

## **Prince George's planning board details maglev concerns**

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Oct. 18, 2018

Prince George's County planning officials have submitted a list of concerns to the Maryland Department of Transportation about plans to build a \$12 billion high-speed train connecting Baltimore and D.C.

Prince George's County Planning Board Chairwoman Elizabeth Hewlett, in a four-page letter following a staff review last week of the project's two proposed routes — connecting the two cities by superconducting magnetic levitation train technology in 15 minutes — does not squarely come out for or against the closely watched project, known as maglev for short and talked about for years. But a host of questions are raised about community impacts, passenger costs, environmental concerns, challenges associated with two ventilation plants planned along the routes and whether the county shares in the upside of the ambitious transit undertaking.

“As proposed, the current maglev alignment and facilities will have significant negative impacts upon Prince George's County, but Prince George's County will not share in the economic or transportation benefits of the project because there is not a station in the county,” Hewlett wrote. “This is a major concern.”

Among the concerns highlighted by Prince's George's planning board members:

- The county wants Maryland transportation officials to review tunnel-digging plans and the impact on residences, businesses and critical infrastructure. A tunnel 80-feet deep or more will be dug in two segments; more than 1,000 residences are located above the proposed tunnels, according to the letter.
- When not traveling in a tunnel at high speeds, trains will run on an elevated viaduct, a bridge made of multiple small spans. Prince George's officials are concerned the viaducts will be built too close to homes — within 60 to 80 feet, according to the letter.
- Two ventilation plant structures, to be built on three-acre sites and standing to one to five stories tall, are proposed for Woodlawn/West Lanham Hills and East Riverdale/Bladensburg — two neighborhoods identified by the county as facing

“significant economic, health, public safety and educational challenges.” The Bladensburg vent facility is also planned for near a waterfront park, a location the planning board opposes.

- A similar concern involves plans for a rolling stock depot facility at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, a “critical environmental and open space resource.” Planning board members would prefer the depot be located outside the county.
- The board wants a fund established to subsidize fares for low-income residents and senior citizens.

Wayne Rogers, a former energy industry executive, launched The Northeast Maglev in 2010 and has a commitment for \$5 billion of the project’s \$10 billion-to-\$12 billion price tag. Northeast Maglev’s engineers and other staffers are working on track alignments and permitting issues with about 30 local, state and federal agencies overseeing environmental, transportation, planning and zoning, emergency management and historic preservation policies.

Rogers hasn't yet responded to a request for comment on the concerns outlined by Prince George's officials.

Northeast Maglev promotes the technology while sister company Baltimore Washington Rapid Rail is the developer. They’re being run with about \$120 million that Rogers has raised so far in startup capital. Crafting an environmental impact statement is the key milestone; that process kicked off in August 2016, funded with a \$28 million federal grant. A draft is expected to be finished by the end of this year, with a final version ready before the end of 2019.

Six proposed track alignments were narrowed earlier this year to two, running along each side of the Baltimore-Washington Parkway.

Some see this maglev project as an ambitious antidote to Greater Washington’s crippling transportation gridlock. Others see it as cost-prohibitive and doomed to red tape roadblocks. Or both. If all the financial and regulatory stars align, trains could be shuttling riders between D.C. and Baltimore for the cost of an Acela ticket — anywhere from \$46 to \$82 based on current prices — in eight to 10 years.

A superconducting maglev train would travel at speeds of 300 mph and eventually

connect D.C. and New York in an hour. Research on this kind of high-speed rail technology began in Japan in 1962; it's been tested there since 1997.

Louis Berger, the New Jersey-based engineering firm working with Baltimore Washington Rapid Rail is seeking a subcontractor to identify and assess a right of way for the two routes along the Baltimore-Washington Parkway.

The subcontractor would work through easements and parcels needing to be acquired and perform economic impact studies for transit-oriented development projects around maglev stations, among other tasks. Berger envisions three phases for this work, with a subcontractor performing services via task orders and time-and-materials agreements, according to a request for proposals issued earlier this month.