



## LOCAL COVERAGE

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# What to know about the new Mass. climate law

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By [Miriam Wasser](#)



The turbines of the Block Island Wind Farm off the coast of Rhode Island. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

Less than two years after enacting a [sweeping climate law](#), Massachusetts is at it again. On Thursday, Gov. Charlie Baker signed the so-called "Act Driving Clean Energy and Offshore Wind" bill into law.

The new law builds on the 2021 law by providing more details about how the state can meet its ambitious climate targets and clean energy goals for 2050 and beyond.

The full text of the legislation is almost 100 pages, and it's pretty dense reading. If you're looking for the highlights, we have you covered.

Here is what you should know about Massachusetts' new climate law:

## Clean energy

### Invests in offshore wind industry

One of the main goals of this law is to aid and expand the offshore wind industry — and specifically, to do so in a way that maximizes and equitably distributes economic and environmental benefits. To this end, the law does several things.

It once and for all eliminates the "[price cap](#)," a controversial rule that required every new offshore wind project to deliver cheaper electricity than previous projects. Critics of the cap argued that by prioritizing power prices, Massachusetts was sacrificing important economic development opportunities and possibly even disincentivizing wind developers from bidding on project solicitations.

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And speaking of the solicitation process, the law also says that when the state is selecting new projects, it must give more weight to bids that promise manufacturing investments, employment opportunities for low income and minority workers, supply contracts with minority and women-owned small businesses, job training opportunities, project labor agreements and other environmental and socioeconomic benefits.

What's more, the big investor-owned utilities like National Grid and Eversource will no longer play a role in helping to select winning bids. That power is now solely in the hands of the Department of Energy Resources and an independent evaluator.

The law also puts the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center in charge of making sure the state has the necessary port infrastructure and job training programs. The center will also oversee the administration of new tax incentives, grants, loans, and other investment opportunities to help build a domestic supply chain, support new technologies and establish more job training programs.

Finally, the law directs the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to help schools across the state establish pilot programs for offshore wind job training. As part of this work, the department needs to track the number of low-income, English-language learners and students with disabilities who complete a certificate program.



Solar panels in a field at Knowlton Farm, Grafton, Mass. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)

## Updates solar rules

The law closes several solar “loopholes,” such as a rule that said only one solar installation per property could qualify for net metering. The law not only scraps that rule, but allows homeowners to be compensated for up to 25 kilowatts of solar power instead of just 10.



The law also makes it easier for farmers and ranchers to put up solar panels in fields where they grow food or raise livestock. And it establishes new incentives for solar projects that are paired with pollinator-friendly plants.

## **Catalogs energy storage**

From various batteries to pumped hydro, the law directs the Department of Energy Resources to catalog all of the energy storage technologies available and under development in the state, and to issue recommendations by the end of 2023 about how to add more storage capacity to the grid.

Also, if the department deems it “beneficial to the commonwealth,” it may issue solicitations for up to 4,800 gigawatt-hours of storage — a substantial increase over what Massachusetts [currently has in operation](#).

## **Invests in the electricity grid**

Building renewable energy projects is one thing, but getting that power to households across the region is a whole other issue. New England's transmission system — the high voltage wires that carry electricity long distances — is not ready for the energy transition we need to undertake to meet our climate goals. The law does a few things to address this.

It establishes a Clean Energy Transmission Working Group to study the best ways to work with other New England states to build new transmission capacity or upgrade existing lines. And it establishes a Grid Modernization Advisory Council, which will help ensure utilities make proactive and cost-effective transmission upgrades.

The law also authorizes the Department of Energy Resources to start soliciting bids from companies that want to build an offshore transmission system to help bring power from offshore wind projects to shore.

## **Declares biomass electricity isn't renewable**

Whether to give renewable energy credits to [wood-burning biomass](#) facilities has been a contentious topic in Massachusetts over the last few years. The new law

supersedes the Department of Energy Resources' [controversial proposal](#) to rewrite biomass rules.

Now, a woody biomass facility can only get credits for the electricity it generates if it was already getting those credits as of January 1, 2022. In practice, this just means that the two small combined-heat and power facilities in the state can continue to qualify.

Biomass is still eligible for credits under a [different state program](#) that rewards generators of "clean heat."

## **Invests in other carbon-free energy**

The law creates an investment fund that the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center can use to help support clean energy research, build relevant infrastructure and otherwise assist the growing industry.

It also, for the first time, gives MassCEC the ability to help companies working on nuclear fusion, networked geothermal and deep geothermal energy technology. And, in an effort to help people in underserved communities access clean energy jobs, the bill aims to help MassCEC expand its workforce development programs.



A rider boards the 23 bus in Boston. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

# **Transportation**

## **Bans internal combustion vehicle sales**

Massachusetts joins the growing list of states banning car dealerships from selling new gasoline or diesel-powered vehicles after 2035. (Used internal combustion engine vehicles can still be sold.)

## **Increases EV rebates**

The current state rebate for a new electric vehicle is \$2,500. The new law increases this amount to \$3,500 for new and used vehicles costing \$55,000 or less, and throws

in an extra \$1,000 for residents who trade in a gas powered car or truck. There are also some incentives for medium and heavy duty zero-emission vehicles.

## **Adds more EV chargers**

The law makes it clear that in order to get more people to use electric vehicles, the state needs more charging infrastructure. To that end, it creates a single state council to oversee the deployment of public chargers, with an eye toward building out these stations in an equitable and accessible way.

The state Department of Transportation is also required to install chargers at all Mass Pike service plazas, five commuter rail stations, five subway stations, and at least one ferry terminal. The department will also need to collect and report data about issues with charging infrastructure.

## **Expands access to EVs**

Electric vehicles aren't cheap. Beyond the new rebates described above, the law allows lower-income residents to get an extra \$1,500 on new and used EV purchases. It also mandates that the state do more outreach about EVs in lower income neighborhoods in and places with a lot of vehicular air pollution.

The state will need to track this effort and report annually about EV adoption among low- and moderate-income households and people of color. It will also need to build a website to help people find available EVs at car dealerships.

## **Greens public transit**

Beginning in 2030, the MBTA can only buy zero-emission buses, and it must electrify the whole fleet by 2040.

What's more, the MBTA needs to prioritize putting zero-emission vehicles on the road in environmental justice communities, and it needs to start factoring emissions and climate resiliency into its long-term planning.

Outside of the MBTA, the law requires various state agencies to help regional transit authorities develop electrification plans, study the challenges of electrifying all

school buses and oversee emissions reductions from ride hailing programs like Uber and Lyft.



Pipelines at the Weymouth Natural Gas Compressor Station. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)

## Fossil fuels and buildings

### Lets some cities ban fossil fuels

One of the more controversial aspects of the original bill was a provision giving 10 municipalities the ability to ban fossil fuel hookups in new construction or major renovation projects. The governor said repeatedly that he had concerns about how this would affect housing prices and availability, and his amended version of the bill included a lot of changes in this section.

The legislature ignored his suggestions, and the pilot program remains the same as in the original bill: Only cities and towns that have met the state's 10% affordable housing target can qualify, and the requirements won't apply to health care facilities and science labs.

Additionally, participating municipalities must collect and report detailed data about emission reductions, construction costs and utility bills.

### Incentivizes electric appliances

There are some big changes coming for Mass Save, the state's energy efficiency program. Beginning in 2025, Mass Save can no longer offer incentives or rebates for fossil fuel-powered heating and cooling systems, unless they are a backup to an electric heat pump, or are being installed in low-income housing or some hard-to-electrify buildings like big commercial and industrial spaces. Mass Save will also be required to do more work in lower income neighborhoods and publish data annually about this effort.

The law also requires electric utilities to establish off-peak rates for EV charging — meaning you'd pay less for electricity you used to charge your car when demand is low.

And finally, the law directs the Department of Public Utilities to find ways it make it easier for residents and communities to install geothermal heating and cooling systems.

## Targets large buildings and school

The law requires that all buildings over 20,000 square feet report their emissions annually. The state must also explore ways to make K-12 school buildings all electric, more energy efficient and improve indoor air quality.

## Addresses future of natural gas

The law takes aim at the Department of Public Utilities' ongoing work on the future of natural gas in the state. The department has been criticized for letting the utility companies write their own plans, and this law gives environmental groups and the public a bigger role in the planning process.

The law also explicitly directs the Department of Public Utilities to ensure that its [program](#) to replace aging and leaking natural gas pipelines doesn't run counter to the state's decarbonization goals. And for the first time, it enables utilities to use money from the program to install big geothermal heat projects.

Other gas related measures include a provision barring commercial, industrial and multifamily building owners from using the state's [Commercial PACE program](#) loans to upgrade natural gas heating systems, or switch from oil to natural gas boilers. In addition, new language requires [utilities experimenting](#) with networked geothermal projects to submit detailed plans about how they could decommission their natural gas infrastructure throughout the state.



**Correction:** *An earlier version of this post contained the wrong date for when Mass Save can no longer offer incentives for fossil fuel-powered heating and cooling systems. The story has been updated. We regret the error.*

*This article was originally published on July 22, 2022.*




*This segment aired on August 12, 2022.*

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