and \$1 for freeway call boxes. Fees ranging from \$2 to \$7 may also be assessed to pay for local air quality programs.

Vehicle License Fee (VLF): Existing law also imposes a VLF, which is in lieu of a personal property tax on all California motor vehicles, at a rate of 1.15% of the assessed value of the vehicle (excluding vehicles subject to the Commercial Vehicle Registration Act[CVRA] in which the fee is calculated at a rate of 0.65%). The taxable value of a vehicle is established by the purchase price of the vehicle, depreciated annually according to a statutory schedule.

License Plates: The first time a vehicle is registered, DMV issues a license plate to the vehicle. The license plates remain on the vehicle for the life of the vehicle and through ownership changes. License plates are only replaced if lost or damaged to the extent that they are not readable.

Vehicle Titles: The vehicle title (or “pink slip”) is the certificate of ownership, and a new title is issued each time the legal owner of a vehicle changes. Each year DMV issues more than six million vehicle titles, about 25% of these are for new vehicles and about 75% are for used vehicles. Also, more than 400,000 vehicles are brought in annually from out of state and issued California titles.

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