

Comments to Maryland Senate Budget and Taxation

Submitted on 2/7/2022, for the committee hearing on 2/9/2022

In support of SB 359, State Finance – Prohibited Appropriations – Magnetic Levitation Transportation System

Dear Committee Members:

We, the undersigned organizations, submit these comments on behalf of our thousands of members and supporters in Maryland. Today we are submitting comments in support of SB 359, Senator Paul Pinsky and Pam Beidle’s bill banning state appropriations from being used for a Maglev project.

The proposed Baltimore to Washington Superconducting Maglev project would have numerous negative environmental impacts along its 40-mile route and within the surrounding area, both temporary impacts during construction and permanent impacts that cannot be mitigated. In many locations, the resulting destruction of critical habitat would be irreversible and would have substantial impacts on wildlife, public welfare, human health, and human recreational resources. The project would also have extensive negative impacts on Maryland communities, particularly low-income communities and communities of color.

Project developers have publicly claimed that the Maglev is an environmentally responsible project that will result in cleaner air through the removal of passenger vehicles from the roadways. This claim is not substantiated by the project’s Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The DEIS demonstrates that the project would increase annual net transportation energy consumption by up to 39 percent by the year 2045 compared to the No-Build option (Table 4.19-7). This is an increase in 3.07 Trillion BTUs, enough energy to power 88,900 homes (Page 4.19-11).

The DEIS further states that the proposed Maglev would be “37 and 20 percent less efficient than existing bus and passenger rail, respectively” (Page 4.19-10). Thus, the Maglev cannot be touted as an energy efficient means of mass transportation. Analysis in the DEIS predicts that Maglev operation would increase net CO2 emissions by up to 336 million kilograms per year relative to the No-Build option.

The removal of vegetation to accommodate the Maglev infrastructure would result in a loss of ecosystem services and a concomitant lessened ability to remove carbon and carbon dioxide, as well as other pollutants, from the environment. The more than 9 million people who live in the Baltimore-Washington region depend on the ecosystem services performed by the existing green spaces for clean, breathable air. The late Senator Paul Sarbanes recognized this fact when he referred to the Patuxent Research Refuge and surrounding green space as the “lungs of the Baltimore-Washington Region.” With the increase in greenhouse gases, people who live in the area would bear the burden of an increased risk of respiratory diseases associated with air pollution.

The increase in power consumption caused by the Maglev operations and the destruction of carbon-storing forests are in direct opposition to the urgent need for actions to reduce greenhouse gas production to abate ongoing climate change. A report from the EPA, released on May 12, 2021, indicates that the climate change crisis is more dire than previously thought, and the inescapable conclusion is

that we cannot allow such a massive scale infrastructure project that moves us further from bringing climate change under control.

The Maglev project would also permanently impact up to 328 acres of federal property, including portions of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, managed by USDA; the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, managed by the National Park Service; the Patuxent Research Refuge, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System; the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center; Fort Meade, managed by the US Army; and other properties administered by the National Security Agency and the U.S. Secret Service. The project could destroy up to 451 acres of forests, including up to 42 acres of the Greenbelt Forest Preserve, managed by the City of Greenbelt. Local parks such as Maryland City Park and Springfield Road Park would also be taken to accommodate the SC Maglev infrastructure. In total, up to 140.5 acres of recreational facilities and parklands could be impacted. Comments submitted to the DEIS on behalf of many of these federal agencies and the City of Greenbelt express grave concerns with the project.

The destruction of forests, wetlands, and other habitats would result in extensive impacts to the 20,000+ acre green oasis that is the largest tract of undeveloped land in the Baltimore-Washington corridor. The impacts would include not only the direct loss of habitat, but also disruption of ongoing research and human recreational use of the area.

The natural lands lost to Maglev infrastructure cannot be mitigated through re-creation elsewhere, as they are dependent upon specific geological formations and soil types. The lands at Beltsville Agricultural Research Center and Patuxent Research Refuge have been documented as some of the most biologically diverse and well-studied landscapes in the world. The destruction of habitat on these properties will impact the continuity of over a century of environmental research at the Patuxent Research Refuge and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center.

There will also be significant impacts to outdoor recreational facilities, with the loss of public park space at Maryland City Park, Springfield Road Park, Greenbelt Forest Preserve, and Greenbelt's Northway Fields Park, among others along the proposed route.

Recreational use of the Patuxent Research Refuge will also be impacted. The Refuge serves over 215,000 visitors annually, on average, including hikers, runners, dog-walkers, hunters, naturalists such as birders, and families. As part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Urban Refuge Program, the Refuge serves a diverse population and sponsors programs that bring inner-city youths and their families to the Refuge, perhaps for their first-ever experience in a natural setting. Maglev infrastructure would impinge on the Refuge's public hunting areas, public hiking trail system, and at least one fishing pond.

The proposed Train Maintenance Facility, with its round-the-clock operations, will bring a heavy-industry environment of noise and light pollution. The proposed viaduct would be tall enough to tower above the tree canopy and would be visible from the Refuge's National Wildlife Visitor Center. The viaduct, which would flank the Baltimore-Washington Parkway for several miles, would forever negate the ability of the Parkway to fulfill its purpose of serving as a scenic entryway to the nation's capital. Park service staff have called the impacts to the Parkway more substantial than anything they have seen in their entire career.

The construction of the Maglev infrastructure would also result in loss of or damage to sensitive habitats and plant communities that harbor rare, threatened, and endangered flora and fauna. Many of the habitats that would be impacted along the Maglev alignment and its associated infrastructure support plant communities that are rare within the State of Maryland, and that depend for their existence on the underlying geological structures and soil substrates. These communities are irreplaceable and cannot be recreated elsewhere.

In destroying sensitive habitats, the Maglev project would imperil specific Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species, as identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the State of Maryland, including nine species of mammals; twelve species of birds; two species of reptiles; three species of fish; eleven species of odonates (dragonflies and damselflies); eighteen species of lepidoptera (butterflies, skippers, moths); two species of freshwater mussels (one federally endangered); and at least seven species of plants (DEIS Chapter 4, Section 4.12.3.3).

The proposed Maglev project would have negative impacts on eight sub-watersheds of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed: the Anacostia River, the Upper Patuxent River, the Little Patuxent River, the Severn River, the Lower North Branch of the Patapsco River, Baltimore Harbor, Gwynns Falls, and Jones Falls. Of special watershed concern is the proposed Trainset Maintenance Facility (TMF), which would add approximately 200 acres of new impervious surface to the region. The DEIS states that the placement of the TMF in either the Anacostia or the Little Patuxent Watershed would cause “a change in watershed function” such as the “ability to filter and store water in the soil” (Page 4.10-15). In total, up to 76 acres of floodplain, 51 acres of wetlands, 124 acres of Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, and 12,896 linear feet of waterways would all be negatively impacted (Table ES4.3-1).

The cumulative effect of the changes to the waterways, wetlands, and sub-watersheds in terms of stormwater management, increased runoff, and potential chemical pollutants would impair the ability of the State of Maryland to meet the mandates of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement. As committee members know, Maryland has invested significantly in Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts. Construction of the Maglev project would be counterproductive to those goals.

There are also significant environmental justice concerns surrounding the Baltimore-Washington Maglev project. Minority populations comprise 69.6percent and low-income populations make up 12.7percent of the total population in the Maglev Project Affected Environment. There will be both permanent or long-term impacts as well as shorter term impacts to communities of color and low-income populations. Low-income populations and Black and Latinx minorities are at a higher risk of direct and disproportionate impacts of the construction of this project. The construction staging and laydown areas and haul routes would predominately occur within environmental justice population areas. According to the DEIS, 80percent of the parcels that would be impacted by land use conversion, rezoning, and property acquisitions are in communities of color. Furthermore, 100percent of the above ground viaduct portion of the Maglev, where construction and perpetual community impacts would be the greatest, are within or directly adjacent to environmental justice communities.

Worse yet, these communities would not directly benefit from the Maglev. The proposed project has three stations; one in Mount Vernon East Washington D.C., a stop at the BWI Airport, and finally a terminus station in Baltimore at either Camden Yards or Cherry Hill. The communities of Prince George’s and Anne Arundel Counties would feel the brunt of construction and long-term impacts, while receiving no public transportation benefits in return. The extremely costly price, projected to be an average of

\$60 for a one-way trip, would exclude all but the wealthiest of commuters from riding on Maglev. This is eight times higher than a corresponding ticket on the MARC train.

For the above reasons, we are opposed to the construction of the Baltimore-Washington Maglev project. State transportation dollars should instead focus on more equitable solutions to our transit concerns, such as investing in Amtrak, MARC, the Baltimore Red Line, and other regional transit options that better serve our communities while safeguarding our parks and the environment. We ask that the committee vote in support of this bill to block state transit dollars from funding this disastrous project.

Sincerely,

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