

January 16, 2024

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

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

My name is Patricia Jackman from New Carrollton MD. I am writing in support of SB0079, sponsored by Senator Alonzo Washington. This bill 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 responsive to the concerns expressed by the Northeast Maglev that a previous iteration 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 the above caveat, the bill should be acceptable to BWRR and the Northeast Maglev,

We understand that BWRR is actively seeking additional funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funds and perhaps other grant sources to continue to tap into federal taxpayer funds. Mr. Wayne Rogers Chairman and CEO of Baltimore-Washington Rapid Rail (BWRR), a private company has repeatedly stated the SCMaglev will not require tax-payer funds. This statement has been repeated by Ian Rainey, senior vice-president of BWRR on several occasions and in testimony including “We’ve been very clear that we’re not going to be seeking state appropriations for this project.”

Senate Bill 0079 can record his statement on the legislative record, with the one caveat on which Mr. Rogers based his past objection, that is Funds can be used for such costs associated with administrative, review and permitting processes. This bill applies to only one specific proposed project that has proven unable to support broad and questionable promises of an influx of good-paying jobs, advanced technology education programs, and the uplifting of environmental justice communities to bring them and the state untold prosperity.

Maryland’s viable transportation projects that serve our communities currently face persistent state funding difficulties. Urgent and practical cost-cutting choices will need to be made. The SCMaglev project, shamelessly promoted as a fast travel option from DC to New York, is not the kind of commuter train needed for the Northeast Corridor. Fares are extremely costly; and the project’s costs will increase exponentially when the actual work is undertaken.

As a result, the ability of BWRR to either continue or complete the project will be curtailed. BWRR and its partners will seek additional funds from bank loans as well as from Maryland, in addition to the federal government. Government funds are taxpayer dollars. We the people will pay—and already have from the allocation of federal government funds expended to undertake the study and meet NEPA requirements. How can this project even be considered to have access to taxpayer funds. The Federal Railroad Administration’s (FRA) SCMaglev Draft Environment Impact Statement review process has been paused since August 25, 2021. Prior to this, the process was paused from September 2019 to May 2020. Further, the Army Corps of Engineers announced a pause in their review of the SCMaglev proposal to accommodate the FRA timetable. The volumes of public comments and concerns submitted during the DEIS process remain unanswered.

Additionally, the recent efforts by the BWRR to apply for a Water Quality Certification from the MD Department of the Environment were woefully insufficient. The MDE posted on their website a letter dated 12/22/2023 that based upon their review of the BWRR submissions, MDE “does not have reasonable assurance that this project will comply with water quality standards, and therefore intends to deny without prejudice BWRR’s request for Certification.”

This SCMaglev project continues to be problematic for the following reasons.

- SCMaglev is not a reasonably priced train with commuter stops that would serve the average Maryland citizens. Yet its construction destroys our communities and is an environmental disaster threatening valuable green spaces, watersheds and eventually the Chesapeake Bay.
- There are unanswered questions about the actual safety of the train. The Japanese government seeks to assure us of the safety of their SCMaglev. However, the number of passengers carried to date on their development and test track are less than the typical number carried by the Washington Metro (pre-COVID-19) in a single day.
- Justifications for the ongoing building of their SCMaglev are being questioned in Japan. The planned 2027 date for starting the first operation of the Tokyo to Nagoya line is unlikely to be met. This would make the United States the first place where the safety of SCMaglev technology would be tested in a high-frequency commercial operation.
- The Japanese SCMaglev has many unresolved safety issues that need to be addressed. Safety Rules of Particular Applicability (RPA) need to be developed by the Federal Railroad Administration before the project is authorized.
- SCMaglev estimates for both ridership and revenue appear to be overstated. Therefore, are likely to need government subsidies.
- BWRR has made various projections about jobs with numbers and project costs varying greatly, yet have not shared the analyses nor strategies for supporting these claims.
- The State needs to prepare for the changes the Climate Crisis (projected for 8-9 years from now) will create for how we work, travel and live; we need to carefully appraise 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.
- The need for other more high-value transportation infrastructure improvements outweigh wasting funds on building the SCMaglev. Governor Moore and MDOT have extensive plans to advance the MARC and Amtrak services and capacity. Amtrak has built the next generation of train equipment capable of speeds in the 200 miles-per-hour range. Having past FRA evaluations, Amtrak is testing the new train technology on the Northeast corridor, with the plan to bring this new technology online for customers this year. The train is being designed and built in the United States, by American unions and trades, not imported from overseas as the SCMaglev and its supporting systems. More information on Amtrak’s NEC Future and the status of the second-generation Acela are readily available on the Internet.

The Japanese government intends to invest in the SCMaglev project, thereby becoming a BWRR partner. They will own an as-yet undetermined percentage of this project. Their technology and expertise will anchor the construction and operation of the SCMaglev. They will seek a profit above all and remain in control of the super conducting levitation technology. It is a dangerous situation to allow Japan to own a piece of Maryland’s Northeast Corridor.

We have witnessed other train scenarios, many of which have failed or are being maintained with large government subsidies. The Japanese and all interested parties will no doubt expect to be repaid for their investments in building and operating the train. Then, MD citizens will be strapped to pay for this overblown train project both monetarily and with the environmental consequences as it plows through our communities.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide favorable written testimony. I look forward to SB0079 moving out of committee and advancing.

Sincerely,

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