

# Vehicle Title Transfer

## When an Owner Has Passed Away

*Washington State | Based on WAC 308-56A-335*

This guide explains your options for transferring a vehicle title after someone has died in Washington State, based on the state's official rule: WAC 308-56A-335. Find the situation that matches yours and follow the steps.

### Before You Go to DOL use this Universal Checklist

- Original vehicle title (if lost, apply for duplicate which will add time and additional fee)
- Certified or legible copy of the death certificate
- Your government-issued photo ID
- Your authority document (court order, Letters, affidavit, death certificate, or community property agreement, whichever applies to your situation)
- Odometer disclosure (required for vehicles under 10 years old)
- Payment for DOL title transfer fees

**!** Some transactions can be completed by mail. Visit [dol.wa.gov](https://dol.wa.gov) or call 360-902-3770 to confirm whether your situation qualifies.

## Your Options at a Glance:

| #        | Situation  | Documents Required  |
|----------|--|---|
| <b>A</b> | Title the vehicle in the name of the estate                  | Court order appointing personal representative                                  |
| <b>B</b> | Transfer directly to a new owner via personal representative | Letters Testamentary, Letters of Administration, OR Certificate of County Clerk |
| <b>C</b> | Surviving joint tenant claims the vehicle                    | Copy of death certificate only  |
| <b>D</b> | Estate not administered (no probate)                         | Death certificate + Affidavit of Inheritance OR Affidavit of Succession         |
| <b>E</b> | Community property – surviving spouse                        | Death certificate + Community Property Agreement                                |

### **A** Title the Vehicle in the Name of the Estate

Use this option when the estate needs time to settle and you are not ready to transfer the vehicle to a final owner yet. The vehicle is held temporarily in the estate's name.

#### Who can do this?

A personal representative, someone appointed by the court to manage the estate. This is the executor named in a will, or an administrator appointed by the court if there is no will.

#### What documents do you need?

- Court order appointing or confirming the personal representative (required by WAC 308-56A-335)
- Completed title transfer application (back of the certificate of ownership)
- Certified copy of the death certificate
- Photo ID of the personal representative

## How will the title read?

The title will show: "Estate of [Deceased's Full Name]" exactly as required by WAC 308-56A-335(3).

**!** This option is a bridge. It lets you keep the vehicle legal while the estate is being settled, then transfer to the final owner later using Option B.

## **B** Transfer Directly to a New Owner via Personal Representative

Use this option when the estate has gone through court (probate) and the personal representative is ready to release the vehicle to its final owner i.e. a family member, heir, or buyer.

## What documents do you need? (one of the following)

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Letters Testamentary</b>        | Issued by the court when there is a will. Authorizes the named executor to act on behalf of the estate. |
| <b>Letters of Administration</b>   | Issued by the court when there is no will. Authorizes the court-appointed administrator to act.         |
| <b>Certificate of County Clerk</b> | An alternative court document that serves the same purpose in some counties.                            |

## You will also need:

- Certified copy of the death certificate
- Original vehicle title (certificate of ownership)
- Completed transfer section (back of the title), signed by the personal representative
- New owner's photo ID

**!** Letters Testamentary and Letters of Administration are time-limited. Many counties require them to be dated within the last 6 months. Check with your county courthouse before submitting to DOL.

## **C** Surviving Joint Tenant

Use this option if the vehicle title listed two owners as joint tenants with right of survivorship. When one owner dies, the surviving owner automatically becomes the sole owner.

**!** This only works if the title specifically indicated joint tenancy with right of survivorship. If the title just lists two names without that language, this option may not apply – check your title carefully or ask DOL.

### **What documents do you need?**

- Copy of the death certificate (this is all WAC 308-56A-335 requires for joint tenancy)
- Original vehicle title
- Your photo ID
- Completed title transfer application (back of the title, signed by you as surviving owner)

**!** This is the fastest path. No court involvement, no probate, no waiting period. Take the death certificate and title to a DOL licensing office and you can walk out with a new title in your name.

## **D** Estate Not Administered (No Probate Required)

Use this option when the estate did not go through formal court probate. Heirs can still claim the vehicle by signing a sworn affidavit instead.

### **What documents do you need?**

- Copy of the death certificate, AND
- Affidavit of Inheritance — OR — Affidavit of Succession

| Affidavit of Inheritance   | Affidavit of Succession   |
|--|---|
| A sworn statement by the heir(s) identifying themselves as the rightful inheritors under the will or by law. | Similar to Affidavit of Inheritance; used when the deceased's property passes by succession under WA law. |
| <b>Both must be notarized.</b>   | <b>Both must be notarized.</b>  |

**!** The affidavit forms are typically available through DOL, your county courthouse, or an attorney. Both must be signed in front of a notary public.

**!** This option avoids the time and cost of probate court for families dealing with smaller or simpler estates. Ask your attorney whether this path is appropriate for your situation.

## **E** Community Property

Use this option if you were married to the deceased and had a Community Property Agreement in place. Washington is a community property state, and this agreement gives the surviving spouse a direct transfer path without probate.

### What documents do you need?

- Copy of the death certificate, AND
- A copy of the Community Property Agreement (the signed agreement between spouses)

**!** A Community Property Agreement is a legal document that must have been prepared and signed before death. You cannot create one after the fact. If you do not have one, see Option B (administered estate) or Option D (not administered) instead.

**!** If you are a surviving spouse without a Community Property Agreement, you may still have strong rights to the vehicle under WA community property law — but the transfer

process will follow Option B or D depending on whether the estate goes through probate.

## Need help with estate administration tasks?

AnnCare is an executor assistant that handles the non-legal administrative work after a loved one passes. We notify agencies, close accounts, set fraud protections, coordinate paperwork and more that saves you 80 hours of work.

[Contact us today](#)

[\*\*anncare.io\*\*](https://anncare.io)

*This guide summarizes WAC 308-56A-335 for general informational purposes and is not legal advice. Consult a Washington State attorney for guidance specific to your situation.*