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## Maglev opportunity

With federal funds available for high-speed rail, state must act fast to make it happen here

By Ted Venetoulis  
*March 20, 2009*

Maryland has an unexpected opportunity to turn the Obama stimulus package into a local triumph. With a little vision and a lot of determination, we can make it happen.

House and Senate conferees inserted language into the stimulus bill that provides \$8 billion for high-speed rail systems. The funding was part of President Barack Obama's bold plan to help shift America's transportation priorities and jolt our high-speed rail infrastructure into catching up with what the Europeans, Japanese and Chinese have been doing for decades.

Over the years, city and state officials have accumulated reams of studies and documents on what's called the "Maglev Project." What sounds like the fanciful title of a Robert Ludlum novel is actually the name of an impressive, magnetically levitated high-speed rail system that would connect Washington and Baltimore on its way to New York at speeds up to 250 mph, and ultimately link Boston in the north and Richmond, Va., and Charlotte, N.C., in the south. The Baltimore-Washington project would be the initial operating segment of the system, with stops at BWI Thurgood Marshall Airport and Penn Station. Most studies show that the greatest need for a maglev system is the Northeast Corridor. Even if the state has to contribute to the initial cost, this would likely be outweighed by the long-term benefits. Building the system would create demand in Maryland alone for \$1 billion in goods and services and put over 16,000 people to work, according to the 2003 Maglev Regional Economic Impact Study - probably dumping into state coffers more tax revenue than all possible slot machines combined.

For decades, state and local officials have yearned for the chance to launch this project - but without federal funds, it was little more than a pipe dream. Now the new administration and Congress have plopped billions of dollars in our laps.

But there are other maglev systems out there ready to be built. The question is, who gets the money - us or them? So what does Maryland have to do to make sure that it's us?

First, we have to methodically and quickly prepare our case. Let's use those documents we've been accumulating, the studies we've amassed, and the evidence that shows the line's extraordinary benefits to the entire East Coast. Next, we have to work with local communities to put forth a unified regional and state effort. Third, we need to create a massive political partnership with other East Coast cities that would be enhanced by such a transformational transportation system.

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And then we have to lead the fight - a fight for which Maryland is well-positioned. Consider: We have a governor who doesn't shrink from a scuffle. We have a couple of savvy U.S. senators who can tangle with the best of them in Washington. Our House delegation includes Steny H. Hoyer, the House majority leader; Elijah E. Cummings, the new president's most powerful state ally; Chris Van Hollen, the head of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee; C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger, who's been known to land a few blows for his district; and Donna Edwards, a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (and whose district encompasses a large portion of the proposed maglev line).

A couple of billion dollars may not seem like much in this world of trillion-dollar bailouts and trillion-dollar deficits - but it's a great start for a visionary project that's just been resurrected from a deep sleep.

"I don't want to see the fastest train in the world built halfway around the world in Shanghai," President Obama said. "I want to see it built right here in the United States of America."

Good idea, Mr. President - and there's no better place to start than Maryland.

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