



Jutta Kußtatscher, ed. *Tunnelblick: Der Brennerbasistunnel: Fakten–Argumente–Meinungen.* Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2008. 360 pp. EUR 24.90 (paper), ISBN 978-3-7065-4499-3.



Reviewed by C. Edmund Clingan (Queensborough Community College, City University of New York)

Published on H-German (July, 2009)

Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

Tunnel Vision

In this book, the Greens of Tyrol and “South Tyrol” (*sic*) have compiled a case against the Brenner Base Tunnel (BBT). It is not intended as a work of scholarship, and I will not review it as such. Sepp Kußtatscher, an Italian Green member of the European Parliament, has led the fight against the tunnel and contributes much to this book. It consists of articles by various politicians, social scientists, and traffic planners, and includes interviews with proponents and opponents of the BBT.

The European Union has drawn up a number of megaprojects and started to execute them. One of these megaprojects is a Berlin-to-Palermo high-speed transit corridor. The most remarkable engineering feats in this corridor will be bridging the Straits of Messina and digging fifty-six kilometer railroad tunnels under the Brenner Pass. In 2006, two million trucks brought thirty-two million tons of goods over the pass. Traffic is slow and is projected to get worse while these trucks belch out pollutants. The pass carries more than one-third of all Alpine freight traffic. Existing rail locomotives are limited to seventy-one kilometers per hour because of the steep

grade of track first laid in 1867. Twenty years after funding a feasibility study, the European Commission and the governments of Austria, Italy, and Germany agreed in 2006 to finance the tunnel plan. Freight would travel at 120 kilometers per hour. Passengers would travel up to 250 kilometers per hour, cutting an hour off the Munich-to-Milan trip. Two main tunnels plus a support tunnel for repair and maintenance were planned. Crews began to dig the first tunnel in 2007.

Delays and cost overruns have set in. The tunnel’s projected opening was pushed back from 2015 to 2020. Initial costs were estimated at 6 billion euros, with 1.9 billion of them to come from the EU. It is now estimated to cost 8 billion. The European Union has committed 900 million euros to pay costs through 2013, but the rest of the financing is up in the air. As of February 2009, Austria was withholding its contribution because Italy and Germany have not paid their shares. Once upon a time, the United States built such megaprojects, and this is precisely the kind of stimulus project that U.S. president Barack Obama urged the European leaders to fund

at the recent G20 summit.

The KuÅtatschers and other Greens argue (here quite repetitively) that the BBT will cost too much and take too long to build. The Swiss opened a modern tunnel under LÅ¶tschberg in 2007 and will open a modern Gotthard tunnel in 2017. These tunnels, together with increased shipping and air travel, can relieve the Brenner congestion. The Greens warn of geological uncertainty and insufficient study of environmental impacts. They charge that many trucks divert to the Brenner from the Swiss passes because of the cheaper tolls.

These points have merit, but it is discouraging to see self-styled Greens who lack vision about ecology and the environment. I also found the book marred by an anti-Italian undercurrent that is typified by Sepp KuÅ-

tatscher's critical report on an Italian railroad journey. Shifting freight to shipping requires more fuel oil to power ships and expansion of port facilities, with unknown environmental damage. If global oil production increases, more trucks will come over the Brenner Pass, and it will be inefficient for some of them to divert to the western Swiss passes, no matter how high the Brenner toll. On the other hand, if oil production falls permanently, truck and air traffic will become too expensive and wither away. BBT Society executive director Konrad Bergmeister comes across as the most far-sighted person in the book. Bergmeister states that the railroad will take on a whole new dimension in the next fifty years as the world replaces oil and gas with renewable energy. Either the tunnel will be needed to relieve congestion and pollution, or it will be needed to sustain much of the central European economy.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: C. Edmund Clingan. Review of KuÅtatscher, Jutta, ed., *Tunnelblick: Der Brennerbasistunnel: Fakten-Argumente-Meinungen*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. July, 2009.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=24801>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.