

Local Scientists Raise Concerns About Maglev Project Impacts

by Amy Carpenter-Driscoll

On January 15, the U.S. Department of Transportation-Federal Railroad Administration and Maryland Department of Transportation released the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Baltimore-Washington Superconducting Maglev Project, commonly known as “the Maglev.” The DEIS describes the proposed project, need, alternatives, current environmental conditions and potential impacts, and possible mitigation strategies. The report includes a comparative analysis between the No-Build Alternative and Build Alternatives so that citizens, representatives, stakeholders and businesses can review the potential environmental and human impacts of the Maglev.

The night prior to the DEIS release, the Maryland Coalition for Responsible Transit hosted a virtual public town hall to discuss the impacts of the Maglev project in Prince George’s County, including safety concerns, greenhouse gas emissions, environmental impacts, road congestion, community impacts, and alternative project ideas. Among the guest speakers were Dr. Owen Kelly, a NASA scientist whose research areas include atmospheric science, and Sam Droege, a wildlife biologist at the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center.

Kelly challenged the Baltimore Washington Rapid Rail (BWRR), the company working to develop the Maglev, on its assertions that it would reduce carbon dioxide emission by 2 million short tons. “The only way I can see to do it is first you ignore the carbon dioxide to build the track. Then you ignore the carbon dioxide to generate the electricity that runs the train, and you only calculate the carbon dioxide in the advertised reduction in car travel, multiply it by a few decades, and you can get 2 million short tons in reduction,” said Kelly.

On the Facts page of the BWRR website, the FAQ regarding neighborhood and environmental impacts states that federal agencies will analyze the proposed project’s potential consequences. “If you see numbers on their website or Facebook and there aren’t background papers explaining how they got those

numbers, you should be somewhat suspicious,” Kelly says. He published a blog post on the Sierra Club website detailing his calculations, positing that at between \$5513 and \$8269 per metric ton of reduced greenhouse gas emission, “Even if BWRR were correct ... the maglev would still be an embarrassingly expensive way to fight global warming.” Effective methods of reducing carbon dioxide emissions cost \$100 per metric ton.

Droege spoke to the physical pathway of the Maglev, which would travel through the largest conservation area along the I-95 corridor between here and New York City. This protected area is comprised of federal lands owned by the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, and state, county and private lands. He points out that the area functions as a whole, and “animals don’t know about boundaries, but they cross back and forth.” The habitat fragmentation that the Maglev project would cause would be detrimental to endangered species and habitats that do not exist elsewhere.

Droege raised another concern regarding the transfer of federal conservation lands to a private corporation. “This is precedent-setting,” he said. “None of these conservation areas, which have existed over 100 years, have ever been transferred to a private corporation.” He notes that this area is the only above-ground section of the entire project. “You could build another train line somewhere else, you cannot build another research center and animal conservation community somewhere else, so I ask you whether this is an appropriate giveaway of our lands.”

The City of Greenbelt has hired Jill Grant and Associates, an environmental law firm, to go through the environmental review process and make challenges and cases on behalf of the city. The DEIS is available for public review at bwmaglev.info/index.php/project-documents/deis. There is a 90-day comment period, ending April 22, 2021. Comments can be submitted by email to info@bwmaglev.info, by U.S. mail or through the online comment form at bwmaglev.info.



PHOTO BY MARY LOU WILLIAMSON

Wintersweet, *Chimonanthus praecox*, opens its fragrant blooms any warm sunny day January into March - the fragrance fills the garden.

Community Events

At the Library

Curbside service is available Tuesdays through Fridays, 1 to 6 p.m., and Saturdays, 1 to 5 p.m. Customers may place new hold requests via the Prince George’s County Memorial Library System catalog (catalog.pgcmlls.info/polaris) or Ask a Librarian Telephone Reference service at 240-455-5451. When notified that held items are available, customers may book pickup appointments through the PGCMLS website (pgcmlls.info) or the Telephone Reference service. Schedule only one appointment for pickup unless there are more than 50 items to be retrieved. Items for pickup should be retrieved from the tables placed outside the lower-level entrance. Curbside service will continue during inclement weather except in dangerous conditions, such as thunderstorms, tornado warnings or ice storms. Call 301-699-3500 and ask for Public Services or use the link at pgcmlls.info/contact-us for assistance.

All Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS) students have access to the library’s online resources with their LINK card number. Adults may register for a free virtual library card or renew an existing card at pgcmlls.info.

Biblio Consulta: The Library’s Spanish language call center is available at 240-455-5451 (press option 2) Tuesdays through Fridays, 1 to 6 p.m. and Saturdays, 1 to 5 p.m.

Homeschool Help

Wednesday, February 3 at 11 a.m. Need help using the digital history resources available from PGCMLS? Working on projects about African American history? Register at pgcmlls.info/event/4796503. The meeting link will be sent the day of the program. Limit 15.

Learning from Home

The PGCMLS supports learning from home with a wide array of online educational resources for students in grades K-12. In September 2020, the Library launched the new Resources for Learning from Home portal at pgcmlls.info/school. The portal complements the Library’s Homework Support Suite to enhance virtual learning for local students.



Senator Pinsky Seeks Scholarship Applicants

State Senator Paul Pinsky is offering a scholarship to current high school seniors and to full-time and part-time degree-seeking undergraduate and graduate students who live in the 22nd legislative district. The application is available online at senatorpinsky.org. Complete and file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in addition to Pinsky’s scholarship application. Selection is based on academic achievement, financial need and commitment to higher education. Awards range from \$500 to \$2,000.

Awards from previous academic years will be renewed automatically as long as the student has maintained satisfactory academic progress. For further information or questions call 301-858-3155 or email paul.pinsky@senate.state.md.us. The deadline is April 1.

Radio Play Auditions

Greenbelt Arts Center (GAC) will hold auditions over Zoom by appointment on Thursday and Saturday, February 4 and 6 for February’s old-time radio plays. Audition slots can be arranged by emailing Director Rikki Howie Lacewell at the address listed on the GAC website, greenbeltartscenter.org.

In February, the series will feature two short plays – Fibber McGee and Molly: Valentine Candy, and Lights Out: The Locked Room Mystery. There will be three virtual rehearsals, and the final video will be posted on the website on February 28.

Although the actors will appear in the video, these are radio plays and casting will be done based on vocal sound and not age or appearance. All roles are open and everyone is encouraged to audition; this is a great opportunity for beginners who would like to try acting. Participation is entirely virtual. More information and the recordings of previous radio plays are available at the website.



GHI Bike Committee Seeks New Members

A new year and new opportunities to use your time, talents and energy to help the GHI community. Consider volunteering with the GHI Bicycle Committee. The GHI community is home to a number of cyclists of all ages and abilities which, in turn, makes advocacy important. The committee seeks fresh new faces and ideas to make the community more bicycle friendly for everyone.

The committee meets the third Wednesday of the month, teleconferencing, of course, in the age of Covid-19. To learn more about how to volunteer, contact John Campanile, jbelltower@yahoo.com; Diana McFadden, bowregard2003@gmail.com; Jackson Tan, jackson.tan.bs@gmail.com; or contact the GHI Board Liaison, Bruce Mangum, bmangum@ghi.coop.

Astronomical Society Hosts Virtual Tour

On Thursday, January 28 at 7:30 p.m. the Astronomical Society of Greenbelt will present a virtual tour of Green Bank Observatory, home to seven radio telescopes, including the 100-meter dish, the world’s largest steerable radio telescope. Sue Ann Heatherly will lead the facility tour and describe current and future research at Green Bank. All are welcome.

This meeting will be held virtually over Zoom. The Zoom link will be posted before the meeting on the Astronomical Society’s website at greenbeltastro.org.

Group Forms to Plan For Electric Vehicles

The City of Greenbelt GREEN TEAM has begun an effort, along with members of the city’s Advisory Planning Board and Greenbelt Advisory Committee on Environmental Sustainability, to propose a standard and plan to develop an electric vehicle fueling infrastructure in Greenbelt. Interested residents are invited to join a virtual meeting to be held on Thursday, January 28 at 7 p.m.

Contact John Lippert at ecolivingmag@aol.com for the agenda and Zoom access. To avoid problems, give the username as it will appear in Zoom or the phone number that will be used for phoning in.

Attention Birders

Greenbelt’s First Annual Big Year is here! Whoever records the most species of birds sighted in 2021 up until December 29 (the New Deal Café’s birthday) will receive a gift certificate for dinner for two at the New Deal Café. There will be a citywide category and a backyard category. This contest will be only within the political boundaries of Greenbelt. Pictures are welcome but not required, the contest is on the honor system. What is required is a list of the birds sighted, the date and time sighted for each species and as close to an exact location as possible described.

PROGRAM SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE		CONNECT WITH GATE ON
7 am	Greenbelt Newsreel	• or Selections From the GATE Archive
8 am	Democracy Now!	• Repeat of Yesterday’s Program
9 am	GATE Classic Film ★ Sports/Drama • 1950	• The Jackie Robinson Story • Jackie Robinson • Directed by Alfred E Green
11 am	Greenbelt Newsreel	• or Selections From the GATE Archive
SAT/SUN	Member Spotlight	• GATE Community Producers
12 pm	Democracy Now!	• Today’s Program • Independent News
1 pm	Science Bowl PGCPS	• Glenn Dale v University Park • Templeton v Tulip Grove
2 pm	Greenbelt Newsreel	• or Selections From the GATE Archive
3 pm	GATE Classic Film ★ Sports/Drama • 1950	• The Jackie Robinson Story • Jackie Robinson • Directed by Alfred E Green
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WATCH US on VERIZON Fios 19 or COMCAST 77
STREAMING LIVE at www.greenbeltaccessstv.org/channel-live-stream