



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on December 2, 2025

TSA Raises Identity-verification Fee, Broadens Biometric and Digital ID Systems

For years, everyday Americans hoped for the elimination of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) — or at least for the rollback of the unconstitutional agency's reach. Instead, the opposite is happening. A new rule, landing on February 1, pushes the United States deeper into a federally controlled identity system. The shift comes with a dry message: The traveler who refuses to join will have to pay and may even stay grounded.

The TSA [announced](#) on Monday that every passenger who arrives at a checkpoint without an “acceptable ID” will be routed into a new, biometric-based identity-verification system called [TSA Confirm.ID](#). Access to that system now costs \$45. The fee covers a 10-day travel period, and applies even if the traveler holds a state license that is not REAL ID compliant.



AP Images

TSA's “Options”

According to the announcement,

All travelers without an acceptable ID, including those who present a non-REAL ID-compliant state driver's license or ID, will be referred to the optional TSA Confirm.ID process for identity verification upon TSA check-in and prior to entering the security line.

The agency then “urges travelers who do not have a REAL ID to schedule an appointment at their local DMV to update their ID as soon as possible.”

The list of acceptable IDs looks broad. Passports, trusted traveler cards, military IDs, tribal IDs, foreign passports, permanent resident cards, enhanced state IDs, and several other forms qualify. The surface impression is flexibility, but the underlying reality is consolidation. All roads lead into a verification system tied to federal databases.

While framed as “optional,” the rule is anything but. A footnote on TSA's own identity verification [page](#) is blunt:

If your identity cannot be verified, you will not be allowed to enter the screening checkpoint.

And without proving your identity to the government, you will not be allowed to board a plane.



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The “options” are simple: Submit your biometric and biographic information to the federal system by getting a REAL ID or another federally “acceptable” document, or pay \$45 to submit the same information through Confirm.ID. The third “option” is no air- or rail travel at all.

TSA says 94 percent of travelers already carry REAL IDs.

Confirm.ID vs. “Old” Method

According to the Federal Register [notice](#) from November 18, TSA created Confirm.ID to move identity verification away from simple document checks and into a system built around biographic and biometric data.

Under the “old” method, TSA’s identity check was straightforward — agents would match “the information on an individual’s travel documentation with a TSA AFOID [acceptable form of identification]” at the Travel Document Checker. If a traveler lacked an acceptable ID, TSA could offer an alternative manual process, though the agency warns that “use of TSA’s alternative identity verification processes neither guarantees that an individual’s identity will be verified nor that the individual will successfully be provided access to the sterile area of the airport.”

The new approach, by contrast, relies on technology-driven identity matching. Confirm.ID uses “biographic and/or biometric information to verify identity and match the individual to their Secure Flight watch list result.” TSA claims this system will “substantially increase” capacity and streamline checks.

But the core rule does not change — travelers who do not present an acceptable ID and who decline the new process “will not be allowed to enter the sterile area of the airport.”

Why There’s a Fee

Congress requires TSA to charge for “any registered traveler program,” and TSA has decided that Confirm.ID qualifies. The agency explains that it must recover all costs associated with building and operating the new system.

According to the Federal Register notice,

The cost of the modernized program includes information technology infrastructure and services, software development, identity verification and validation, mobile computing costs, data infrastructure, integration, security and compliance, program management, as well as customer service and administrative costs.

The original fee was \$18. TSA may raise it through additional notices — which it has now done, increasing the charge to \$45.

Notably, TSA’s 2026 budget request totals \$6.2 billion in net discretionary authority. That includes \$215 million for checkpoint technology and \$20 million for biometric technology, signaling that the agency is expanding its identity-verification infrastructure regardless of what travelers pay.

Additionally, TSA partners with CLEAR, the private biometric identity-verification firm operating in more than 50 U.S. airports. CLEAR uses fingerprint and iris scans to verify identity and speed travelers past the document-checking line, and it has invested heavily in biometric expansion as its national footprint has grown. The company’s market capitalization stands at [\\$4.65 billion](#), reflecting the scale of the biometric-identity industry now intertwined with TSA’s own programs.



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The “Security” Pitch

TSA touts Confirm.ID with a familiar script — identity checks as national security. The agency says the new system is needed to keep “terrorists, criminals, and illegal aliens out of the skies and other domestic transportation systems such as rail.” It frames identity verification as the first gate in the screening process and the final step in Secure Flight’s watch-list matching.

Also, in the agency’s telling, the new identity regime is not an expansion of federal authority, but an overdue correction for past leniency:

The REAL ID law was signed more than 20 years ago, but previous presidential administrations failed to properly implement it. Under President Trump’s leadership, the law was finally implemented and enforced by Secretary Kristi Noem as of May 7, 2025.

The message is straightforward: The government had a mandate, and this White House is the one that finally carried it out.

What follows is the logic of enforcement, not flexibility. REAL ID becomes the threshold. Confirm.ID becomes the processing lane for anyone who misses it. And TSA’s language about blocking “unauthorized individuals” now stretches to include ordinary travelers whose IDs are perfectly valid at the state level but noncompliant under federal rules.

Digital IDs

While a traditional driver’s license may now trigger fee-based extra screening if it lacks REAL ID markings, digital IDs are not only accepted but promoted. [Per the TSA](#),

You can now use your Digital ID at more than 250 airports to verify your identity at TSA checkpoints through platforms such as [Apple Wallet](#), [Google Wallet](#), and [Samsung Wallet or a state-issued app](#).

[The list](#) of participating states keeps expanding. California supports the “California DMV Wallet App, Apple Wallet, and Google Wallet.” Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Maryland, North Dakota, and others accept multiple commercial wallets. Even U.S. passports can be presented for domestic travel through Apple Wallet or Google Wallet’s “ID pass.”

At the same time, TSA is widening its biometric net. The agency notes that it uses “facial comparison technology to verify the identity of travelers on a voluntary basis.”

Digital IDs, commercial wallet platforms, and biometric matching now form the next era of TSA’s identity system, shifting the checkpoint from a physical document to a device, and increasingly, to a biometric check administered through a growing public-private identity framework.

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