

Testimony by Susan R. McCutchen
February 5, 2020

In support of Senate Bill 253, An Act Concerning
State Finance and Procurement – Prohibited Appropriations – Magnetic Levitation
Transportation System

I am testifying about Senate Bill 253, an act put forth by Senators Pinsky, Augustine, and Beidle, which I strongly support and applaud. At issue is the proposed Superconducting Magnetic Levitation (SCMaglev) project.

The proposed SCMaglev project is a deeply disconcerting conundrum, both for you and your constituents. We also face a complicated set of competing proposed transportation projects, including Beltway Expansion and the Loop (modified Hyperloop). Our Northeast Corridor is being assailed by the hard-hitting promotion of and promises made by the developers of these disparate, uncoordinated projects, all claiming to bring significant traffic alleviation and ease of travel, a greener environment, and more prosperity for communities along the paths. The allure is understandable if taken at face value; however, as you well know regarding any complicated issue, there is much more under the surface. The issues roiling beneath the SCMaglev project have not been mined sufficiently for concrete information about actual financial cost, environmental impact, and the impact on the lives of the residents and communities along the path.

The communities along the proposed paths comprise richly diverse, multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual residents. Elected officials, organizations, and residents are working to maintain, improve, and strengthen their municipalities and unincorporated areas, including in the area of sustainable transportation options. The Prince George's County Mayors Coalition for Sustainable Transportation that formed to address regional transportation issues is one example. Another is environmental and grassroots organizations of many kinds actively engaged in addressing issues of environmental and social injustice as well as considering and proposing reasonable transportation alternatives that will enhance our lives. An example is the Anacostia Watershed Society creatively working on non-intrusive, green, and sustainable transportation as they improve our waterways. I urge you to reach out to the various sources of forward-looking transportation concepts and consider less intrusive and more cost-effective measures that can be taken.

As recurrent problems with extant and new Metro and other regional construction projects demonstrate, the DMV is a wetland marsh not conducive to the digging associated with intrusive construction projects that would entail disturbing the earth by exploratory burrowing under at various depths along most of and erupting from underneath in one section along the path, expanding the built environment on the surface at several locations along the path, and ultimately potentially harming or destroying private and public property. Further, consider the inevitable gentrification that will displace lower-income residents in Baltimore as continues to be the case in Washington, D.C.

Maryland will not substantially benefit financially from the SCMaglev transportation option nor will it benefit the residents and their communities. Do not be swayed by the leaderships of the NAACP and the Chambers of Commerce of Prince George's County, Anne Arundel County, Baltimore County, and Baltimore City, or the unions that have stated their pre-support for the project. Unless they are privy to information withheld from the public, the leaderships of these organizations have yet to review the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). It will be issued later this year, revealing the final chosen route and addressing in detail the assessed environmental and other related impacts. Yet these organizations have signed off on and are actively promoting the project and posit that all the consistently thorny questions will be sufficiently answered. They claim to have been promised seats at the table and have accepted the unsubstantiated claims of an abundance of construction and permanent jobs and prosperity, particularly for Baltimore. There needs to be careful review of the EIS by independent specialists. Too many questions linger over years of queries. Too much is unknown and so much would not be known until actual digging would take place, which is too late if damage is caused.

Senators, I urge you to support Senate Bill 253. The risks of this project far outweigh the benefits. These kinds of projects are destined for cost overruns and would become a financial burden for Maryland. Baltimore-Washington Rapid Rail and Japan, with its potential windfall from sales of technology and expertise, would be the benefactors and the beneficiaries, as they admittedly look to use us as a trial balloon to convince New York to buy in.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

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