



Committee: Senate Budget and Taxation
Testimony on: SB-0055 – State Finance – Prohibited Appropriations – Magnetic Levitation Transportation System
Organization: Maryland Coalition for Responsible Transit
Submitting: Rhonda Kranz, President
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: January 29, 2025

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for accepting the Maryland Coalition for Responsible Transit's (MCRT's) written testimony in support of SB0055. The MCRT evaluates transit projects for social equity, environmental impact, environmental justice, economic viability, and community accessibility. We represent a statewide coalition of communities, civic organizations, environmental groups, and residents. This bill will bring much-needed protection of public funds by prohibiting the State and certain units and instrumentalities of the State from using any appropriation for a magnetic levitation transportation system in the State; and providing that the prohibition does not apply to certain expenditures for salaries.

Maryland has experienced significant cost overruns in large transportation projects. The Purple Line has encountered major financial problems with a cost overrun of \$1.4 billion. Excessive cost overruns in development of the Intercounty Connector cost millions of federal taxpayers' dollars. It is essential that Maryland does not take responsibility for delays and contractual problems if the proposed Superconducting Magnetic Levitation (SCMaglev) train project is approved. In fact, as the SCMaglev is a project proposed by Baltimore-Washington Rapid Rail (BWRR), a private company, rather than a public-private partnership, Maryland taxpayers should not be responsible for funding any part of the proposed or future maglev projects.

To date, no major public rail system in the world operates without government subsidy. Taxpayers have already covered the over-five-million federal and state dollars for the current SCMaglev environmental assessment processes (e.g., the Draft Environmental Impact Statement [DEIS] and environmental certifications). At this juncture, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has run out of funding for the next step of developing an EIS and will need more federal dollars. Future projects would undeniably depend on a large amount of state and federal funds for certification and compliance.

BWRR—again, a private company—repeatedly has stated in their arguments in opposition to this bill that, while they do not need state funds, they want them to be available just in case financial

support is needed “later” in the project’s implementation. Our concern is that *now* is their *later* because the current federal funds have been fully expended.

Maryland’s transportation investments face persistent state funding difficulties, especially now with the current budget deficit. Cost-cutting and carefully-deliberated choices need to be made. Maryland should be focused on providing affordable and accessible transportation for all members of our communities. The SCMaglev would be built with three stops—Washington, D.C., Baltimore-Washington International Airport, and Baltimore— and no stops within the communities it would run through. Baltimore, Prince George’s, Anne Arundel, and Baltimore Counties would incur major financial and environmental costs of building the train. Most of the burden will be on already overburdened environmental justice communities. The SCMaglev’s excessively expensive ridership cost would benefit only an exceedingly small fraction of the state’s population.

Maryland is making great strides in adopting climate friendly policies, many targeted to be met by 2031. Analyses find that the SCMaglev would generate more greenhouse gases during construction than it is likely to save over several decades of operation. With a construction timeline of eight-to-ten years before ridership even begins, the SCMaglev would be significantly increasing, not decreasing, Maryland’s emissions, setting us back from achieving our emission reduction goals.

Why prohibit appropriations for all maglev systems? There are multiple concerns regarding the SCMaglev, including the loss of important ecological habitats, environmental justice and public health impacts, and the safety of the technology, as well as whether it would in fact lead to a decrease in greenhouse gas emissions. Most of these concerns, particularly environmental and health impacts, are inherent in the maglev technology rather than specific to the current proposal. Another important concern is that the technology is developed and maintained in Japan. Rather than benefiting Maryland, the investment in equipment and maintenance would benefit Japanese business resources and expertise.

Maglev trains are not compatible with the Maryland's existing transportation systems. They require their own operating systems that would run underground and/or on elevated tracks that can be up to 150 feet in the air. And they take massive amounts of land to build and operate. The proposed SCMaglev project includes a rail maintenance yard larger than Disneyland that would be located on federal property.

Why would Maryland need a new rail system when we have existing transit with AMTRAK, MARC, and Bus Rapid Transit? The FRA, through the Northeastern Corridor Future program, has already developed a long-term vision and investment program with regional stakeholders. Billions of dollars have been committed to major upgrades to the existing Acela equipment that reaches speeds comparable to maglev trains. Marylanders deserve their taxpayer dollars to be used for commuter options that benefit all citizens; not gamble on still untested technology that would benefit only a small and wealthy minority.

Maryland residents should not have to bear the financial costs of any maglev project that is not fully funded by the private developer, especially if the project runs into difficulties and escalating costs as we have seen in previous transportation projects as stated above. For the reasons given above, we thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony and urge a FAVORABLE vote for SB0055.