

May 4, 2021

House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials
2167 Rayburn House Office Building
45 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20515

Hearing: “When Unlimited Potential Meets Limited Resources: The Benefits and Challenges of High-Speed Rail and Emerging Rail Technologies”

Testimony for May 5, 2021

Jane Lyons, Maryland Advocacy Manager

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading organization in the Washington, DC region advocating for walkable, bikeable, inclusive, and transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way to grow and provide opportunities for all. We have strong partnerships with business, conservation, and affordable housing organizations, and received the 2017 Regional Partnership Award from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

We have been strong supporters of major rail improvements in the Northeast corridor, but are convinced that 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. Therefore, we urge you to not provide federal financial support to this project. Instead, we urge significant investments in both the Amtrak and commuter rail improvement programs.

The 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, with 80 percent of impacted parcels located in EJ communities.

Furthermore, the high projected cost of a one-way ticket sends a signal that this project is for the wealthiest white-collar commuters, not those who will suffer from the damage wrought by the project or those who need more accessible, frequent, and affordable transit. A \$60 ticket

for the SCMAGLEV would be about seven times more than an existing MARC commuter rail ticket for the same trip (\$8) or existing Amtrak Acela ticket (\$46).

We are also 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 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. Given that Maglev is a multi-billion dollar technology yet to be implemented anywhere in the U.S., this project could require significant public funding.

The limited time savings is also not worth the cost and risk. The Acela Express between DC and Baltimore currently takes 30 minutes. While Maglev would cut time spent on the train in half, it doesn't account for time spent getting to the station. The average total trip would go from 90 minutes to 75 minutes, which is not worth the risk, nor the costs to equity and environmental quality.

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 the SCMAGLEV. Thank you for your time.