



May 20, 2021

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Re: Draft EIS Comments on the Baltimore-Washington SCMAGLEV Project

Sierra Club supports the **No-Build option** in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement of the Baltimore-Washington SCMaglev Project. Any possible benefits are far outweighed by the fundamental inequity of the project, its irreversible adverse impacts on protected public lands, and its negative impacts on local transportation services that already serve the corridor.

At first glance, the proposed Baltimore-Washington Maglev (Maglev) does indeed look shiny, futuristic, and exciting. But mega-infrastructure projects and policy decisions that impact regions, states, and communities for many generations can't be made based on quick looks. Whether it's a transit project or a road project, we need to apply the same critical scrutiny. These projects require careful analysis and assessment of risks, benefits, and tradeoffs. That is where the troubling aspects of Maglev become apparent.

First, there is the issue of fairness.

The people who would bear the burden of the impacts of construction and operation of the Maglev would not receive a fair share of the benefits of the project. The project area is home to a 69% minority population, with about 13% of people living in low income households. Approximately 80% of the land parcels that would have impacts ranging from vibrations, noise, and health hazards are located within Environmental Justice communities. Moreover, the cost of the ticket on the Maglev train – an estimated \$60 on average – would be substantially greater than that on the MARC train (\$8) or Amtrak (\$46). With such high-priced tickets, the Maglev might be an option for the wealthy but it would be out of reach for most people. With no stops

between downtown DC and BWI airport, this train is essentially inaccessible to people outside the vicinity of the terminals. When the Maglev was to be sited through wealthier Maryland communities over a decade ago, they [opposed it](#) just as those currently in its proposed path are doing today, including in [Greenbelt](#) and [Prince George's County](#).

Second, there are the adverse effects on the local public transit system.

Investment in the Maglev could take away from much-needed investment in regional commuter services, including the MARC and Amtrak trains that already serve the Baltimore-Washington corridor. According to the DEIS, approximately 32% of annual MARC ridership on the Penn and Camden Lines would divert to the Maglev project once it is implemented. Diverting passengers from MARC and Amtrak would decrease the economic viability of these more affordable services on which ordinary Marylanders depend. According to the DEIS, this may also result in a decrease in service levels of these more affordable options.

Third, there are the adverse impacts to the environment and public lands.

Transportation projects (including many necessary ones) all have environmental impacts to some degree, but the Maglev project has significant irreversible impacts that far outweigh any of the questionable claimed benefits. The DEIS describes many [serious and irreversible impacts](#) to the Patuxent Research Refuge and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, as well as National Parkland along the BW Parkway and the Greenbelt Forest Preserve. Hundreds of acres – along with their ecosystem services – would be lost to the trainset maintenance facility, vent shafts, and access roads. Is this really how we should treat public lands that have been set aside for ecological and agricultural research and conservation of our local natural habitats? It would be a travesty to allow a private entity to use these public lands for profit, with the disruption that would occur to priceless natural ecosystems in uniquely valuable places. Approving this project would set a precedent for further encroachments on land set aside for the public good.

Though the Maglev project proponents have tried to pitch it as climate-friendly, the Maglev project would result in a net increase of 3 trillion Btus, equivalent to the energy to power around 88,900 average homes for one year. This would not be offset by the diversion from other transportation modes. It would also be very unlikely to significantly decrease highway traffic congestion or transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions. Why should we all bear these significant adverse impacts for private projects when we already have existing public transit options that provide more affordable travel for more people with similar trip times along the Baltimore-Washington corridor?

Conclusion

While the Sierra Club supports transforming the transportation sector to move people and goods without burning fossil fuels, we cannot support the Baltimore-Washington Maglev as described in this DEIS (see impact [facts and figures](#)). The possible benefits are far outweighed by the fundamental inequity of the project, its probable adverse impacts on local transportation services for ordinary residents, and its irreversible adverse impacts on protected public lands and unique local ecosystems. Instead we must improve mobility in the region by fixing and expanding the public assets that we already operate – like MARC and Amtrak – and by changing our land use and development decisions so that people can live closer to

family-sustaining jobs and amenities. We urge the Federal Railroad Administration and Maryland Department of Transportation to select the No-Build option for this project.

Sincerely,
Josh Tulkin
Director, Sierra Club, Maryland Chapter

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has approximately 800,000 members.