

# \$45

## TSA FEE Complete Guide to Avoiding It

Starting Feb 1, 2026  
With Standard License Only



# Who This Guide Is For

This guide is designed for U.S. travelers who need to understand the new TSA alternative identity verification fee starting February 1, 2026.

## You'll find this guide helpful if you:

- Currently have only a standard (non-Real ID) driver's license
- Want to understand exactly what the \$45 TSA fee covers
- Need to decide between Real ID, passport book, or passport card
- Are planning to travel domestically in 2026 and beyond
- Have a family and need to calculate costs for multiple travelers



# What Changed on February 1, 2026

Starting February 1, 2026, TSA implemented the "TSA ConfirmID" alternative identity verification fee. This applies to all travelers arriving at security checkpoints without Real ID compliant identification.

## Key Facts:

### Fee Amount

**\$45.00** per verification

### Coverage Period

**10-day** travel window from payment

### What It Covers

Biometric facial recognition and federal database verification

### Who Pays

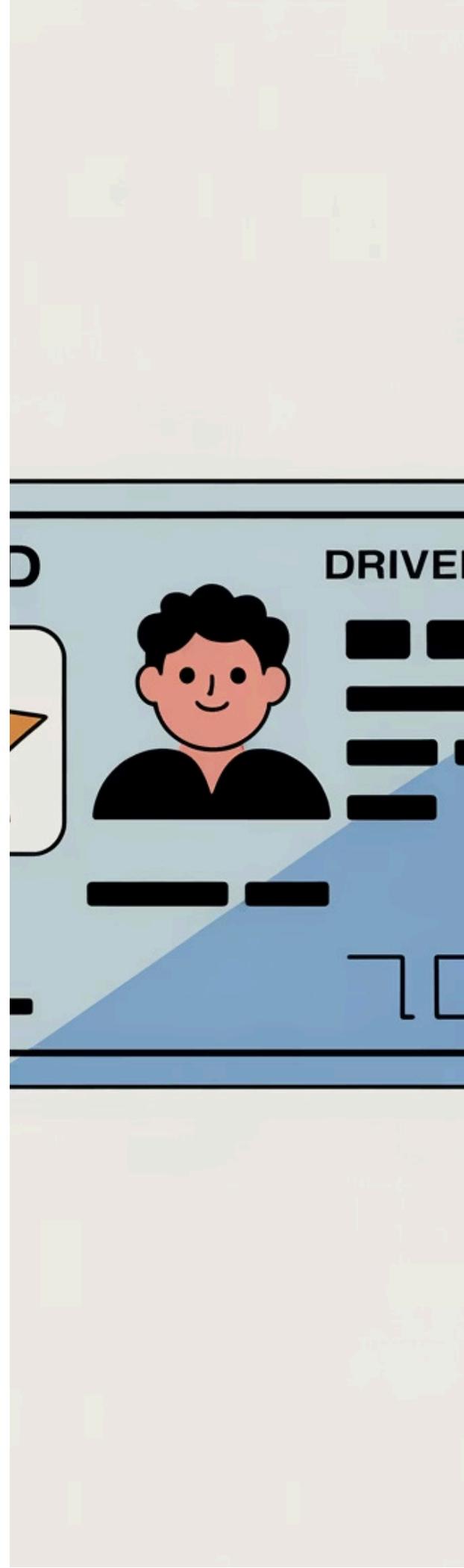
Only travelers with standard driver's licenses

### Who's Exempt

Anyone with Real ID, passport, passport card, military ID

### Children

Under 18 traveling with adults are exempt



# What Happens at the Checkpoint

01

## Directed to ConfirmID Lane

When you present a standard driver's license at TSA security, you'll be directed to a designated ConfirmID verification lane.

02

## Payment Processing

You pay \$45 using credit card, debit card, or mobile payment.

03

## Biometric Verification

TSA performs biometric facial recognition scanning and queries federal databases to confirm your identity.

04

## Digital Receipt

You receive a digital receipt via email confirming your 10-day travel window.

05

## Security Screening

Then you proceed through standard security screening.

 **Time Impact:** This process adds approximately 10-15 minutes to your checkpoint experience.

## Understanding the 10-Day Window

The \$45 fee is valid for 10 days from payment date, not just a single flight.

### What This Means:

- Round trip within 10 days: Pay once (\$45 total)
- Multiple flights within 10 days: Pay once (\$45 total)
- Flights more than 10 days apart: Pay separately for each trip

**Example:** Monday departure with Friday return = \$45. Monday departure with return 12 days later = \$90 (two payments).

# Annual Cost Reality

Understanding how the fee accumulates helps you make informed decisions.

## \$90

### Two Round Trips Per Year

If you take two round trips per year more than 10 days apart, you pay \$90 annually. Over 10 years, that's **\$900** in verification fees.

## \$540

### Monthly Business Travel

Monthly business travel costs minimum \$540 per year, or **\$5,400** over 10 years.

## \$450

### Once Per Year

Even flying just once per year costs \$450 over 10 years, which is significantly more than any permanent compliant ID solution.

## Family Cost Considerations

Children under 18 traveling with an adult don't need identification and are exempt from the TSA fee.

### Family Examples:

- Two adults, two kids under 18: \$180 per year (only adults pay)
- Two adults, one child over 18: \$270 per year
- Two adults taking four trips yearly: \$360 per year

Over 10 years, a family of two adults paying the fee costs **\$1,800 to \$3,600** depending on travel frequency.

# Your Three Compliant ID Options

## Option 1: U.S. Passport Card

### Best Value

The passport card costs **\$65** for first-time applicants (\$30 application plus \$35 execution fee). If you already have a passport book, adding a card costs only \$30 by mail.

Processing takes 4-6 weeks for routine service. The card is valid for 10 years for adults.

**Travel Coverage:** All domestic flights, plus land travel to Canada and Mexico, and sea travel to Canada, Mexico, Caribbean, and Bermuda.

**Why It's Often Best:** Costs less than two TSA verification fees, requires no DMV visit, and provides permanent solution for domestic travel.

## Option 2: State Real ID

Real ID typically costs **\$20-\$60** depending on your state.

Processing times vary significantly by state.

Fastest states process in 1-2 weeks. Average states take 3-4 weeks. During peak periods, some states have experienced 60-90 day backlogs.

**Requirements:** Proof of identity like birth certificate or passport, Social Security number verification, two documents proving current residential address, and in-person DMV visit.

Valid period varies by state, typically 4-8 years, with some states offering 10 years.

## Option 3: U.S. Passport Book

The passport book costs **\$165** (\$130 application plus \$35 execution fee) for first-time applicants. Processing takes 4-6 weeks for routine service.

Valid for 10 years for adults, it covers all domestic flights and all international air travel.

**Best For:** International travelers or anyone who travels abroad even occasionally. The passport book is the most versatile travel document and provides maximum flexibility for unexpected opportunities.

# Comparison Table: All Options

Feature	Passport Card	Real ID	Passport Book
Initial Cost	\$65	\$20-\$60	\$165
10-Year Total	\$65	\$20-\$60	\$165
Domestic Flights	Yes	Yes	Yes
International Air	No	No	Yes
Land to Canada/Mexico	Yes	No	Yes
DMV Visit Required	No	Yes	No
Processing Time	4-6 weeks	Varies	4-6 weeks
Valid Period	10 years	Varies	10 years

## Decision Guide: Which Option to Choose



### Do you travel internationally?

If yes, get **Passport Book (\$165)**. It covers all domestic and international travel and is the most versatile option.



### Do you fly domestically more than once per year?

If yes, get **Passport Card (\$65)**. Best value for domestic-only travelers with no DMV visit needed.



### Do you fly less than once per year?

Consider **Real ID** if you need a DMV visit anyway (\$20-60), or **Passport Card** for long-term value (\$65).

Check your state's current Real ID processing times before deciding, as they fluctuate significantly.

# How to Apply for Passport Card

## 1 Gather Required Documents

Gather proof of U.S. citizenship (birth certificate or naturalization certificate), government-issued photo ID (current driver's license), and one passport photo (2" x 2").

## 2 Complete Form DS-11

Complete Form DS-11 at [travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov). Do NOT sign until instructed by acceptance agent.

## 3 Find Acceptance Facility

Find an acceptance facility (post offices, libraries, county clerk offices) using the facility search tool at [travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov).

## 4 Submit Application

Submit application in person with all documents. Pay fees and have photo taken if facility offers service. Track your application at [travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov).

 For complete step-by-step instructions, see our [Passport Application video](#).

# How to Apply for Real ID

## 1 Check State Requirements

Visit your state DMV website to verify requirements and check current processing times. Determine if an appointment is required.

## 2 Gather Documents

Gather original birth certificate or valid passport, Social Security card (non-laminated), two proofs of residence, and marriage certificate or divorce decree if your name changed.

## 3 Visit DMV

Visit DMV with all original documents. Complete Real ID application, have new photo taken, and pay state fee.

## 4 Receive Your ID

Your card typically arrives by mail. Processing time varies by state. Temporary paper ID may be issued same-day in some states.

 For complete step-by-step instructions, see our [Real ID Application video](#).

# Cost Calculator: Individual Travelers

Calculate your travel pattern. Count how many domestic round trips you take per year and determine if trips are typically more than 10 days apart.

## If trips are more than 10 days apart:

Number of trips per year  $\times$  \$45 = Annual TSA fee cost

Annual cost  $\times$  10 years = 10-year TSA fee total

## Compare to permanent solutions:

- Passport Card: \$65 one-time
- Real ID: \$20-60 one-time (check your state)
- Passport Book: \$165 one-time

Your savings = 10-year TSA fee total minus chosen ID option cost.

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# Cost Calculator: Families

Count number of adults (18+) in your family. Children under 18 are exempt from the fee. Determine number of trips per year.

## TSA Fee Route:

Number of adults  $\times$  number of trips  $\times$  \$45 = Annual cost

Annual cost  $\times$  10 years = Total 10-year cost

## Compliant ID Route (Passport Cards):

Number of adults  $\times$  \$65 = One-time cost

Family savings over 10 years = TSA route total minus compliant ID route total.

# Common Questions Answered

## Do I need Real ID if I have a passport?

No. If you have a valid U.S. passport or passport card, you don't need Real ID. Your passport is already compliant.

## Can I keep paying the fee instead of getting compliant ID?

Yes, but this becomes the most expensive option if you fly more than once or twice per year.

## Does TSA PreCheck eliminate the need for Real ID?

No. TSA PreCheck provides expedited screening but you still need compliant identification.

## What if I refuse to pay the fee?

You won't be allowed through security and cannot board your flight. There are no exceptions.

## Timeline Planning: Traveling Soon

### In the next 30 days:

Pay the \$45 TSA fee for upcoming trips, or apply for expedited passport processing (\$60 extra, 2-3 weeks). Check if your state offers same-day temporary Real ID.

### In 60+ days:

Apply for passport card now with routine processing. Choose based on long-term travel needs, not urgency.

1

2

3

### In 30-60 days:

Apply for passport card with routine processing (4-6 weeks), or apply for Real ID if your state processes under 4 weeks.

# Official Resources & Action Checklist

## Official Resources

- **TSA Information:** [tsa.gov/real-id](https://tsa.gov/real-id) TSA Contact Center: 1-866-289-9673 (Mon-Fri 8am-11pm ET, Weekends 9am-8pm ET)
- **Passport Services:** [travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov) National Passport Information Center: 1-877-487-2778 (Mon-Fri 8am-10pm ET, Sat 10am-3pm ET)
- **State DMV:** Visit your state's official DMV website for current processing times, required documents, fee schedules, and appointment systems.

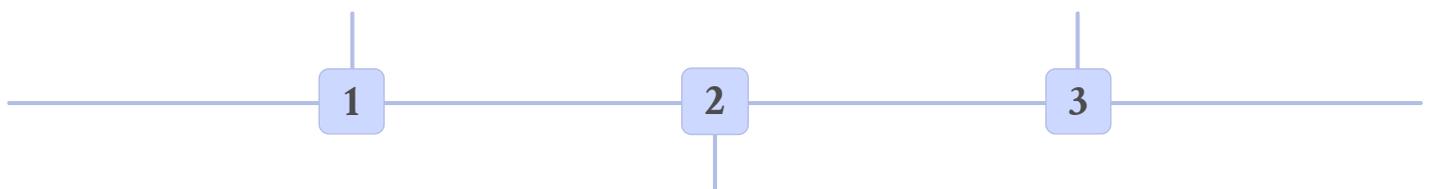
## Action Checklist

### This Week:

- Determine how often you fly domestically per year
- Calculate your 10-year TSA fee cost
- Decide which compliant ID option fits your needs
- Check processing times for your chosen option
- Locate required documents

### Before Next Trip:

- Verify compliant ID has arrived
- Make copy of new ID for records
- Update travel wallet with new ID



### Within 30 Days:

- Apply for your chosen compliant ID
- Schedule DMV appointment if choosing Real ID
- Submit passport application if choosing passport option
- Track application status regularly

# If You're Caught Unprepared

At the airport without compliant ID, your fastest option is paying the \$45 fee. Alternative IDs include passport in your car or hotel, military ID, or Global Entry card.

Don't argue with TSA officers who don't make the policy.

Don't expect exceptions as there are none.

Don't try leaving the airport to get documents as you'll likely miss your flight.

- ☐ **After your trip:** Apply for a permanent solution before your next flight at [travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov) for passports or your state DMV website for Real ID.

