

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 Mary Gerster. I have lived, and paid taxes, in Greenbelt, Maryland, for more than 25 years. 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: It is blindingly obvious to me that the State of Maryland should not allow funding for the SCMaglev for the following reasons:

1. Maryland’s transportation funding is facing limitations, and funding must be allocated to urgent and practical projects that will benefit Maryland citizens: the taxpayers who pay for these projects. The State and its residents need transportation that is effective, affordable, and accessible. We do not need an overpriced, limited-access train for the wealthy.
2. BWRR and Northeast Maglev have stated they want to be able to access State funding *if* they need financial funding later in their project. First, projects of this size always have cost overruns. Second, they are currently facing loss of federal funding. These two points mean that BWRR and Northeast Maglev will turn to the State Comptroller on a regular basis if this legislation is not passed.
3. BWRR is currently seeking funding from the infrastructure investment and Jobs Act funds and possibly other grant sources at the federal level. If provided, this would expend taxpayer dollars for a project that will serve the wealthy. Their federal funding has been fully expended at this point. State funds should serve Maryland residents at large.
4. Among my concerns is that if this project begins, it will repeatedly run out of funding, as well as being over budget continuously, and the backers will keep returning to ask the State for more funding. The result will be that our financial resources and precious land will be seriously compromised for a boondoggle project that will never be completed, or if completely, only after many delays and a huge, unrecoverable (by any measure) cost. Finally, our land—a precious and finite natural resource—will be forever damaged with no benefits for the vast majority of Marylanders, and significant damage to quality of life for thousands of us more directly affected by this massive and unsustainable project.

5. Currently the NEPA process has been paused on this project. Significant work needs to be done to move this project to the next level. But the federal funding to allow this is not in place.
6. BWRR will need investors. The Japanese government has offered to invest in the project. Having a foreign government pushing for funding from the State could place Maryland in a difficult or awkward position. It's very important to have legislation to address this possible scenario.
7. BWRR has not so 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—another precious, limited natural resource.
8. Much is on the line in this bill. Maryland's financial resources, our natural resources, and the integrity of and quality of life in our communities.
9. Maryland should be preparing for probable fallout from the climate crisis (projected for 8–9 years from now), which could change how many of us live, work, and travel. In light of projected but unknown demands on the State, the State should very carefully review the footprint of any projects it does or might fund.

Additional points:

- Recent research suggests development 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.” It is without question that 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 and all of which are in short supply in suburban Maryland.
- Protecting the State from loss of funding for other necessary transportation and infrastructure projects throughout the State is a far better course of action.

In closing, I ask that SB0079 be given a favorable vote and moved out of committee.

Sincerely,

Mary A Gerster
10 Plateau Place Unit N
Greenbelt MD 20770
Tel: 301-441-3298