

TBM excavation in weak and heterogeneous rock masses for the Athens Metro

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ABSTRACT: An engineering geological assessment with respect to the TBM excavation, within a highly heterogeneous system of formations known as the "Athens Schist" is presented. The method considers mainly the rock mass competence on the basis of criteria related to lithology, tectonic deformation (fracturation-folding-shearing), weathering and rock mass quality as well as geometrical-structural and groundwater criteria. Hence it calibrates the rock mass interaction during excavation using the specific TBM of the Athens Metro project, with an emphasis to potential face failure and overbreaks. It is based on a statistical-minded extrapolation of factors that govern the behaviour of the ground, when subjected to mechanised boring. The final objective is to identify which tunnel sections exhibit 'friendly', 'moderate' or 'adverse' tunnelling conditions with respect to overbreak development and propagation and to provide a basis for the selection of appropriate treatment and/or alternative excavation methods.

RESUME: Une caractérisation appliquée à la performance du tunnelier dans des formations très hétérogènes du substratum d'Athènes est présentée. La méthode considère la compétence de la masse rocheuse suivant sa lithologie, sa déformation tectonique, son altération, sa classification géotechnique, son développement géométrique et son milieu hydrogéologique. Un calibrage du comportement de la masse vis-à-vis la formation des hors-profils par effondrement du front à travers le disque de la foreuse est donc formulé. La méthode est basée sur le groupement statistique des facteurs qui contrôlent le comportement du terrain. L'objectif final est de classer les sections à être traversées comme d'un comportement "amical", "modéré" ou "défavorable", pourvu, le cas échéant, qu'on décide les moyens des traitements nécessaires.

1 GENERAL

The first two fully underground lines of the Athens Metropolitan Railway are under construction since November 1991. These lines comprise 18km of tunnels, 21 stations, 29 ventilation shafts and various miscellaneous structures. Two 9.5m diameter TBMs, one for each line, were employed in order to bore the twin-track running tunnels which are generally located at a depth of 10-20m (measured at the crown). At the time of writing this paper all the stations are excavated, and about 70% of the interstation tunnels are bored with by the TBMs (Hewison, L., 1994).

The objective of this independent tunnelling assessment is to evaluate whether the tunnelling conditions along the Athens Metro interstations are 'friendly', 'moderate' or 'adverse' for excavation with the tunnel boring machines (TBM) of the specific project.

The methodology of this analysis has been put into practice especially for the assessment of the Athens Metro interstations and has provided successful predictions of the behaviour of the ground. This methodology is continuously developing (Marinos, P. et al, 1997), as the experience gained from the works underway lead to particular adjustments in its approach, through a

better understanding of the engineering behaviour of the rock mass.

2. GROUND CONDITIONS IN THE ATHENS METROPOLIS

The geological substratum of the city of Athens consists, within the depth range of the Metro works, of a series of formations known as the system of the "Athens Schist".

The 'Athens Schist' is a term used to describe a highly heterogeneous, flysch-like formation of Cretaceous age (Marinos, G. *et. al*, 1971). It comprises schists, phyllites and metasedimentary shales, siltstones and sandstones. Limestones and marls may also occur while igneous activity has introduced peridotitic and diabasic intrusions at places. During the Eocene the 'Athens Schist' formations were subjected to intense folding and thrusting and subsequent extensive faulting caused extensional fracturing. Widespread weathering and alteration of the deposits are additional controlling factors of the rock mass quality. In general, sericite metasandstones and schists form an upper unit, which is underlain by a lower unit of dark grey clayey and silty shales, phyllites and finer grained metasandstones (Figure 1).

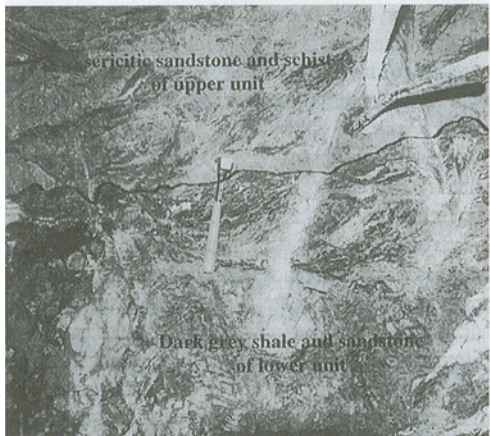


Figure 1: The two units generally distinguished in the "Athens Schist".

The 'Athens Schist' rock mass is thus characterised by:

- frequent changes of lithological facies at short distances, further accentuated by an irregular weathering pattern,

- a variability of materials ranging from hard rocks to soils in terms of strength (frequently mixed at the scale of the tunnel) and
- a highly erratic structural pattern of numerous structural shears and faults.

The tectonic activity whenever associated with weak rocks often produces engineering soil materials. The tectonic fabric of the 'Athens Schist' bedrock also includes mylonite materials that are not only limited to major fault zones but also rather occur under the form of gouge infilling of systematic or non-systematic shears. The response of rock mass volumes composed of hard rock and weak rock intercalations to the severe tectonic activity gave rise to dysharmonic folding and faulting that often entailed a clearly visible chaotic structure of isolated lensed blocks of hard rock 'floating' within a soft clayey matrix.

The resulting rock mass is highly heterogeneous and anisotropic not only in the macroscopic-geotectonic scale of the Athens basin, but mainly in the mesoscopic scale of the tunnel works. This inherent heterogeneity of the "Athenian Schist" rock masses is a key-factor for the generation of overbreak developing conditions during TBM excavation.

In practice, the heterogeneity of the 'Athens Schist' is proved by the uncertainty for correlating adjacent boreholes, a fact which makes the drawing of reliable geological sections more difficult. In the methodology described herein, a 'statistical-minded' extrapolation of the borehole data is employed, instead of compilation of classic geological sections.

In the Athens Metro Project the "Athenian Schist" geological formations are being rated by the Contractor according to a Mass Rating system (MR), a modification of the RMR classification of Bieniawski. In simple terms, the MR subdivides the R.Q.D and discontinuity spacing ratings of the lowest range, and does not account for the effect of the discontinuities orientation).

Since the Athenian Schist rock masses, in several cases, exhibit an engineering soil behaviour, the present assessment does not rely upon the rock mass classification ratings to deduce its stability versus TBM excavation. It is possible that the same MR rating is attributed to formations with totally different behaviour during TBM excavation (e.g. cohesionless soil-like material with frictional characteristics, as opposed to laminated presheared shales of very low frictional

strength) or response to strengthening measures ("groutable" or "non-groutable" ground). Nevertheless, the MR-ratings are coevaluated with all other controlling geological parameters of the tunnel's cover zone and face, mainly when MR>22. On the engineering geological profile the MR-values are shown in distinct columns adjacent to the boreholes, thus allowing the facile identification of areas where blocks or lenses of hard rock 'float' within a predominantly weak-rock or engineering soil environment of low MR.

3. POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF TUNNEL BORING: THE NEED FOR A PREDICTIVE METHODOLOGY

The tunnels of the two new Athens Metro Lines are in their majority being excavated by means of two identical Tunnel Boring Machines, one per each line. The 9.5m-diameter TBMs are of the shielded type with a cutterhead equipped with disc cutters and drag bits (Figure 2). The uncontrolled muck discharge openings represent about 30% of the total cutterhead area while a series of belt conveyors are used to transport the muck at the back and load it to trains.

In principle the Athens Metro TBMs were designed to deal with various constellations of rock and soil, and their behaviour was indeed very good in excavating a major part of the Athenian substratum. However TBM excavation cannot always avoid collapses if the surrounding material is very poor (Efraimidis, C., 1996). Ground failures may initiate either from the face, or, in minor extent, from the very restricted section of the crown that is temporarily left unsupported at the upper front part of the TBM, as the machine advances. Overbreaks may then develop that could propagate upward.

The ground conditions ahead of the TBM are assessed in terms of overbreak risk that induces surface settlements jeopardising the stability of surface structures, or occasionally propagates to surface collapse with inestimable consequences in the worst case scenario.

Indeed, certain ground conditions can easily induce such collapses, by 'ravelling' of loose fine-grained material or by 'flowing' of soil or crushed rock, or by slippage of 'flakes' of tectonically

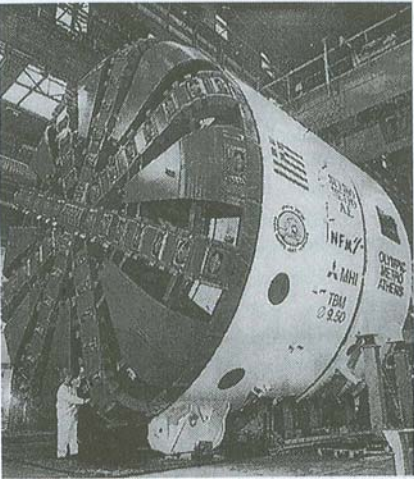


Fig. 2: The Athens Metro open cutterhead shielded TBM

disturbed phyllite. In other words, the aforementioned phenomena are favoured by 'passages' with low modulus of deformation (E), or in presheared formations of low strength with closely spaced foliation.

In the special case of mixed face conditions where sizeable blocks of competent hard rock (of the tunnel's scale) are isolated in a sheared weak clayey rock environment, overbreak may initiate when the blocks are rotated and displaced rather than cut by the TBM cutter head.

Overbreak developing conditions are further aggravated by the presence of water. During tunnelling with a TBM, the unlined front part of the tunnel constitutes a medium of infinite permeability. In general, vertical drainage towards the tunnel cannot be intense due to the overall moderate to low permeability of the 'Athens Schist' rock masses and therefore overbreak due to internal erosion is not a typical mode of failure. However, the rock mass becomes softer and

weaker when saturated with water, and the discontinuity condition is radically downgraded, especially in the case of completely weathered or presheared clayey shale with gouge infillings of low friction.

At this point it should be stressed that the encounter of ancient or antique (empty or backfilled) wells and cisterns, may constitute an imponderable failure factor at the tunnel face and

cover zone. Aside from the uncontrolled flow of water and mud from the well itself, the surrounding rock mass tends to be softened and disturbed and is generally liable to collapse from the rapid drawdown. Weakening may also occur due to leakages from overlying old sewage pipes.

Additionally, there is always the problem of predicting and avoiding tunnel-induced settlements on the surface of the urban area of Athens.

4. BOREHOLE INFORMATION AND THEIR ASSESSMENT

Borehole information is the main core of the present methodology. A solid basis of all necessary geological and geotechnical information is first compiled, in the form of 'geological sections for engineering purposes' on which the key parameters for the evaluation of the ground conditions are depicted.

4.1. Engineering geological characterization of the borehole materials

Detailed logs of the boreholes are prepared, following careful inspection of the cores, mostly collected with the split barrel drilling technique. The geological material is described and classified into distinct engineering geological formations, not according to strict classic petrographical criteria but combining basic engineering geological data such as:

- the type of tectonic deformation, i.e. brecciation, intense fracturing, compact endogenetic breccias,
- the type of infilling material of the discontinuities, i.e. soap-like clayey coatings or thick compressible gouge infillings of low friction angle,
- the presence or absence of slickensides (lines or striations) along the discontinuity surfaces and susceptibility of the formations to shear failure,
- the degree of participation of loose rock material and susceptibility of the formations to raveling failure,
- the degree of participation of engineering soil material, which may occur in the forms of completely weathered rock (residual soil) or discontinuity infilling material or fill material in

the voids or mylonitic clay along zones of intense tectonic shearing,

- the presence of blocks of very hard rock within a very weak, sheared and laminated mass that exhibit differential behaviour during excavation (incapability of the cutters to break the floating blocks).

4.2. Assessment of geologic conditions for TBM excavation

The assessment described herein, is based on the identification and the grouping of the participation of the above mentioned rock mass types (Figure 3).

The main point of interest is the proportional participation and the geometrical structure of the 'competent' (rock-like) and 'non-competent' (weak rock or soil-like) ground materials, both in the cover zone and the tunnel face. The relevant information originates from the cores of the boreholes. The rock mass classification ratings of the cores and the hydrogeological measurements and test results are also taken into account; the overall assessment is counterbalanced with an empirical estimation of the behaviour of similar rockmasses, as witnessed during inspection of both TBM and conventional excavations in the completed tunnels of the project.

Cover zone

Of interest here are the following parameters:

- 1) The depth of the tunnel crown.
- 2) The participation of the various weak materials, i.e. alluvium, backfill, mylonitic material, brecciated rock, loose rock fragments in a matrix of soil, shale and any other type of geological material that simulates to soil (engineering soil).
- 3) The participation of rock-like materials in a 6-metre zone immediately above the tunnel crown. This 'factor' is considered as indicative of the capability of the cover zone to bridge over a progressive overbreak and prevent its propagation towards the surface.

Tunnel face

Regarding the tunnel face, the rock mass is assessed both in terms of differential behaviour as of its hardness and in terms of potential slippages or raveling behaviour. The parameters which are examined are:

- 1) The participation of rock-like against soil-like material, at the full section of the tunnel.

The rock-like material at the face may represent distinct layers with sufficient thickness and lateral persistence in the scale of the tunnel. In case such rock layers prevail within the section of the tunnel face, the conditions of excavability are favourable with minimum or total absence of overbreak.

The soil-like material at the face is mainly represented by the presheared black shale or phyllite of the lower unit. Horizons of highly fractured and loose rock, or mylonitized or highly weathered rock in the upper unit, are also considered as soil-like material.

- 2) The participation of rock-like against soil-like materials in the upper half of the tunnel face, since this very part is the most prone to face-collapse and overbreak initiation..

BOREHOLES	AKS 102	AKS 103	SYO 409
Chainage (m)	4216	4231	5445
Distance from TBM tunnel axis (m)	5.5	20	5.6
COVER ZONE INFORMATION			
Tunnel crown depth (m)	15.8	15.8	19.8
Alluvium - Fill (%)	8.9	10.1	17
Completely Weathered Rock / Engineering Soil (%)	3.8	6.3	19
Sericitic schist with black shale (%)	0	0	0
Breccia (%)	0	26.6	32
Back Shale (%)	0	0	15
void(;;)			
Total cumulative percentage of weak material in the cover ZONE, alluvium excluded (%)	3.8	32.9	66
Total cumulative percentage of weak material in the cover ZONE (%)	12.7	43	83
Percentage of soil-like material in the 6-m ZONE above the tunnel crown (%)	3	35	73
FACE INFORMATION			
Full face: Soil-like material (%)	10.4	28.1	68
Upper half of face: Soil-like material (%)	0	29.2	48
ASSESSMENT FOR TBM EXCAVATION	F	M	A

Fig. 3: Examples of the engineering geological assessment of borehole cores for TBM excavation. Typical cases of boreholes for which the material both of the cover zone and of the tunnel face are characterised as P: friendly, M: moderate, A: adverse for TBM excavation. In those cases where a different characterisation is assigned to the cover zone and to the face

The geometrical distribution and structure of the various materials at the face obviously contributes to the stability factor. The simultaneous presence of 'competent' and weak competent

members is responsible for the differentiability of the rock engineering behaviour of the face.

Ratings

The parameters discussed in the previous paragraphs are co-evaluated, in order to provide an assessment of the expected engineering geological conditions for TBM excavation. Such an assessment is of practical value if it identifies distinct areas along the drive and suggests the likely precautions to be taken before, or during, the passage of the TBM. These precautions will be first aimed at eliminating any possible risk of damage to the urban environment, such as settlements, surface collapses and associated damages. Additionally, they will be aimed towards guiding an efficient, trouble-free and thus rapid excavation procedure.

Individual ratings (in the form of symbols A for adverse, M for moderate and F for Friendly) are assigned at each borehole, based on the cover zone quality, the face quality and the MR values (Figures 4, 7). As a rule, the meaning of these ratings is the following:

Friendly:

No significant overbreaks are expected due to the good quality of the rock mass.

Moderate:

Case 1: Incompetent rock may exist at the tunnel face, but the quality of the cover zone impedes the upward propagation of extensive overbreaks. Case 2: The face consists of competent materials but the cover zone is partly intensely broken (brecciated etc.). In this case it is difficult to have initiation of extended overbreaks by a face instability. If, however, an overbreak occurs, then the cover zone may in principle have some ability of bridging, since it does not consist of the black shale raveling flakes, but of angular portions of fractured or brecciated layers.

Adverse:

Predominance of the black shale or of very weak material at the face, associated with material of similar weakness at the cover zone, over a significant height above the tunnel crown. The latter material might be very weathered or intensely brecciated rock of the upper unit, or transitional material from the upper to the lower unit. The enhanced presence of groundwater dramatically downgrades the condition of the discontinuities, which generally bear clayey coatings, and as a rule contributes to adverse conditions. Overbreaks may easily initiate from the tunnel face and propagate towards the surface.

The presented geologic assessment was proven to be in good agreement with the performance of the TBM; as a rule, in areas where the borehole information indicate the extended development of soil-like materials, frontbreaks or overbreaks have appeared. Failure events were much less, or totally absent, in areas where rock-like material prevails. However, a number of failures are often caused by other reasons, such as the encounter of leaking sewers or aqueducts associated with TBM stoppages and provoking occasionally internal erosion of the ground. Although the borehole information is most valuable other data is required in order to get a more realistic feeling for the ground behaviour during excavation.

5. OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

5.1. Hydrogeological information

All the available information, such as the water level drawdown during drilling, the ground water piezometric data, the in situ permeability tests, the hydrographic info on watercourses or preferential surface runoff in the broader area of the alignment, are compiled on distinct hydrogeological profiles along the drive. These allow the evaluation of the hydrogeological conditions of the overburden deposits and of the 'Athens Schist' bedrock. In the

former case, the presence of alluvia or of deep buried channels that could approach the tunnel or tunnel crown elevation, are of major significance. In the latter case, particular importance is attributed to perched water tables above the tunnel or to sections with enhanced permeability that could induce increased water inflow. The presence of water in poor quality formations is responsible for a further degradation of the ground as already mentioned.

5.2. Information on voids and/or buried antique features

It is common knowledge that as the TBM is driving through the substratum of the city of Athens there is an inherent high risk of encountering old pre-existing voids and/or other buried structures, either empty or filled with loose material. Among others one could indicatively mention the ancient hydraulic structures (wells, shafts, aqueducts and galleries either isolated or in complex systems) or the fortification wall of Athens (moat, trenches and galleries). Buried features and voids of the modern times are also concerned (known or unknown utilities' networks). More specifically, the presence of voids may not prove to be sufficient to induce dangerous overbreak, where these are found 'isolated' in a 'friendly' environment of good rock. On the other hand, the same ground response cannot be anticipated in the case of moderate or adverse

conditions. If however these voids do not represent individual 'isolated' features but rather they form part of a combined system of wells, aqueducts or galleries, the danger of extensive overbreak exists irrespective of the nominal geotechnical conditions for TBM excavation. The information used in this assessment derives from geophysical surveys (not always very effective), from boring and mainly, where possible, from pilot tunnels.

5.3. Pilot tunnel information

The need for further investigation by means of pilot tunnels emanated from the detection of adverse zones through the described assessment, in which poor ground prevailed increasing dramatically the risk of TBM failures. The frequent and random occurrence of ancient wells and voids constituted another basic reason. Pilot tunnels (usually of 0=3.0m and located 1.5m below the TBM crown) proved to be valuable sources of information, since, apart from the accessibility for underground treatment of the rock mass (if and where necessary), they allowed:

- a) the compilation of a continuous engineering geological profile along the tunnel drive,
- b) the encounter of wells and other preexisting voids that intersect the tunnel or lie in its close environment (probehole detection),

- c) the drainage of the rock mass (locally weepholes contribute significantly to water pressure relief),
 - d) the observation of the rock mass behaviour during excavation and identification of potential modes of failure.
- The above categories of pilot tunnel data are added to the drawing of the engineering geological section in the form of 'bars' (Figure 5) that enable the quick visualisation of hazardous zones.

6. FINAL ASSESSMENT: 'FRIENDLY', 'MODERATE' & 'ADVERSE' CONDITIONS FOR THE TBM

The final assessment results from the co-evaluation of the borehole core ratings along with the available pilot tunnel information, the hydrogeological information, the presence of buried disturbing structures and the overall sensitivity of the area. The geotechnical conditions for TBM excavation are again assigned the characterisations 'friendly' (low risk), 'moderate' (medium risk) and 'adverse' (high risk) (Fig. 7). These characterisations are an index of geotechnical hazards and consequent overbreak risk, now in conjunction also with the vulnerability of the area (sensitivity of buildings, presence of ancient structures, wells & underground chambers, sewers, utilities, etc.)

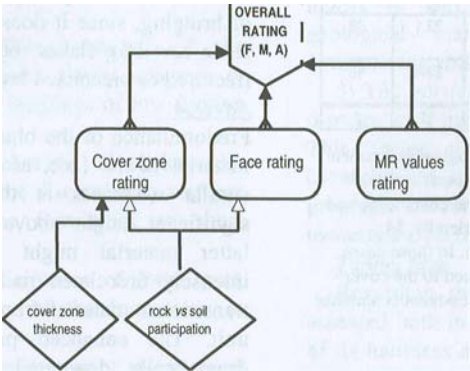


Fig. 4: Ratings of borehole cores for the assessment of the geological-geotechnical conditions for TBM excavation. F: friendly, M: moderate, A: adverse IO TBM boring.

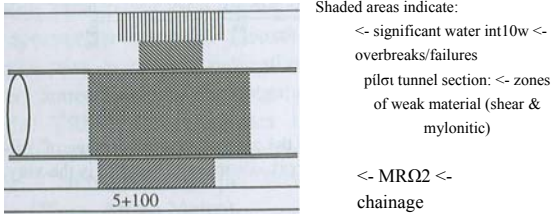
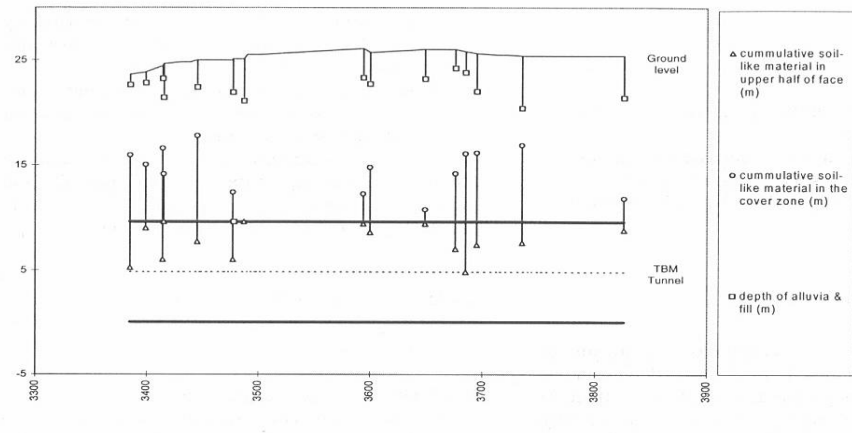
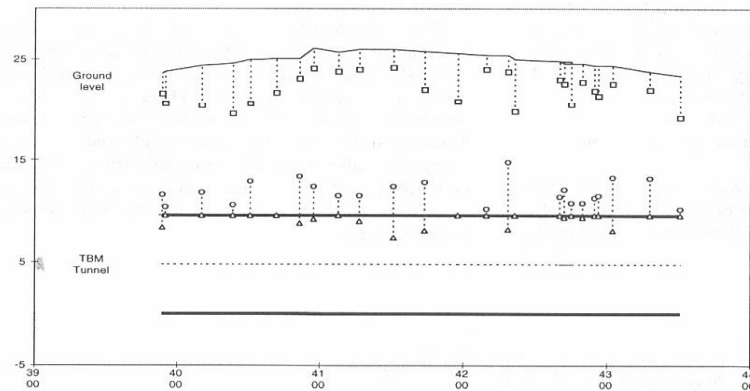


Fig.5: Pilot tunnel information on the hazardous zones. Details are reported on the final engineering geological section (see fig. 7)



a



b

Fig. 6: Assessment of borehole materials for TBM excavation, in terms of the cumulative percentage of soil-like materials. a) interstation where overbreaks have occurred, b) interstation with no overbreak occurrence. Notable is the very limited presence of weak black shales at the tunnel face in case b.

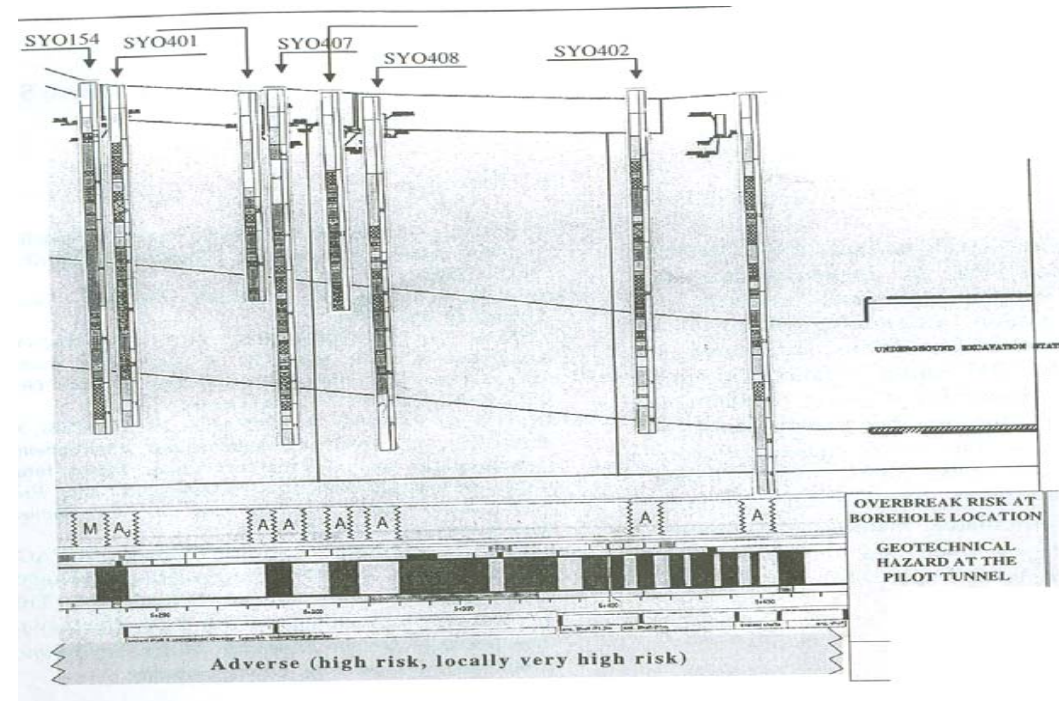


Fig. 7: Engineering geological section in the area of *Plaka*, an old central Athens quarter with vulnerable historical buildings (part of SYO interstation, line 2). The area was already assessed as "adverse" from the borehole data a fact which was confirmed by the pilot tunnel construction. The cover zone was thus reinforced through the pilot tunnel with grouted fiberglass nails, prior to the TBM advance.

7. FACING THE ADVERSE CONDITIONS

An early assessment of the tunnelling conditions to be encountered during TBM excavation allows the contemplation of appropriate remedial measures and alternative engineering solutions, particularly since face treatment cannot easily be implemented through the specific TBMs. The measures are designed and implemented by the parties involved in the project (the Contractor, Olympic Metro Consortium, and the Client, Attiko Metro).

'Adverse' conditions for TBM excavation denote the inability of the machine to excavate through these ground conditions, without inducing extensive overbreak that could possibly propagate to surface collapse. The range of solutions is then levelled as follows:

J. If adverse conditions prevail over significant lengths of a tunnel drive, or if significant structures are to be underpassed by the TBM, then the *realignment of the tunnel*, where feasible, is a way of bypassing the problem. This was the case with the realignment of the Metro tunnel beneath the Archaeological Site of Keramikos (P. Marinos et al., 1997).

2.a If the tunnel alignment cannot be modified, then treatment is required. In this case *pilot tunnels* driven ahead of the TBM are considered highly beneficial, because:

- they allow the detection and filling of pre-existing voids (wells, galleries, e.t.c.) which are often the basic imponderable factor for triggering failures
- they drain the rock mass

- . they permit the implementation of rock mass strengthening techniques ahead of the TBM, where the rock mass is susceptible to treatment (e.g. grouted fiberglass nails).
 - . by means of the support measures for their own temporary stability (e.g. fiberglass reinforced shotcrete), they reduce the possibility of face failures during TBM excavation.
- 2.b .If the rock mass can be sufficiently treated from surface, then the implementation of appropriate ground treatment methods is considered (grouting, jet grouting, piling).
3. The aforementioned solutions are aimed at ensuring safe TBM boring by preconditioning the ground. However, if none of them is feasible (i.e. due to the underpassing of buildings or to the predominance of non-treatable ground in the pilots), then a change of method was in some cases seriously considered. Alternative methods may include the use of an open shield machine or conventional tunnelling ("stiff NATM" or forepolling).

CONCLUSIONS

The assessment presented in this paper is based on an engineering geological classification of a complex geologic formation, that takes into account the particularities of the behaviour of the specific boring machine for the construction of the Athens Metro. This classification distinguishes the various members of the 'Athens Schist' by means of petrographic characteristics, tectonic fatigue, weathering and groundwater conditions through the geotechnical grouping process and assumes their behaviour (rock-like or soil-like) during excavation with the TBM. The final risk evaluation takes into account man-made particularities of each area and may be supported by information from pilot tunnel. This method is intended for the works of Athens Metro; however, the same principles of assessment can also be applied to other projects and different ground types, given that the sensitive parameters for a particular method of excavation are properly recognised.

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