

Austria Goes Long with Brenner Base Tunnel

Adapted from Information by Brenner Base Tunnel and PORR

The Brenner Base Tunnel is a straight, flat railway tunnel being constructed between Austria and Italy. The entire tunnel system through the Alps will be 40 miles long. It will rank as the longest tunnel in the history of Austria and the longest underground rail link in the world.



The tunnel consists of two tubes equipped with a single track, meaning train traffic through the tubes is one-way. One unique feature is the exploratory tunnel running from one end to the other. This tunnel lies between the two main tunnels and is noticeably smaller than the main tubes. The excavations currently underway should provide information on the rock mass, which will help reduce construction costs and times to a minimum. The exploratory tunnel will be essential for drainage when the BBT becomes operational.

This summer, construction will start on a segment of tunnel known as lot H51 Pfons-Brenner with a length of around 11 miles. The contract for the project went to PORR, along with Hinteregger and joint venture partners from Italy. PORR's tunneling experience includes constructing more than 370 miles of tunnels, as well as already building multiple exploratory and access tunnels for the Brenner Base Tunnel.

The construction phase for lot H51 will involve building two main tunnel tubes between Pfons and Brenner and around five miles of exploratory shafts, as well as an emergency stop and transfer point. Tunnel boring machines (TBMs) will be used to construct the two main, single-track tunnel tubes. The TBMs will have an excavation diameter of 34 feet, which means a stretch of up to 100 feet can be driven per day, per TBM. The drill and blast method will be used to excavate the exploratory shafts, then they will be secured with shotcrete. The entire lot will be supplied via a single access shaft. Completion is planned for 2024.

PORR CEO Karl-Heinz Strauss said, "To be charged with building the largest tunneling project in Austria is a sign of how highly valued our expertise is. The scope of the project, the changeable geological conditions, and the limited space constraints of the construction site all represent considerable challenges. On highly demanding, large-scale projects such as the 'Green Line' metro in Doha, we have proven that we are capable of mastering exceptionally complex tasks within the promised time and quality - and on budget. This certainly worked in our favor in the award process for the Brenner Base Tunnel."



A TBM used by PORR to construct the Finne Tunnel in Germany.

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