

Department of Public Utilities History
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March 2016

The Department provides this history for the convenience of users. While reasonable efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of the information herein, the various acts of the Massachusetts General Court constitute the official legislative history of the agency.

Pre-Department History

August 15, 1822: City Gas Company, a joint-stock corporation, is organized to provide gas service in Boston. Company goes into receivership shortly thereafter.

January 22, 1823: Boston Gas Light Company, successor of bankrupt City Gas Company, becomes the second gas company in the United States and the first gas company chartered in Massachusetts (Chapter 41 of the Acts of 1822). Boston Gas Light Company goes into commercial operation on January 1, 1829, with gas street lights in Dock Square.

April 6, 1855: General incorporation statute for gas companies enacted in Massachusetts. As a result, it is no longer necessary for incorporators to obtain a legislative charter for a gas company (Chapter 146 of the Acts of 1855).

July 1, 1861: Inspection of gas meters, gas measurement unit, and standard for lighting enacted (Chapter 168 of the Acts of 1861).

April 13, 1864: Board of Railroad Commissioners established to prescribe conditions for grade crossings (Chapter 152 of the Acts of 1864).

July 1, 1870: Board of Railroad Commissioners' powers expanded to include general supervisory authority over railroads, including hearing service complaints (Chapter 408 of the Acts of 1869).

March 19, 1877: Gas companies are authorized to provide service outside town named in the company's charter (Chapter 67 of the Acts of 1877).

April 9, 1879: Gas companies organized or chartered before April 9, 1879 are permitted to engage in the business of furnishing steam for heating or hot water (Chapter 202 of the Acts of 1879).

November, 1878: Brush Electric Lighting Company installs indoor arc lighting system in a clothing store at the corner of Howard Street and Washington Street in Boston. The company installs an experimental lighting system in Scollay Square in January of 1880, and begins commercial operations on February 15, 1882.

October 1, 1883: World's first three-phase central electric generating station goes into operation in Brockton, Massachusetts. With low capital and startup costs, this system, designed by Thomas A. Edison, becomes a model for other incandescent light plants across the country. The building still stands today across from City Hall, and houses the Old Colony Planning Council.

May 15, 1885: Gas companies are authorized to engage in the manufacture of gas for heating, cooking, chemical and mechanical purposes, and are thus no longer limited to providing lighting service (Chapter 240 of the Acts of 1885).

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June 11, 1885: Board of Gas Commissioners established to exercise general supervision over gas companies. This authority included (1) supervising gas purity and inspecting the general condition of gas works, (2) investigating rates of companies upon petition by mayor, board of selectmen, or twenty customers, and (4) ordering such reductions as found just and proper. Entry of new gas companies into town served by an existing company is also restricted by this same statute (Chapter 314 of the Acts of 1885).

March 6, 1886: First alternating current streetlighting system demonstrated in Great Barrington, Massachusetts by William Stanley. Commercial service begins on March 20, 1886.

June 8, 1887: Name of Board of Gas Commissioners changed to Board of Gas and Electric Light Commissioners; board acquires general supervisory authority over electric companies consistent with that held for gas companies. Entry of new electric companies into a town served by an existing company is also restricted by this statute (Chapter 382 of the Acts of 1887).

June 4, 1891: Cities and towns are authorized to engage in gas and or electric business and acquire necessary facilities either through acquisition or their own construction; municipal systems become subject to the supervision of the Board of Gas and Electric Light Commissioners (Chapter 370 of the Acts of 1891).

June 10, 1893: Highway Commission established to review local ordinances regarding effect of telephone and telegraph companies on state highways (Chapter 476 of the Acts of 1893).

June 5, 1894: Board of Gas and Electric Light Commissioners authorized to review and approve stock and debt issues of gas and electric companies (Chapter 450 of the Acts of 1894). Stock and debt issues of telephone, telegraph, aqueduct and water companies are subject to review and approval of the Commissioner of Corporations (Chapter 452 of the Acts of 1894).

June 9, 1894: Highway Commission authorized to review and approve stock and debt issues of railroad and street railway companies (Chapter 462 of the Acts of 1894).

June 7, 1906: Board of Railroad Commissioners' jurisdiction now includes railroad, street railway, and steamship companies (Chapter 463 of the Acts of 1906).

May 19, 1908: Board of Gas and Electric Light Commissioners authorized to review and approve of mergers between operating companies (Chapter 529 of the Acts of 1908).

March 11, 1910: Board of Gas and Electric Light Commissioners authorized to allow a gas or electric company to enter town outside of the community listed in the company's charter or articles of incorporation (Chapter 197 of the Acts of 1910).

July 1, 1914: Railroad Commissioners and Highway Commission merged to become Public Service Commission; new agency has general supervisory authority over railroads, street railways, steamship and express companies, and telephone and telegraph companies (Chapter 784 of the Acts of 1913) (certain provisions of this statute became effective upon June 13, 1913 override of Governor's veto).

August 1, 1914: Board of Gas and Electric Light Commissioners are granted general supervisory authority over water companies in the same manner as held for gas and electric companies; this responsibility had been initially assumed in 1909 by the Board of Health (Chapter 787 of the Acts of 1914).

April 21, 1915: Board of Gas and Electric Light Commissioners may authorize municipal light plant to serve a community outside of the municipality (Chapter 191 of the Acts of 1915).

November 1, 1919: Public Service Commission and Board of Gas and Electric Light Commissioners abolished and replaced with Department of Public Utilities, with functions of previous commissions transferred to the new agency; five-member commission established (Chapter 350 of the Acts of 1919).

April 26, 1927: Utilities now required to file proposed rates with Department of Public Utilities and receive approval in advance of any changes; Department permitted to open investigations into rates and charges of utilities on its own motion, in addition to complaint provisions provided in 1885 Mass. Acts c. 314 (Chapter 316 of the Acts of 1927).

September 1, 1929: Department of Public Utilities acquires jurisdiction over securities brokers because the Department is the only state agency with the powers to hold administrative-type hearings (Chapter 287 of the Acts of 1929).

1952: Natural gas pipelines extended into Massachusetts; gas companies begin shutting down their manufactured gas plants and converting customer appliances to work with the higher Btu content of natural gas.

August 27, 1958: Department of Public Utilities commission increased from five to seven members. At least one member has to be a woman, and no more than four members may belong to the same political party (Chapter 557 of the Acts of 1958).

November 16, 1971: Community Antenna Television Commission established with general supervisory authority over cable television providers (Chapter 1103 of the Acts of 1971).

November 1, 1972: Jurisdiction over securities brokers transferred from Department of Public Utilities to Secretary of State (Chapter 694 of the Acts of 1972).

December 31, 1974: Energy Facility Siting Council established to review and approve forecast and supply needs of gas and electric companies. EFSC supervised by Energy Facility Siting Board, whose membership includes the commission of the Department of Public Utilities (Chapter 1272 of the Acts of 1973).

March 7, 1975: Department of Public Utilities commission changes from seven part-time members to three full-time members serving coterminous with Governor. No more than two members may belong to same political party (Chapter 38 of the Acts of 1975).

September 1, 1992: Energy Facilities Siting Council merges with Department of Public Utilities. Nevertheless, the Energy Facility Siting Board remains a separate body (Chapter 141 of the Acts of 1992).

November 25, 1997: Cable Television Commission merges into Department of Public Utilities as a separate division (Chapter 43, § 111 of the Acts of 1997).

November 25, 1997: As part of extensive electric restructuring legislation, name of Department of Public Utilities changes to Department of Telecommunications and Energy. The number of commissioners is expanded to five members with staggered terms and designated areas of expertise. The Cable Television Commission is formally merged into Department, but retained certain autonomous powers (Chapter 164 of the Acts of 1997).

April 11, 2007: As part of the Governor's Executive Department reorganization plan, the Department of Telecommunications and Energy is abolished and replaced with (1) a Department of Public Utilities with jurisdiction over gas, electric, water, siting and transportation functions, and (2) a Department of Telecommunications and Cable with jurisdiction over telecommunications and cable matters. The new Department of Public Utilities is placed under the supervision and control of the Commonwealth Utilities Commission, which consists of three members, two of whom are appointed and removable by the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs for a term coterminous with that of the Governor, with the third member appointed and removable by the secretary for a term of four years. Any appointment or removal shall require the approval of the Governor. Commission members shall have background or expertise in electricity or natural gas matters, and no more

than two members may be members of the same political party (Chapter 19 of the Acts of 2007).