

Alternatives to Building New Gas Pipelines: Legislative Efforts to Stop Gas Leaks In States and Cities Nationwide

There are a number of states and municipalities that are taking proactive steps to address aging pipeline infrastructure and gas leaks. Some key examples include California, New Jersey, and the city of Boston.

In **New Jersey**,¹ a collaborative effort between the Environmental Defense Fund and the state's largest utility, Public Service and Enterprise Group (PSE&G) has offered an example of how pipeline repair can be incentivized over building new pipeline infrastructure. Using technology to identify the highest risk pipelines, EDF showed how prioritizing pipeline repair to reduce methane leaks can be more economically palatable. The New Jersey Board of Public Utilities had previously rejected requests from the utility to raise customer rates to pay for building new pipelines, but approved the request to focus on high-risk sections of pipelines for repair. Official work on the project began in the spring of 2016. This was one of many efforts to address fugitive methane emissions from aging pipeline infrastructure.

The **state of Massachusetts** is also taking steps to address pipeline leaks. In 2014, the state legislature passed the "Gas Leaks Act,"² which allows companies to submit "gas system enhancement programs" for the replacement of aged infrastructure to the Department of Public Utilities for approval. The programs would be developed with the key goal of repairing old infrastructure to reduce leakage and promote public safety.

The state of California is also taking steps to address natural gas leakage and aging pipelines by employing sensor technology to identify high risk leaks, in response to an explosion that led to the destruction of homes and numerous fatalities in San Bruno, California. In response to the incident directly, regulators in California fined the Pacific Gas & Electric utility for \$1.6 billion in damages. In turn the utility began to use sensor technology to track even the smallest of pipeline leaks. Additionally, in 2014, the state of California passed legislation to require utilities to quantify and repair leaks for environmental and safety concerns.³

The **city of Boston** provides an example of what can be done on a municipal level to address aging pipelines and increased leaks. In December 2016, the Boston City Council passed "an ordinance regarding management and elimination of natural gas leaks"⁴ The primary goal of the ordinance is to eliminate all gas leaks within 6 years of passage. The ordinance essentially

¹ https://e360.yale.edu/features/with_new_tools_focus_on_urban_methane_leaks

² <https://www.mass.gov/lists/gas-system-enhancement-plan-orders>

³ https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140SB1371

⁴ https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/mothersoutfront/pages/935/attachments/original/1481813389/BostonGasLeaksOrdinance_20161212.pdf?1481813389

allows the city of Boston to prevent gas companies from opening ground for new pipeline infrastructure until repairs are made to existing pipeline infrastructure - through coordination of the Department of Public Works and gas companies. Whenever the ground is opened for repairs of water and sewer pipes, the city will invite the gas company to repair or replace old and leaking pipeline infrastructure, while also holding utility companies responsible for damaged trees. It has been estimated that \$90 million per year is being spent on gas leakage, which is being paid for by ratepayers. This city ordinance works to rectify that by “coordinating maintenance, repair, upgrades, and replacement with gas companies in order to minimize costs, traffic disruption and blockage due to street openings.”