

February 22, 2024

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

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

My name is Susan McCutchen, a member of the Maryland Coalition for Responsible Transit, submitting testimony as an individual. I am speaking in support of HB0170, sponsored by Delegate Nicole Williams. 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 and directly addresses concerns expressed by 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.

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. A private company, BWRR 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. My concern is that *now* is their “later” because their federal funds have been fully expended. Furthermore, they proffer the hackneyed argument that such legislation would send the wrong message to developers of innovative forms of transportation and discourage them from doing business with Maryland. *The reality is that this bill would address only one specific overblown 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 an *eventual* fast travel option from DC to New York as a convincing selling point, is not the kind of commuter train needed for the Northeast Corridor. Extremely costly, the projected 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 chunk of federal government funds allocated and expended to undertake the study and meet NEPA requirements.

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 no matter how many fees Japan waives for BWRR to acquire the technology. I do not relish the Japanese owning a piece of Maryland’s Northeast Corridor and demanding repayment should the project falter or perhaps not be able to be finished. They and all interested parties will no doubt expect to be repaid for their investments in building and operating the train. Again, we the people will pay to complete a foundering project or suffer living with a useless, uncompleted behemoth dissecting our communities.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony favorable to HB0170, which we look forward to moving out of committee.

Sincerely,

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