

British Tunnelling Society Conference 2022

"Saving the world is what we do"

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Tunnels are central to sustainable development. That was the message from International Tunnelling and Underground Space Association (ITA) president Arnold Dix at the British Tunnelling Society Conference 2022, which was held in London on Tuesday and Wednesday this week.

"We are constructors not destructors," he told the audience at the Queen Elizabeth conference centre in Westminster. "Saving the world is what we do. Sometimes that gets lots."



Keynote speakers Antonia Cornaro (L) and Arnold Dix (R) with Tunnelling Journal editor and conference curator Tris Thomas

Held on 11 and 12 October 2022, the conference covered a diverse range of projects and themes, from current and recent projects to emerging and low-carbon technologies, nuclear sector opportunities, digitalisation and drone technology.

Dix, who was one of the keynote speakers on day one of the conference, went on to explain that tunnelling projects help deliver the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Tunnels bring health to communities and countries by delivering clean water and taking away wastewater and make cities liveable and sustainable by taking transportation underground.

In her keynote presentation Antonia Cornaro, expert underground space, from Amberg who co-chairs the ITA's Underground Space Association, took the conference through a series of uses for the underground.

Projects highlighted in her keynote presentation included the Lightway, Cargo Sous Terrain in Switzerland which will take freight underground and a project at the Swiss Centre of Applied Technology (SCAUT) to develop underground data centres.

Attendees at the conference received reports and updates on a huge variety of projects from the UK and abroad. Technology themes included slurry treatment plants, nuclear decommissioning and waste storage, muon tomography and an update on drone-swarm tunnel rehab and construction from hyperTunnel. A session devoted to sprayed concrete linings (SCL) covered multi-layer design, Norway's SUPERCON project, the use of recycled glass to replace sand in SCL and a programme to produce low-carbon SCL.

Neil Hancox, chair of TunnelSkills and director of health, safety and wellbeing for Align JV and the success of its tunnel apprenticeship scheme. Hancox made an appeal for experienced tunnellers to volunteer as NVQ assessors to help the industry prove and ensure competency.

Conference goers also learned about two important new documents which are soon to be published. `Anthony Drake of Mott MacDonald and John Davis of Geotechnical Consulting Group talked about a new guide from CIRIA, *Geotechnical Baseline Reports: a good practice guide*, due out in early 2023. And Christophe Eberle, technical principal at Mott MacDonald provided an

update on the *BTS/ICE specification for tunnelling 4th edition**. Changes include a move towards performance-based specifications rather than prescriptive ones in a bid to encourage more innovation.

New BTS president Rod Young spoke about the accelerating pace of change in his David Wallis Lecture entitled 'A past to be proud of, a future that looks green'. He observed how the use of new technology, such as drones, has transformed works in the water sector and pondered what further changes new technology and materials would bring.

*Anyone who wants to comment on the first draft of the BTS/ICE specification should email bts@ice.org.uk (<mailto:bts@ice.org.uk>) before 7 November 2022 to register interest.
