

Date: January 16, 2024

Subject: Written Testimony in Favor of SB0079 – State Finance – Prohibited Appropriations – Magnetic Levitation Transportation System (Cross-file HB0170)

To: Chairman Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

My name is Heather Ettus. I am writing in support of SB0079, sponsored by Senator Alonzo Washington.

Description of Bill:

Senate Bill SB0079 would prohibit Baltimore-Washington Rapid Rail (BWRR) from appropriating funds from the state of Maryland to build the proposed SCMaglev transportation system, “providing that the prohibition does not apply to certain expenditures for salaries” of state employees. This exception is in response to Northeast Maglev’s concerns that earlier versions of this bill had unintended consequences in that it would inadvertently tie their hands to work with the appropriate state personnel to acquire permits or other required approvals should the project go forward. By including this provision, the bill should be acceptable to BWRR and the Northeast Maglev.

TESTIMONY

The state’s transportation funding is facing limitations and funding needs to be allocated toward urgent and practical projects – those that will benefit Maryland citizens – the taxpayers who pay for these projects. The transportation needs of the state and its residents are for effective, affordable, and accessible commuter options – not an overpriced, limited access, train for the wealthy.

BWRR and Northeast Maglev have stated they want to be able to access state funding “if” they need financial funding later in their project. Two points: 1) projects of this size always have cost overruns, and 2) they are currently facing loss of federal funding. These two points will lead BWRR and Northeast Maglev to be knocking on the proverbial “door” of the state Comptroller on a regular basis if this legislation is not passed.

BWRR is currently seeking funding from the infrastructure investment and Jobs Act funds and possibly other grant sources at the federal level. If provided they would use taxpayers’ dollars for a project that will serve the wealthy. Their federal funding has been fully expended at this point. State funds should serve the greater good of Maryland residents.

My concern is that if this project were to ever “begin” it will run out of funding over and over again, will be over budget continuously, will continuously ask the state for untenable amounts of funding, and the result will be that our financial resources and precious land will be seriously compromised for an unneeded project that will never be completed. And our land – a precious natural resource – will be forever damaged – for ABSOLUTELY NO BENEFIT TO ANYONE.

Currently the NEPA process has been paused on this project. Significant work needs to be done to move this project to the next level. But the federal funding to allow this is not in place.

BWRR will need investors. Indeed, the Japanese government has offered to invest in the project. This puts Maryland at risk of having the Japanese government demanding funds for this project. It would be very important to have legislation to impede this.

In addition, BWRR has not, thus far, been able to demonstrate to the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) that the construction of this project will meet MDE's requirements for protecting our waterways – also a precious natural resource.

Much is on the line in this bill. Maryland's financial resources, our natural resources of land and water, and the integrity of our communities.

The State needs to prepare for the changing scenarios the Climate Crisis (projected for 8-9 years from now) will create for how we work, travel and live; we need to carefully attend to the footprint of projects that the state funds.

Based on recent research, the construction of the SCMaglev will generate more greenhouse gases than it will save for likely several decades. We do not have decades to wait for such a "possibility". In addition, the project will destroy hundreds of acres of wild green spaces including a forest preserve, wetlands and wildlife refuge all of which are needed for CO2 storage, clean air and water, and climate cooling.

Protecting the state from losing funding for needed transportation and infrastructure projects throughout the state is the best option.

I ask that SB0079 be given a favorable vote and moved out of committee.

Sincerely,

Heather Ettus
19 Lakeside Drive, Greenbelt, MD 20770
(301) 474-6443