



Municipal Technical Advisory Service  
INSTITUTE *for* PUBLIC SERVICE

# Tennessee's REAL ID

*Why You Need It, Where to Get It, When to Get It, and  
How to Get It*

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## Introduction

The staff of the University of Tennessee Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS) strives daily to meet its consensus mission. As an agency of the University of Tennessee and in collaboration with the Tennessee Municipal League, MTAS leverages the resource of the university to improve the lives of the people of Tennessee with technical consulting, research, and training for municipal governments. This publication works toward MTAS's mission.

## Background

The REAL ID Act of 2005 was enacted in response to a 9/11 Commission recommendation that the federal government “set standards for the issuance of sources of identification, such as driver’s licenses.”<sup>1</sup> The Act established minimum security standards for license issuance and production and assigned the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) the responsibility for determining whether a state is meeting these standards.



Figure 1-REAL ID Revision

The Act prohibits federal agencies from accepting for official purposes driver’s licenses and identification cards from states not meeting the Act’s minimum standards. The official purposes defined in the Act and regulations are as follows:

- Accessing federal facilities;
- Entering nuclear power plants; and
- Boarding federally regulated commercial aircraft.



Figure 2-Legacy Real ID-Pre-2024

In early 2013, the National Security Council Staff convened an Interagency Policy Committee to develop a plan to ensure that enforcement of the Act’s prohibitions is done fairly and responsibly. This plan, announced on December 20, 2013, defined the initial enforcement phases and established a schedule for their implementation. The Act doesn’t just cover Tennessee; it covers the 50 US states, the District of Columbia, and the US territories of Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and

<sup>1</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. “The 9/11 Commission Report.” January 1, 2004. Available online: <http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf>

the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

## Is This a New Law?

No, as the name of the Act suggests, the Act was established in 2005. DHS issued the REAL ID regulation on January 29, 2008, and began issuing compliance determinations on December 20, 2012. On December 20, 2013, DHS announced a phased enforcement plan to implement the statutory prohibition on the ability of federal agencies to accept driver's licenses and identification cards issued by noncompliant states for official purposes. The deployment of enforcement measures is cumulative, with measures in each phase remaining in effect through successive phases.

## Implementation Schedule

Beginning May 7, 2025, everyone must have a REAL ID or another approved federally issued ID, such as a passport, to enter certain federal buildings, military bases, and nuclear power plants, or board commercial flights within the United States.

The phased implementation below is for historical purposes to communicate that this law has been in place for some time.

**Phase 1** of enforcement began on April 21, 2014, at DHS's Nebraska Avenue Complex headquarters in Washington, DC.

**Phase 2** began on July 21, 2014. This phase applies to restricted federal facilities (or parts of a facility), which are only accessible to federal employees, contractors, and their guests. It applies to about 217 facilities in the custody and control of the General Services Administration (GSA), mostly law enforcement agencies and laboratories—as well as many agency headquarters facilities.

**Phase 3** applies to “semi-restricted” federal facilities (or parts of a facility), which are accessible to the public but subject to ID-based access control. The start date for each facility is based on its Facility Security Level (FSL) classification. Some facilities began on January 19, 2015 (Phase 3A), and some facilities began on October 10, 2015 (Phase 3B).

**Phase 4A** enforcement for boarding federally regulated commercial aircraft, based on the compliance status of the state/territory, began on January 22, 2018.

**Phase 4B** enforcement for all official purposes, based on the compliance status of the card, begins on October 1, 2020. In response to COVID-19, the Phase 4B deadline has been postponed until October 1, 2021.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> On March 26, 2020, President Donald Trump issued an order to delay the implementation of REAL ID until October 1, 2021.

## What Does This Mean for Tennessee Residents?

The Act only affects access control policies where individuals are required to present an identification document for official purposes. It does not require agencies to accept, or individuals to present identification where it is not required for access, nor does it prohibit an agency from accepting other forms of identification, such as a US passport or military ID card.

The Act's prohibitions do not affect the use of state-issued driver's licenses or identification cards, including licensees, for purposes unrelated to official purposes as defined in the Act and its applicable regulations. For example, the Act's prohibitions do not apply to voting, registering to vote, issuing Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD-12) cards, or applying for or receiving federal benefits.

Tennesseans have options. Tennesseans are not required to obtain a REAL ID-compliant license. The decision to get a REAL ID is entirely up to you. A REAL ID driver license or identification is not required for any other reason than to allow you to continue to fly domestically within the United States and access certain federal facilities after October 1, 2021. Beginning May 7, 2025, you must have a REAL ID compliant credential, passport, or other Transportation Security Administration (TSA) approved alternative form of identification to board commercial flights within the United States, access federal buildings, or enter nuclear power plants.

Activity	REAL ID Driver License or ID	Standard Driver License or ID
Driving (DL Only)	Yes	Yes
General Identification Purposes	Yes	Yes
Age-Restricted Purchases	Yes	Yes
Apply For Federal Benefits	Yes	Yes
Boarding Domestic Flight after May 7, 2025.	Yes	No
Enter Federal Facility (that require ID) or Military Base	Yes	No

Table 1-Driver License Type Needed for Activity

## Tennessee's REAL ID

Tennessee's REAL ID is distinctive from the basic Tennessee Driver License. The REAL ID compliant driver license and identification credential both have a gold circle with a star in the upper right corner of the license card to indicate that it is REAL ID compliant. There are other

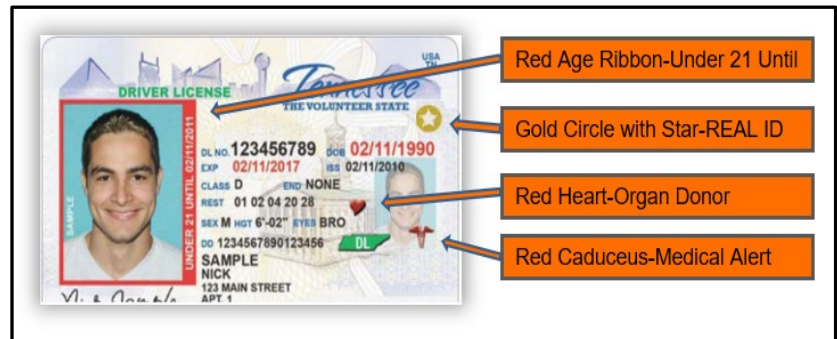


Figure 3-REAL ID Anatomy

symbols on the REAL ID that are useful and easily identifiable. At a glance, a first responder can look at a REAL ID and visually determine if the person is over/under 21-years old, that the person is or is not an organ donor, and if the person has a medical alert condition they have reported.

## Tennessee's REAL ID Cost

A Tennessee REAL ID costs the same as current Tennessee licenses and IDs. If it is time to renew your license, the cost to obtain a REAL ID driver license or identification credential will be the standard renewal fee of an 8-year credential. However, if you are not within your renewal period and you wish to obtain a REAL ID compliant credential, you will be charged a duplicate fee.

License Class (standard 8-year cycle)	License Fees*	Minimum Age	Temporary (X) Driver License ( Identification (ID) License Type	Temporary License Fees*
Class D-Operator	\$28.00	16	XD-Class D Vehicle	\$28.00
Class D w/For Hire	\$30.50	18	XD w/For Hire	\$30.50
Adding For Hire	\$4.50	18	Adding for Hire	\$4.50
PD Learner Permit (over age 18)	\$5.50 (1 year)	18	XPD-Class D Permit (over age 18)	\$28.00
PD Learner Permit (under age 18)	\$10.50 (1 year)	15	XPD-Class D Permit (under age 18)	\$33.00
H-Hardship	\$9.00	14	XH-Hardship	\$33.00
Photo ID (over age 18)	\$12.00	Over 18	ZID-Photo ID Only (over age 18)	\$12.00
Photo ID (under age 18)	\$4.50	Under 18	ZID-Photo ID Only (under age 18)	\$4.50
Class M- Motorcycle	\$29.00	15	XM-Class M Vehicle	\$29.00
DM—Operator & Motorcycle	\$55.00	16	XDM-Class D&M Vehicle	\$55.00
Class A	\$64.00	21	NA	NA
Class B or C	\$56.00	21	NA	NA
1 <sup>st</sup> Duplicate—D or M	\$8.00	-	1 <sup>st</sup> Duplicate XD or XM	\$28.00
2 <sup>nd</sup> or Subsequent Duplicate-D or M	\$12.00	-	2 <sup>nd</sup> or Subsequent Duplicate-XD or XM	\$28.00
Intermediate Restricted—D	\$23.25	16	Intermediate Restricted-XD	\$33.00
Intermediate Unrestricted—D	\$2.00	17	Intermediate Unrestricted-XD	\$28.00
Graduating to Class D	\$8.00-\$12.00	18	Graduating to Class XD	\$28.00

Table 2-REAL ID Costs

## Getting the REAL ID

Federal law requires that your first application for a REAL ID compliant credential be made in person.

If you already have a Tennessee driver license or ID, you can visit any of the State's [44 full-service Driver Service Centers](#), the Nashville Downtown Express Center (William R. Snodgrass Building), or a participating County Clerk's Office (Bradley, Campbell, Cheatham, Chester, Claiborne, Clay, Cocke, Giles, Grainger, Greene, Hamblen, Hamilton, Hancock, Hawkins, Henderson, Henry, Jefferson,

Johnson, Knox, Lake, Lewis, Lawrence, Monroe, Morgan, Perry, Roane, Sequatchie, Shelby, Sullivan, Unicoi, Union, Washington, Wayne, and Wilson).

If you have not been issued a Tennessee driver license, you must visit one of the 44 full-service Driver Service Centers.

Prepare a checklist of required documents for your in-person visit; check off and organize the documents as you obtain them to complete the REAL ID process. Documents needed:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Tennessee Department of Safety & Homeland Security. READ ID Required Documents.  
<https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/safety/documents/REALIDRequirements.pdf>

Documents Required	Examples
All documents must be originals or certified documents. No photocopies are accepted.	
<p><b>Proof of U.S. Citizenship or Legal Presence</b></p> <p>These documents must show the applicant's legal name and full date of birth. * Applicant must present one (1) of these documents:</p> <p>*You must provide certified legal documents supporting any name changes that have occurred.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Official Birth Certificate issued by a U.S. state, jurisdiction or territory (Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, Swain's Island, Guam)</li> <li>• Puerto Rican birth certificates issued before July 1, 2010, will NOT be recognized as proof of Lawful U.S. Citizenship.</li> <li>• The government of Puerto Rico has provided information for citizens to apply for new birth certificates</li> <li>• U.S. Government-issued Certified Birth Certificate</li> <li>• U.S. Certificate of Birth Abroad (DS-1350 or FS-545)</li> <li>• Report of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the U.S. (FS-240)</li> <li>• Valid, unexpired U.S. Passport</li> <li>• Certificate of Citizenship (N560 or N561)</li> <li>• Certificate of Naturalization (N550, N570 or N578)</li> <li>• U.S. Citizen Identification Card (I-197, I-179)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Proof of Social Security Number</b></p> <p>Applicant must furnish their Social Security Number. If it is not known, one (1) of the following approved documents showing applicant's full name and full Social Security Number is acceptable:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form W-2 within last 12-months</li> <li>• Form 1099 within the last 12-months</li> <li>• Social Security Card</li> <li>• Payroll check stub</li> </ul>
<p><b>Two Proofs of Tennessee Residency</b></p> <p>These documents must show the applicant's name and physical address. Applicant must present two (2) of the following documents dated within the last four (4) months:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current Utility Bill – This includes landline telephone, electric, water, gas, and cable bills.</li> <li>• Current Bank Statement - Internet bank statements are acceptable only if taken to the local bank, stamped and dated by teller as an active account. Checks and checkbook information are NOT acceptable.</li> <li>• Current Rental/Mortgage Contract or Receipt including the Deed of Sale for property.</li> <li>• Current employer verification of residence address or letter from employer as long as it is on company letterhead with an original signature. If employer does not have letterhead, then the signature of the employer must be notarized.</li> <li>• Current Paycheck/Check Stub, Work ID or Badge – residential address must be included on the badge or document.</li> <li>• Current Automobile, Life or Health Insurance Policy - Wallet Cards will NOT be accepted.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Two Proofs of Tennessee Residency (Continued)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current Driver License/ID issued by the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security to a parent, legal guardian or spouse of applicant.</li> <li>• Current Tennessee Motor Vehicle Registration or Title (may use one, not both)</li> <li>• Current Tennessee Voter Registration Card</li> <li>• Internal Revenue Service tax reporting W-2 form within last 12 months.</li> <li>• Receipt for Personal Property or Real Estate Taxes paid within last 12 months.</li> <li>• In case of a student enrolled in a public or private school in Tennessee, the student may provide a photo student ID and acceptable documentation from the Dean or Bursar's Office that the student lives on campus.</li> </ul>
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Figure 4-General License-REAL ID Documents

## Commercial Driver License Requirements

If you have a Commercial Driver License, you will need to present the following documents when applying for a REAL ID:

Documents Required	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All documents must be originals or certified. No photocopies will be accepted.</li> <li>• All CDL License holders are required to have a valid DOT Medical on file with the Department of Safety and Homeland Security or in their possession at the time of visiting the Driver Services Center.</li> <li>• These documents will be required even if you are already a Tennessee license holder and are applying for a REAL ID for the first time or if you are a new Tennessee resident and were previously issued a REAL ID in a different state.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Proof of U.S. Citizenship or Legal Presence</b></p> <p>These documents must show the applicant's legal name and full date of birth.* Applicant must present one (1) of these documents:</p> <p>*You must provide certified legal documents supporting any name changes that have occurred.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Official Birth Certificate issued by a U.S. state, jurisdiction or territory (Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, Swain's Island, Guam)</li> <li>• Puerto Rican birth certificates issued before July 1, 2010, will NOT be recognized as proof of Lawful U.S. Citizenship.</li> <li>• The government of Puerto Rico has provided information for citizens to apply for new birth certificates</li> <li>• U.S. Government-issued Certified Birth Certificate</li> <li>• U.S. Certificate of Birth Abroad (DS-1350 or FS-545)</li> <li>• Report of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the U.S. (FS-240)</li> <li>• Valid, unexpired U.S. Passport</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certificate of Citizenship (N560 or N561)</li> <li>• Certificate of Naturalization (N550, N570 or N578)</li> <li>• U.S. Citizen Identification Card (I-197, I-179)</li> </ul>
<b>Proof of Social Security Number</b>  Applicant must furnish their Social Security Number. If it is not known, one (1) of the following approved documents showing applicant's full name and full Social Security Number is acceptable:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Security Card</li> <li>• Payroll check stub.</li> <li>• W-2 form for current tax year or dated within last twelve months.</li> <li>• 1099 form for current tax year or dated with the last twelve months.</li> </ul>
<b>Two Proofs of Tennessee Residency</b>  These documents must show the applicant's name and physical address. Applicant must present two (2) of the following documents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current utility bill including telephone, electric, water, gas, cable, etc.</li> <li>• Current Tennessee vehicle registration or certificate of title showing Tennessee address (may use one, not both)</li> <li>• Mortgage papers including property deed or mortgage payment coupon or book</li> <li>• Copy of Lease Agreement or contract with notarized signatures OR accompanied by signed realty agency letterhead confirming lease validity</li> <li>• Voter registration card (application for voter registration not accepted)</li> <li>• Military LES papers listing Tennessee as home of record (this is ONLY document that won't have the address)</li> </ul>

Figure 5-Commercial Driver License-REAL ID Documents

## REAL ID Documents Pre-Approval Process

You can get your REAL ID documents pre-approved to ensure you have everything in order when you arrive at the Driver Testing Center. Please allow up to five (5) days to have documents pre-approved. [Visit this site for more information.](#)

## Frequently Asked Questions<sup>4</sup>

### Why is a REAL ID compliant driver license beneficial for me?

It is your choice to get a REAL ID license. If you fly domestically and simply want the convenience of carrying your driver license or ID credential to board your flights or if you do not have another Transportation Security

<sup>4</sup> Tennessee Department of Safety & Homeland Security. REAL ID FAQs. <https://www.tn.gov/safety/driver-services/real-id/faqs.html>

Administration (TSA) approved alternative form of identification, you may want to obtain a REAL ID so your travel plans are not affected.

**Where do I go to have a REAL ID compliant driver license or ID credential issued?**

Federal law requires that your first application for a REAL ID compliant credential be made in person. A REAL ID credential can be obtained at any of the 44 Driver Services Centers or, if you have already been issued a Tennessee driver license or ID, a participating County Clerk Office.

**Do I need an appointment to get a REAL ID?**

No appointments will be accepted for this type of transaction. You may visit a Driver Services Center during business hours (8:30 am – 5:00 pm).

**Will I receive my REAL ID compliant driver license or ID credential the same day I apply?**

No. You will be issued a paper interim REAL ID compliant credential. If you need a REAL ID compliant credential for an upcoming trip, please allow enough time before your trip to receive your hard copy in the mail. A paper credential may not be accepted by TSA. Please contact TSA to inquire if a paper copy is accepted. The hard copy will arrive in 10-20 days at the mailing address you provided.

**What if I don't want a REAL ID credential?**

The decision to get a REAL ID credential is completely up to you. It is not required for any other reason than to allow you to continue to fly domestically and access certain federal facilities after May 7, 2025. For example, you may decide not to get a REAL ID if you already have a passport, or another TSA approved alternative form of identification.

**When do I need a REAL ID compliant driver license or ID credential to fly domestically?**

Beginning May 7, 2025, you must have a REAL ID compliant credential, or a TSA approved alternative form of identification to fly within the U.S.

**Will minors be required to have a REAL ID compliant driver license or ID credential to fly domestically?**

Minors are eligible to obtain a REAL ID compliant driver license or an ID credential. Minors that have a current driver license or ID credential have the same choice as existing license holders and can obtain a REAL ID compliant

credential by following the same process as adult drivers.

### **Does obtaining a REAL ID compliant driver license or ID credential cost more?**

No. The REAL ID compliant credential does not have an additional cost. However, if you wish to obtain one before your renewal, you will need to pay a duplicate fee. See the cost schedule in [Table 2](#).

### **What does a REAL ID compliant driver license or ID credential look like?**

A legacy REAL ID compliant driver license or ID credential appears very similar to your existing driver license or ID credential. The distinguishing difference is a gold circle with a star in the right corner. The current REAL ID looks starkly different than the legacy REAL ID. The current credential has a black circle with a star inside located in the top right corner.



### **What if I choose not to obtain a REAL ID compliant driver license or ID credential?**



You will be issued a Standard driver license or ID credential. It will have the phrase “Not for Federal Identification” printed on the front of the credential. The general use of a Standard or REAL ID driver license or ID credential will not change. The only difference is that a REAL ID driver license or ID credential will allow you to board commercial domestic flights or enter certain federal facilities.

### **What does “Not for Federal Identification” mean?**

“Not for Federal Identification” means that a credential is not REAL ID compliant, and you will not be able to use the credential to board a commercial domestic aircraft, enter a federal facility or visit a nuclear facility after May 7, 2025.

### **Can I transfer my REAL ID compliant driver license or ID credential from another state for a Tennessee REAL ID?**

Any REAL ID compliant credential issued from another state can be transferred, however all documentation requirements must be met to be issued a Tennessee REAL ID credential.

### **Is there a federal database of people with REAL ID credentials?**

No. The federal government does not have a federal database storing REAL ID information. Tennessee securely stores your REAL ID information with your

driving record information.

**Does the REAL ID compliant driver license or ID credential have an electronic chip in them that allows my movements to be tracked?**

There is no electronic chip or other electronic device in a Tennessee driver license or ID credential.

**Will I be able to renew my driver license by an alternative method (Online, Self-Service Kiosk, County Clerk Office or Mail) and still receive a REAL ID compliant driver license or ID credential?**

When REAL ID compliant licenses and ID credentials are available, your first or initial application for a REAL ID compliant driver license or ID credential must be done in person at a Driver Services Center or participating County Clerk Offices across Tennessee. After receiving your REAL ID compliant credential, you may be able to use the online renewal service, Self-Service Kiosks, visit a County Clerk Office or the mail-in option to renew or be issued a duplicate of your REAL ID compliant credential.

**Are there any new knowledge and driving test requirements to apply for a REAL ID compliant driver license credential?**

No. There are no knowledge or skills testing requirements to apply for a REAL ID complaint driver license credential if you currently have a valid driver license.

**How do I decide whether I need to obtain a REAL ID compliant driver license or ID credential?**

A REAL ID compliant driver license or ID credential is not mandatory, and some people may find they do not need one. If they have a valid passport or if they do not plan to fly commercially, enter a federal facility or visit a nuclear facility, a REAL ID may not be necessary.

Some questions to consider when deciding:

- Do you fly on commercial aircraft domestically?
- Do you need to access a federal facility or nuclear facility?

If the answer is yes to either or both, you should consider obtaining a REAL ID compliant credential.

## **What happens to travelers who show up without a compliant license after May 7, 2025? Will TSA turn them away?**

Beginning May 7, 2025, travelers will need to present a REAL ID compliant driver license or ID credential or another acceptable form of identification, such as a passport, to board commercial aircraft. If the traveler cannot provide an acceptable form of identification, they will not be permitted through the security checkpoint.

## **Questions or Assistance**

Do not hesitate to contact the following MTAS staff with questions or for assistance.

Steven Cross, MTAS Fire Management Consultant  
[steven.cross@tennessee.edu](mailto:steven.cross@tennessee.edu)  
(931) 548-6827

## References

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