Policy Statement on Legal and Administrative Issues in Underground Space Use

ITA Working Group on Subsurface Planning

At the 1991 annual meeting of the International Tunnelling Association, held in London in April, the ITA General Assembly unanimously accepted the following declaration, prepared by the ITA Working Group on Subsurface Planning.

The subsurface is a resource for future development similar to surface land or recoverable minerals. Once an underground opening is created, the subsurface can never be restored to its original condition, and the presence of this opening can affect all future uses of the surface and the subsurface in its vicinity. These factors require responsible planning for all uses of the underground to ensure that the resource is not damaged or usurped by uncoordinated first uses.

The awareness of the underground option among planners, developers, and financiers should be increased so that subsurface planning issues are properly addressed. Subsurface planning should be an integral part of the normal land use planning process.

National, regional, and local policies should be prepared to provide guidelines, criteria and classifications for assessing appropriate uses of underground space, identifying geologic conditions, defining priority uses and resolving potential utilization conflicts. Site reservation policies should be established for important future uses and for especially favorable geologic conditions.

It is recommended that every region or city establish a permanent record-keeping system for the maintenance of detailed records of the use of the subsurface. This record-keeping should be coordinated by a single agency to ensure compatible and complete records and should include "as built" records rather than project plans. Records should include activities, such as groundwater extraction and deep pile foundations, which affect the potential use of the subsurface but which may not be classed as specific subsurface facilities.