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# Debate continues on energy storage plans for Acton


 PERRY SMITH(<https://signalscv.com/author/perrysmith/>)


 MAY 17, 2024

 3:41 PM

The Canyon Country Energy Storage Project is in the stages of development in the Soledad Commercial Center off of Sierra Highway and Soledad Canyon. Habeba Mostafa/ The Signal

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Rep. Mike Garcia, R-Santa Clarita, was the latest official to weigh in on a debate over battery


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energy storage plans for Acton, including one he said would connect along the San Andreas Fault near a highway and train tracks.

The quiet community has been stirred up recently over speculation about plans to help the state meet its energy-grid goals that could place several battery energy storage systems, or BESS, facilities in the area.



The Hecate Humidor BESS is one such project, which would add 300 megawatts to the grid using large lithium-ion batteries for storage.

Hecate officials have declined to comment on any other future plans for the area, but county officials have acknowledged residents' concerns about multiple projects.

"The Humidor project location was carefully selected to be far away from residential neighborhoods," according to a Hecate Grid website in support of the project. "The closest neighborhood is 4,000 feet from the proposed site. It is also located in an industrial area between a freeway and rail line, near other energy infrastructure."

The county approved the plans over questions from residents about potential safety concerns and why multiple facilities must be placed in Acton, particularly if there are safety concerns and they need to be placed far away from people.

Hecate, which is one of many contractors working to meet the state's goal, has reiterated the safety and stability of its technology, and cited the technology's track record when reached for comment this week.

### Raising an alarm



Garcia's comments followed his questions about potential dangers that exist with lithium-ion battery facilities during a recent congressional subcommittee discussion on electric-vehicle fires and how first responders can be better supported.

When asked Thursday about his comments at a February hearing, Garcia said he didn't even mention the fault line when he was talking about the BESS site in Acton, which he called a "galactically dumb" oversight by L.A. County planners.

The topic of the hearing for the Space, Science and Technology Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight was, "Examining the Risk: The Dangers of EV Fires for First Responders."



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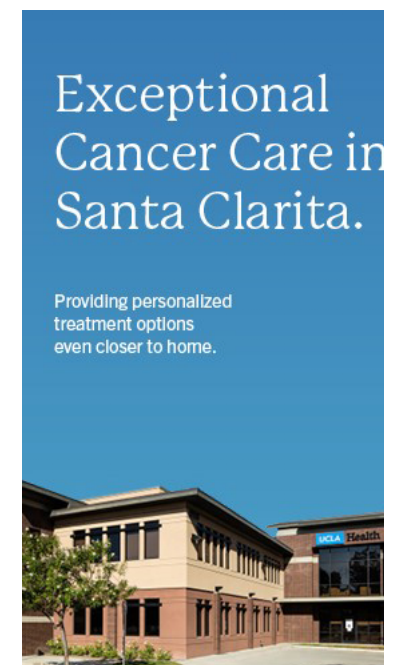


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Garcia's questioning and concerns come from a series of energy-storage plans drawn up for a northern part of his district, an area being eyed for the facilities at least in part due to the area's available land and relatively low population density.

Garcia echoed some of the residents' concerns during the hearing. Hundreds have signed a petition; some have joined a lawsuit asking for another look at what's being proposed.

The projects' proponents have said the concerns are linked to misinformation about the possible risks.

"This is supported by Hecate's growing track record of no safety or fire incidents," according to a December letter from Hecate to the Acton Town Council, which was shared in response to a request for comment on the protests. "It is further supported by the fact no BESS fire has ever left a BESS facility, let alone spread beyond small groups of battery equipment within a BESS facility."

The congressional hearing was about what will happen if something does go wrong, which is a question residents say hasn't been adequately answered.

### Local concerns

When residents found out there could be multiple facilities sited in Acton, the complaints grew and drew the attention of 5th District L.A. County Supervisor Kathryn Barger, who represents the Santa Clarita Valley.

A motion by Barger last June asked Los Angeles County planning officials to evaluate the review process for energy-storage facilities and create an ordinance, according to Helen Chavez, a spokeswoman for Barger. She said that's a 12- to 18-month process.

Garcia used the congressional hearing to ask about the potential danger behind large-scale battery-energy storage systems, or BESS, like one that was recently approved for Acton. Specifically, what happens in the case of an emergency?

The panel also talked about how research needs to continue to work on safer materials for first responders, showing how a Tesla on fire in a Colorado garage took hours to extinguish, caused costly damage to firefighting equipment and put the home in danger.

Garcia said, as an EV owner himself, the footage was enough to make him want to park in the driveway.

"Next door to you in L.A. County in the Acton-Agua Dulce area, they are installing something that is called a battery electric storage system, which is a huge facility full of capacitors, while their sources of electric energy are being pushed to that site," Garcia said to one of two experts who spoke, San Bernardino Fire Chief Dan Munsey, referring to projects being proposed for the Highway 14 corridor.



“When you look at the potential energy, if you will, of an electric vehicle, any sort of lithium-based battery, it’s substantial,” Garcia said, then adding, “but when you look at other projects that we’re looking at throughout the nation relative to electric storage, it makes an electric vehicle look tiny.”

### Battery benefits

The projects are part of a state goal, according to a PG&E statement, with the state bidding out contracts to meet a [2021 California Public Utility Commission ruling \(https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M389/K603/389603637.PDF\)](https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M389/K603/389603637.PDF) that called for an 11.5 gigawatt increase in storage by 2026 to meet the anticipated demand.

The city of Santa Clarita already has a smaller version of the project that’s being discussed for Acton, an 80-megawatt stand-alone, transmission-connected battery energy-storage resource approved by the city’s Planning Commission about three years ago. A city official said the latest update on the project was that it could be online by July or August.

The Terra-Gen project was announced as a first of its kind for the SCV in a January 2022 PG&E news release issued after the 3.5-acre project was approved for 18358 Soledad Canyon Road in Sand Canyon.

Hecate Grid’s Humidor BESS received permission from L.A. County through a ministerial review in December for a 400-megawatt facility, which is enough energy to power 300,000 homes.

The plans call for Hecate Grid to develop 15 acres of a 26-acre plot next to West Carson Mesa Road to the west and Angeles Forest Highway N-3 to the east.

A representative for Hecate Grid said in June that beyond helping the state meet its energy-storage mandates, the project safely provides energy reliability and resiliency, which is vital for a state where extreme weather can create emergencies that cause power outages.

Kent Truckor, former senior director of development for Hecate Grid, said in a phone interview in June that his company’s equipment was constructed to meet stringent state and federal standards for safety and that there was a lot of misinformation out there about the project.

The previously stated goal for the Acton project was to be online by 2026.

When asked about the approval process last year — which involves an ongoing dispute over a technical determination over whether the facility should be considered a transmission facility versus a distribution facility — a letter from the county stated the project is compliant based on the determination made by planners.

“The Humidor BESS site plan layout has been designed per the L.A. County Fire Code, which in turn refers to and incorporates by reference the California Fire Code. The California Fire Code has specific detailed design requirements for stationary electrical energy storage systems such as the Humidor BESS to ensure fire safety during construction, operation, and



decommissioning. The Humidor BESS's equipment and design will undergo further design review with the LACoFD for conformance with applicable provisions of the L.A. County Fire Code and the California Fire Code," according to an Aug. 1 letter from Amy Bodek, the county's director of Regional Planning.

However, Barger took notice of the attention the area was getting.

Following the unsuccessful appeal of the project, citing the number of proposals her office has seen, Barger authored a motion "to regulate the siting of BESS projects under Title 21/22 of the county's code," Chavez said.

Barger's motion called for several items, including a consideration that might avoid a crowding of the facilities in the 5th District.

Her June 6 motion requested: a report on the known pending applications for BESS projects; recommendations to bolster the county's review authority, including opportunities to avoid an overconcentration of BESS projects; and an analysis of key equity indicators and considerations in areas where projects are already permitted and there are pending applications.

While the residents are glad to see the review, they're still going forward with their plans to sue over the Hecate Humidor BESS.

*Click here (<https://signalscv.com/2024/05/residents-hope-courts-can-stop-energy-plans/>) to read the story about the lawsuit being filed by SORT, which is expected to have a hearing schedule set May 23 in Downtown Los Angeles: <https://youtu.be/d8I8AsN5suA>.*



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