



MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY



January 24, 2023

Committee: Budget and Taxation

Testimony On: SB0050: State Finance – Prohibited Appropriations – Magnetic Levitation Transportation System

Position: Support: SB0050

The Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) and Safe Skies Maryland ask that the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee give a favorable report of SB0050 and move it to the full Senate. The bill would prohibit State from using any appropriations for a magnetic levitation (MAGLEV) system in the state of Maryland, except to fund review of permits or other approvals for a MAGLEV system.

MOS is a Maryland-based volunteer organization of some 1800 members, with 15 chapters in Maryland. We are devoted to the study, preservation and enjoyment of birds and their habitat. Safe Skies is an initiative of MOS to raise awareness state-wide of the threats posed to migratory and resident bird by collisions with man-made structures, and how to employ science and technology solve this issue.

Our reasons for supporting this bill are occasioned by the proposed MAGLEV line between Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. MOS opposes this project because it would have far-reaching negative impacts, in some cases irreversible, on native and migratory birds and the habitats that support them, by the taking or alteration of protected public lands and natural areas; and by the impacts to bird species that are rare, threatened or identified as species in greatest need of conversation.

Proposed alignments would carve up and fragment large parts of the last large green space between Washington and Baltimore. The impacted areas would be Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) and the Patuxent Research Refuge (PRR), but also the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, the

NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, the Greenbelt Forest Preserve, a number of local parks in the District of Columbia, Prince George's County, and Anne Arundel County, and notably the Maryland Job Corps' Woodland Center, Bladensburg Waterfront Park, Northway Fields Park, and Maryland City Park.

Both build alternatives would carve a 180-acre Train Maintenance Facility (TMF) out of either BARC and/or PRR. A Maintenance of Way (MOW) site, and a 600-space parking lot of unknown acreage would be added to the TMF. The Maintenance of Way is particularly problematic since its impacts would likely be permanent, not temporary. A further MOW is also needed elsewhere on the chosen alignment. Further acreage would be destroyed for nine Fresh Air and Emergency Egress Sites (FA/EE), totaling another 34 acres. Sixty-five acres would be used for Electric Power Substations. Further acres would be taken by access roads.

The impact on birds would be considerable. A recent, much-cited, study has shown that North America has lost 3 billion birds, 29% of its total population, since the 1970s.¹ The Maryland Department of Natural Resources has designated certain Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), including American Kestrel, Blue-winged Warbler, Eastern Meadowlark, Prairie Warbler, Red-headed Woodpecker, Savannah Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, and Yellow-breasted Chat.² At least 261 bird species have been recorded on PRR and 240 at BARC. All of the SGCN species noted above have been recorded at PRR and/or BARC, and some breed there. For example, American Kestrel, a rapidly declining species, finds BARC one of its few strongholds, with a number of successful nesting pairs. Forest habitat would be fragmented, negatively impacting Forest

¹ Rosenberg, et al, Decline of the North American Avifauna, Science, vol 366, issue 6461, pp. 120-124, 4 October 2019.

² Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Maryland State Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025, chapter 3, Maryland's Wildlife and Species of Greatest Conservation Need, pages 39-45.

Interior Dwelling Bird Species (FIDS), which are in serious decline due to forest fragmentation..

Loss of forest and replacement with cleared or impervious surfaces will also increase sediment and other non-point-source pollution of local waterways, most notably Beaverdam Creek. This is a Tier II stream with good water quality that supports spawning anadromous fish. Herons and other fish-eating birds frequent the creek and adjacent wetlands; it is used in winter by a wide variety of waterfowl feeding on aquatic vegetation and is also the site of an active Bald Eagle nest within BARC. The Little Patuxent River, which feeds into the Patuxent and thence to Chesapeake Bay, would also be severely impacted. This stream supports a fairly diverse biological community, including osprey, eagles, kingfishers, herons and other fish-eating birds. It also has an active sport fishery for Bass and stocked Trout. The project could also reroute the channel of the Little Patuxent River.

The diversity of bird species and their habitats is under increasing threat. Unless concerted efforts are taken in the near future Maryland will lose some of its greatest assets – healthy natural systems and the wide range of birds, plants, and other wildlife that they support. Maryland risks economic impact as well as a decrease in quality of life. An estimated 900,000 residents and non-residents enjoy birding in the state. While Marylanders generated \$483 million from wildlife-watching activities in 2011, the Total Industrial Output (TIO), which includes, direct, indirect, and induced effects, totaled over \$909 million, produced 10,807 full- and part-time jobs, and generated \$88.4 million in state and local tax revenue. Nationally, Americans who watch and feed birds contribute \$41 billion to the nation's economy every year.³

In light of our opposition to the DC-Baltimore MAGLEV system, we believe that it is appropriate to prohibit any state funding of a MAGLEV system. MOS supports mass transit as a means of reducing greenhouse gases, which through climate change pose an existential threat to birds and other wildlife. The proposed MAGLEV system by its own admission will be unaffordable for most people, and so will not in any way seriously reduce

³ US Fish and Wildlife Service, Economic Impact: Birds, Birdwatching and the U.S. Economy, November 16, 2017.

automobile usage, traffic, or emissions. MOS urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB0050.

Sincerely,



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