

February 20, 2024

Hon. Delegate Marc Korman
Chair of the Environment and Transportation Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Position: Favorable HB 170 - State Finance - Prohibited Appropriations - Magnetic Levitation Transportation System

Dear Chair Korman:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 170. Please accept this testimony on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading organization advocating for walkable, bikeable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way for the Washington, DC region to grow and provide opportunities for all.

HB 170 would prohibit the State from using any appropriation for a magnetic levitation transportation system in the State. We support this bill because the proponents of the Maglev project claim that it does not require public subsidies. Thus, this bill ensures that the public will not be subjected to paying for costs associated with the planning of this private investor-driven project.

We have been strong supporters of major rail improvements in the Northeast corridor, but the proposed Baltimore-Washington Superconducting Magnetic Levitation (SCMAGLEV) project is the wrong technology and design for the Washington-Baltimore corridor and the NE Corridor as a whole. Instead of allowing public subsidies to be expended on Maglev, we urge the State to lead coordinated efforts on significant investments in both the Amtrak and commuter rail improvement programs.

We are concerned about the project's negative effect on existing taxpayer investments in transit. The project is already diverting attention from repairing and improving our existing MARC and Amtrak infrastructure. If public funding is required for the Maglev, it could divert hundreds of millions of dollars in addition to fare revenue lost due to potential reduced ridership on Amtrak and MARC. The Maglev is a potential public-private partnership, and recent experience with P3s in Maryland and other states suggests that public funding will be required.

The Maglev project would have a negative impact on racial and social equity. Construction would plow through majority Black Prince George's County, but the residents of Prince George's County would not be able to take advantage of the project, since the technology and design speed are such that there will only be stops in DC, at BWI Airport, and at Penn Station in Baltimore. Environmental Justice (EJ) communities would be disproportionately impacted.

Investing in the Maryland MARC and Amtrak NE Corridor expansion plans would more effectively serve the transit needs of our region and the NE Corridor. Upgrades to the existing rail system could also more easily be extended to other destinations like New York and Boston, than would be the case with Maglev which would need entirely new right-of-way through the very densely developed Northeast. Existing rail stations are located in more central and well-established transit hubs, like DC's Union Station.

A much more cost-effective solution would be to invest in improving our existing infrastructure and upgrade over time to high-speed rail standards. In conclusion, we urge you to pursue upgrades to the nation's existing rail infrastructure, including high-speed rail, in lieu of Maglev.

We ask for a favorable report for this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cheryl Cort', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cheryl Cort

Policy Director