

Date: January 16, 2024

Subject: Written Testimony in Favor of SB0079 – State Finance – Prohibited Appropriations – Magnetic Levitation Transportation System (Cross-file HB0170)

To: Chairman Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

My name is Nancy Solomon. I am writing in support of SB0079, sponsored by Senator Alonzo Washington.

Description of Bill:

Senate Bill SB0079 would prohibit Baltimore-Washington Rapid Rail (BWRR) from appropriating funds from the state of Maryland to build the proposed SCMaglev transportation system, “providing that the prohibition does not apply to certain expenditures for salaries” of state employees. This exception is in response to Northeast Maglev’s concerns that earlier versions of this bill had unintended consequences in that it would inadvertently tie their hands to work with the appropriate state personnel to acquire permits or other required approvals should the project go forward. By including this provision, the bill should be acceptable to BWRR and the Northeast Maglev.

TESTIMONY The State should not allow funding for the SCMaglev for the following reasons, among others:

The state’s transportation funding is facing limitations and funding needs to be allocated toward urgent and practical projects that will benefit Maryland citizens, the taxpayers who pay for these projects. Maryland residents need effective, affordable, and accessible commuter options--not an overpriced, limited-access train for the wealthy. State funds should serve the greater good of the largest number of Maryland residents.

BWRR and Northeast Maglev have stated they want to be able to access state funding “if” they need financial funding later in their project. But projects of this size always have cost overruns, and BWRR and Northeast Maglev are currently facing loss of federal funding. These two points will lead BWRR and Northeast Maglev to be knocking on the proverbial “door” of the state Comptroller on a regular basis if this legislation is not passed.

BWRR will need investors. Indeed, the Japanese government has offered to invest in the project. This puts Maryland at risk of having the Japanese government demanding funds for this project. It would be very important to have legislation to impede this.

BWRR has not, thus far, been able to demonstrate to the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) that the construction of this project will meet MDE’s requirements for protecting our waterways, a precious natural resource.

The State needs to prepare now for the changing scenarios that the impending climate crisis will create for how we work, travel and live in the next decade. This includes carefully attending to the environmental footprint of all state projects. Consider, for example, that recent research suggests that the construction of the SCMaglev will generate more greenhouse gases than it will save for likely several decades. We do not have decades to wait for such a “possibility.” In addition, the project will destroy hundreds of acres of wild green spaces--including a forest preserve, wetlands, and wildlife refuge--all of which are needed for CO2 storage, clean air and water, and climate cooling.

CLOSING:

Much is on the line in this bill. Maryland’s financial resources, our natural resources of land and water, and the integrity of our communities. I ask that SB0079 be given a favorable vote and moved out of committee.

Sincerely,

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