Patuxent Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

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May 22, 2021

SCMAGLEV Project c/o Lauren Molesworth
Maryland Transit Administration
6 Saint Paul St, Baltimore, MD 21202

Via email to info@bwmaglev.info

I am submitting comments on behalf of the Patuxent Bird Club on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Baltimore-Washington Maglev project. The Board of the Patuxent Bird Club has voted to oppose the building of the Maglev project and instead supports the No-Build option.

Our members have many concerns about the proposed Maglev project. Foremost is the irreparable damage that will result to the ecosystems at Patuxent Research Refuge, Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, the Greenbelt Forest Preserve, and county and local parks along the alignment. The train's infrastructure would require removal of forests, fields, scrub-shrub habitat, and varied wetlands including bogs, springs, and seeps. Many of the habitats that would be impacted are dependent on underlying geological formations, aquifers, and soil types. The ecosystems containing these habitats have evolved over centuries, and the damage caused by slashing through the area cannot be mitigated by attempting to re-create such habitats at off-site locations. The triangle of green space comprising Patuxent Research Refuge, Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, and the Greenbelt Forest Preserve is the largest undeveloped tract of land in the region, and still contains much of its original biodiversity. There is simply no other place in our region that could support an attempt to mitigate the damage by re-creating these ecosystems.

Apart from the damage to the ecosystems, the Patuxent Bird Club is concerned about loss of the recreational value of the impacted properties. Our organization sponsors an annual series of field trips and bird walks at Patuxent Research Refuge; these events, which are free and open to the public, would be negatively impacted by the construction of the Maglev and by its very existence when operational. Can you imagine trying to view and identify warblers by sight and by ear – birds that would be high in the tree canopy – with a train zipping by at over 300 mph over our heads? Why would anyone be attracted to study birds in such a disturbed setting?

Our members also worry about impacts to long-standing scientific research studies at Patuxent Research Refuge and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center. The research conducted by these federal taxpayer-funded facilities has been ongoing for more than 100 years, and the land occupied by these facilities now constitute the best-studied ecosystems in the world. Some of our members are employees of the facilities; others participate as volunteers at Patuxent Research Refuge and/or the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center in studies on native plants, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects. Our study sites include the northwest corner of the North Tract of Patuxent Research Refuge, which would be impacted by the proposed Train Maintenance Facility along Route 198; and the old airfield on Springfield Road, a site that has been

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extraordinarily productive for rare birds and odonates, but which has also been proposed as a Train Maintenance Facility site.

We have deep concerns about impacts to waterways and wetlands. The proposed Train Maintenance Facilities at Route 198 and at Springfield Road would directly overlie the beds of the Little Patuxent River and the Beaverdam Creek, respectively, requiring re-routing of the waterway and destruction of associated wetlands. Beaverdam Creek is an important tributary of the Anacostia River, and the Little Patuxent is a major tributary of the Patuxent River. These waterways are important in providing wildlife habitat and opportunities for fishing and other human recreation; in addition, the Patuxent River is a source of drinking water for hundreds of thousands of people in southern Maryland.

Indeed, there would be impacts to watersheds and waterways along the entire 40-mile Maglev route, including the tunneled portions and the above-ground viaduct portion. These impacts include physical damage or outright destruction of waterways and wetlands; increased runoff caused by an increase in impervious surfaces associated with the Train Maintenance Facility, parking lots and access roads, and other pieces of the immense Maglev infrastructure; and chemical runoff from train washing and maintenance. Given the location in the sensitive watersheds of the Chesapeake Bay, this area represents the worst possible choice for the siting of the Maglev infrastructure. Ultimately, the Maglev would have a negative impact on the health of the Chesapeake Bay through its severe impacts on the Bay's watersheds.

The Patuxent Bird Club notes that the Patuxent Research Refuge was created in 1936 by Executive Order of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This order directed that the lands be used as a "wildlife experiment and research refuge." Any other use would not be compatible with this Executive Order. Allowing a private, for-profit company any use of the Patuxent Research Refuge for its own profit-making business would be a travesty and would constitute a dangerous precedent for other federal land use across the country.

The Maglev project would also require the taking of other public lands, including municipal and county parklands as well as federal facilities. Our public lands have been set aside and protected for valid reasons in support of the public good, and these reasons cannot be set aside and ignored. The Maglev project offers no public benefit to the people of Prince George's County that would offset the taking of our public lands.

For these reasons, the Patuxent Bird Club urges the Federal Railroad Administration to reject the proposal to build the Maglev project, and instead adopt the No-Build alternative.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Marcia Watson
President