

FIRST SIRIUS MINERALS TUNNELLING MACHINE UNVEILED

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The first machine that will construct Sirius Minerals' underground mineral transportation tunnel between Whitby and Teesside has come off the production line.

The first of the 1,800 tonne, 225-metre-long tunnel boring machines machine is undergoing final checks in Germany. It will be shipped to Teesside in the coming weeks, where it will be reassembled and start tunnelling in the second quarter of the year.

The machine will be operated by construction company Strabag, who also worked on the 35-mile Gotthard Base Tunnel under the Alps. Initial excavations have already begun to prepare for the machine's arrival.

The machine will bore the first of three planned tunnel drives which will make up the 23 mile tunnel from a new underground mine, near Whitby, to a processing facility on Wilton International in Redcar. Two other machines are planned to be launched in 2020 from Whitby and Lockwood Beck, near Guisborough, to complete the final 15 miles of the six-metre diameter tunnel.

Workers will operate the machine 24 hours a day, seven days a week, lining the tunnel with concrete segments as it goes.

Chris Fraser, managing director and chief executive of Sirius, said: "The assembly of our first tunnel boring machine represents an exciting milestone for the company and the region. With around 1,000 people currently employed across all of our sites, the team working to make this project a success continues to grow as we deliver this world class project. We expect to create hundreds more skilled construction roles in the coming months to help build our mineshafts, tunnel and mineral handling facility."

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