



## California Private Car Sale Checklist

Use this checklist to prepare for a private vehicle sale in California. Requirements can vary by vehicle type, lien status, and situation, so always confirm with the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) before completing the transaction.

### QUICK ANSWER

California sellers must sign the back of the title, complete the odometer disclosure section, and file the Notice of Transfer and Release of Liability (NRL) online at [dmv.ca.gov](https://dmv.ca.gov) within 5 business days of sale. A valid smog certificate is required for most 1976+ vehicles over 4 years old. The buyer has 10 days to submit the signed title and fees to a California DMV office.

### KEY FACTS

|                     |                                               |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| State               | California                                    |
| Agency              | California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) |
| Process             | See official source                           |
| Notary required     | No                                            |
| Bill of sale        | Conditional                                   |
| Odometer disclosure | Yes                                           |
| Filing deadline     | 10 days                                       |
| Last reviewed       | May 10, 2026                                  |

### QUICK REFERENCE

|              |                             |                 |                             |
|--------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| NOTARY<br>No | BILL OF SALE<br>Conditional | ODOMETER<br>Yes | INSPECTION<br>Not specified |
|--------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|

### IMPORTANT DEADLINES

**Within 10 days**  
Buyer must transfer title within 10 days of purchase

### PRINTABLE CHECKLIST

#### Seller checklist

- ☐ **Signed vehicle title** **REQUIRED**  
The seller must sign the title over to the buyer. Sign exactly as your name appears on the title.
- ☐ **Odometer disclosure statement** **REQUIRED**  
Required by federal law for vehicles less than 10 years old under 16,000 lbs. Usually completed on the title itself.
- ☐ **Bill of sale** **RECOMMENDED**  
A written record of the sale including VIN, price, date, buyer and seller information. Requirements vary by state.
- ☐ **Vehicle history report (recommended)** **RECOMMENDED**  
Not required but strongly recommended. Helps buyer verify ownership and history.
- ☐ **Release of liability / notice of sale filed with state** **CONDITIONAL**  
Protects the seller from liability after the vehicle is sold. Requirements and process vary by state.
- ☐ **Lien release (if vehicle had a loan)** **CONDITIONAL**  
If there is an outstanding loan on the vehicle, the lienholder must release the lien before or at the time of sale.

#### Required forms

- ☐ **Signed vehicle title** **REQUIRED**  
The certificate of title signed over to the buyer.
- ☐ **Odometer Disclosure Statement** **CONDITIONAL**  
May be on the title itself or a separate form for older titles.



## FEES

**Check official DMV fee schedule** — Private party vehicle transfer fee (Fees include title transfer, registration, and county fees.)

## SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

**Notary:** No — California generally does not require notarization for private vehicle sales.

**Bill of sale:** Conditional — Not required by state law but strongly recommended. Use a private-party form or written receipt.

**Odometer disclosure:** Yes — Required on the title for vehicles less than 10 years old. The seller completes the odometer section on the back of the title.

## STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

- 1 Seller signs the title on the back in the space for seller's signature.
- 2 Seller completes the odometer disclosure section on the title.
- 3 Both parties complete a bill of sale (recommended).
- 4 Seller files Notice of Transfer and Release of Liability (NRL) at [dmv.ca.gov](https://dmv.ca.gov) within 5 days of sale.
- 5 Buyer submits the signed title, smog certificate (if required), and fees to a DMV office within 10 days.

## COMMON MISTAKES

- Seller not filing the Notice of Transfer and Release of Liability, which can result in liability for tickets and accidents.
- Buyer not registering within 10 days, resulting in late fees.
- Missing odometer disclosure on the title.
- Selling without a current smog certificate when required.

## OFFICIAL SOURCES

### California DMV — Transfer of Title

<https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/vehicle-registration/titles/title-transfers-and-changes/>

### CA Notice of Transfer (NRL)

<https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/vehicle-registration/titles/title-transfers-and-changes/notice-of-transfer-and-release-of-liability-nrl/>

### California DMV

<https://www.dmv.ca.gov>

### CA DMV Forms

<https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/forms/>