

Testimony of Colin Beckman
before the Maryland Senate Finance Committee
in Support of SB0514 - Maryland Regional Rail Transformation Act

February 16, 2022

Good afternoon, Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Colin Beckman. I live in Baltimore's Greenmount West neighborhood and I am president of the Baltimore MARC Riders, an all-volunteer group of train riders and supporters advocating for faster, more frequent, and more reliable MARC trains to and from Baltimore.

I support SB0514, the Maryland Regional Rail Transformation Act. As you know, the bill requires the Maryland Transit Administration to start implementing its MARC Cornerstone Plan by establishing individual investment programs to make incremental improvements on the Brunswick, Camden, and Penn lines. These programs would, among other things, require that MTA complete plans for specific track capacity extensions and station improvements. The bill would also require MTA to make progress toward designing new stations along the Penn Line at Bayview in East Baltimore, and Elkton in Cecil County.

In short, the bill will expand the reach and effectiveness of MARC, improving mobility for Marylanders throughout the state. Such improved mobility is crucial to raising Maryland's economic competitiveness, expanding access to good jobs, ensuring inclusive growth, and providing access to moderate and affordable housing.

Specific to Baltimore, the bill will require that MTA begin to design an additional fourth track on the Penn Line between Baltimore and DC, allowing for less congestion and faster run times. The bill also requires planning to begin for a new station in East Baltimore at Bayview, also on the Penn Line. With this new Bayview Station in East Baltimore joining Penn Station and a newly-renovated West Baltimore Station MARC, many more Baltimoreans will have access to the mobility afforded by Maryland's regional train system.

At the same time, Maryland must avoid distractions like the proposed [\\$13.8 – 16.8 billion](#) magnetic levitation train from Baltimore's Cherry Hill neighborhood to D.C.'s Mount Vernon neighborhood. The maglev concept suffers from too many fatal flaws for it to qualify as serious public infrastructure. I will mention three. First, it has a "first-mile problem": the ride from Baltimore's Cherry Hill to Mt. Vernon in D.C. is expected to take only 15 minutes, but most riders could not easily get to the Cherry Hill station without driving. By contrast, MARC already has three centrally located stations in Baltimore at Camden Yards, West Baltimore, and Penn Station. Second, although the Northeast Maglev [website](#) states that Japan has agreed in principle to pay \$5 billion of the cost, much of the remainder would likely be funded by federal grants, diverting highly-constrained public funds to a privately-owned project. This is money better invested toward the proven efficiencies of existing rail. Third, an expected average ticket price of \$60 for a one-way journey would make maglev unaffordable for most Baltimoreans. Compare that to a \$9 one-way ticket on any MARC train.

By the way, the new evening rush hour MARC [express train pilot](#) on the Penn Line closes the distance from Union Station to Baltimore's Penn Station (with a stop at BWI) in under 43 minutes---on *existing* infrastructure. We applaud the MTA for that step. We believe that MTA should add a second evening express train, and two additional AM southbound express trains as well, with stops at West Baltimore. A February 2021 report from the Johns Hopkins [21st Century Cities Initiative](#) described how MARC express trains would boost Baltimore's economy. We must add express trains now, and---when the capital investments in this bill make it possible---add additional and even speedier express trains in the future.

To conclude, to retain and attract residents, Maryland must invest in the backbone of its rail infrastructure and improve the MARC system. China's expansion of intercity rail in the last decade is a modern marvel. India is building a new rapid [passenger rail network](#) from New Delhi to neighboring cities. Closer to home, Virginia last year signed a [\\$3.7 billion deal](#) to double its passenger rail service within the decade. The federal infrastructure bill made historic sums of federal dollars available if states have plans that are ready to execute. Maryland has the plans. Now we must commit to putting them to work. SB0514 would do just that. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss this bill.