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Committee: Budget and Taxation

Testimony on: SB188 - “State Finance – Prohibited Appropriations – Magnetic Levitation Transportation System”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: January 27, 2021

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports SB188 that would prohibit the State and any unit or instrumentality of the State from using any appropriation for a magnetic levitation transportation system (Maglev) in the state. The prohibition would not apply to expenditures for the salaries of personnel assigned to review permits or other forms of approval for a magnetic levitation transportation system.

We strongly support state funding for reliable and affordable public transit for working Marylanders and oppose any state funding for an expensive private transportation project. The state is already spending its limited resources to complete the Purple Line and is underfunding critical transportation infrastructure such as that provided by the Maryland Transit Administration. MTA has a deferred maintenance backlog of \$1.5 billion and also lacks funding for needed compliance projects and other upgrades.

We also have major concerns about the many environmental and social justice impacts of Maglev in Maryland. It would destroy hundreds of acres of the most ecologically important research, conservation and forest areas in the MidAtlantic area, and impact three rivers that feed into the Chesapeake Bay. It also would negatively affect environmental justice areas along the length of the Maglev project corridor in Maryland, and not be affordable for low and moderate income residents. In addition, we are concerned that Maglev ridership studies show a large portion of its riders would come from MARC, Amtrak and Acela, thereby endangering the viability of those important train systems in the region.

Maglev proponents say the project would not need any money from the state. SB188 would merely put that statement into statute.

Experience shows that having Maryland officials make statements regarding transportation (such as, “No state money will go to Maglev”) are not commitments to be trusted. The Governor said the replacement for the Governor Harry W. Nice Memorial Bridge in Newburg would contain a barrier-separated path for hikers and cyclists, but then the state changed its plan. The Governor and Secretary of the Maryland Department of Transportation said repeatedly that state funds would not be used to fund the Managed Lanes project on I-495 and I-270, but project documents subsequently showed that not to be true. So, this bill is necessary to ensure no financial appropriation from the state can be used for Maglev.

In summary, this bill contains a reasonable prohibition on how the state’s money may be spent, and we urge this committee to issue a favorable report on it.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.