



SB359 – State Finance – Prohibited Appropriations – Magnetic Levitation Transportation System

Testimony before

Budget and Taxation Committee

February 9, 2022

Position: Favorable

Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice Chair and members of the committee, my name is Brian Wessner, and I represent the 750+ members of Indivisible Howard County. We are providing written testimony today in **support of SB359**, which seeks to prohibit the State from providing appropriation for a magnetic levitation (maglev) transportation system in the State, except for specific salaries appropriated by the State. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We appreciate the leadership of Chairman Pinsky and Senator Beidle in moving this bill.

The maglev project is a bad idea for Maryland because:

LIMITED SERVICE - The system will provide limited service between Baltimore and Washington, with only 1 intermediate station at BWI Thurgood Marshall Airport – service isolated to very targeted and affluent areas.

PROHIBITIVE FARE STRUCTURE - Round trip fare would be approximately \$120, compared to \$30 for existing Amtrak and \$18 for MARC round trip service. Commuting via the maglev would cost an individual over \$28,000 annually. Non-business travelers, traveling with their families to visit Baltimore or Washington, would consider maglev fares an unacceptable burden.

UNREALISTIC TRAVEL TIMES - Although advertised top speed is over 300mph, and Baltimore to Washington time of 15 minutes, locations of proposed stations would require additional travel to final destinations, with door to door transit times similar to existing travel options, at 4-7 times the ticket cost of other alternatives.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY – Maglev projects are notorious for significant cost overruns over their initial estimated costs. The Maryland project is currently estimated at \$15B, but considering cost overruns of comparable projects, will realistically increase to between \$17.6B and \$26.5B. To date, no private investors have stepped forward to provide funding for the project. A 2005 report by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) found that any high speed rail line shorter than 100 miles cannot compete with car travel. The proposed maglev line is approximately 40 miles.

RIDERSHIP FORECASTS – Ridership forecasts form the foundation for much of the maglev justification, and while no official ridership forecasts have been made public, an informal number of 20.6 million one-way trips in 2045 is being circulated. Since only 2% of the served population is affluent enough to use the maglev, 2045 ridership is realistically closer to 321,000 trips – a

drastically lower ridership to cover operating costs and recover any of the capital costs of building the service.,

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IMPACTS – Environmental Justice is at the fore of much legislation before the General Assembly this session and transportation is no exception. The FRA Environmental Impact Study states that 85% of the planned routes pass through Environmental Justice areas, impacting 185,000 residents. Many of these communities will be permanently fractured and displaced by the viaducts and tunnels being constructed through their communities. Yet all of this will serve 2% of the affluent in the Baltimore and Washington areas.

HEALTH IMPACTS - Maglev systems are not quiet. FRA determined that a person standing 30m from a maglev passing at 400kph is subjected to 100dBA (approaching that of a rock concert), a noise level NIOSH states with cause hearing damage if a person is exposed more than 15 minutes daily. The maglev would travel at 500kph, increasing the danger of hearing impacts since the noise level increases exponentially as speed increases.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

We respectfully urge a favorable report.

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