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*Comment Received From: Orange County Supervisor Katrina Foley*

*Submitted On: 5/16/2025*

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## **Oppose BESS Facility in High Fire Severity Zones**

I urge you to deny the Compass Energy Storage Project in San Juan Capistrano. As the Vice Chair of the Orange County Board of Supervisors, I spearheaded the development of our first climate action plan and initiated sustainability efforts for our county. However, sustainability should not take priority over public health or public safety from fire risk. For that reason, I oppose this project and any other BESS development within Very High / High Fire Severity Zones as identified by CalFire.

As you know, unlike traditional building fires, fires at Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) facilities require complex and less effective mitigation efforts. The lithium-ion battery technology used in these facilities generate their own oxygen, which means water will help cool down a blaze but rarely extinguishes the flames. The best our firefighters can do is contain these fires and wait around as they burn out.

Just recently, on January 16, a fire overwhelmed the fire suppression system of the biggest BESS facility in the world, forcing a Monterey County state of emergency and the evacuation of more than 1,200 residents. Thankfully, this facility sits in a relatively low fire risk area, but the same cannot be said about the proposed project in San Juan Capistrano. For projects in dry, expansive areas similar to the areas impacted by the Los Angeles fires, the “let-it-burn”™ method recommended for BESS fires will lead to catastrophic wildfires. As demonstrated in Attachment A, the hazard of wildfires continues to expand to more of our county and state.

As a member of the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) and LOSSAN Rail Corridor Agency Board of Directors, the impact on the rail corridor concerns me as well. Questions of project feasibility arise given the erosion in the Oso Creek channel and the trains that move 90 miles per hour on this portion of the LOSSAN Rail Corridor. The proximity to this critical rail path and the Interstate 5 makes this project not only a threat to public safety but also threatens regional mobility. It demands more, not less, local control.

Last October, I directed County staff to write commonsense guidelines that will dictate the safety and fire suppression mechanisms of these facilities, given current systems are not working. Once written, the ordinance will serve as a model for other jurisdictions to adopt. Please allow us time to keep this development under local oversight.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Alyssa Napuri, my Deputy Chief of Staff, directly at (714) 558-3550 or [Alyssa.Napuri@ocgov.com](mailto:Alyssa.Napuri@ocgov.com).