

MONOCLE



LIFE IN MOTION — *Global*

Preface

From the infrastructure giant improving quality of life to the railway firm entering the property market, we meet the high-flyers going above and beyond.

2. Pietro Salini CEO, Salini Impregilo

Villa Necchi Campiglio is a listed building with manicured gardens in the heart of Milan. It was designed in the 1930s by Piero Portaluppi, the architect known for reshaping the cityscape. Today the city is undergoing a different kind of redesign: one that's taking place 25 metres beneath the villa, led by a company that many locals have never even heard of.

Italy's Salini Impregilo isn't as recognisable as Armani or Illy but it is a giant of Italian business – and its work benefits millions. Today the civil-engineering group is preparing to make life easier for residents of smog-inflicted Milan by constructing a metro line connecting Linate Airport to downtown. When monocle visits the site, engineers explain that the excavated tunnel has reached the point directly beneath Portaluppi's stately villa.

“We are trying to give people the best quality of life possible,” says Pietro Salini, the firm's 61-year-old ceo. Salini Impregilo was formed through a merger of several businesses, one of which was founded in 1936 by Salini's grandfather (also Pietro). Today it is an infrastructure-

building powerhouse managing ventures in some 50 countries, including nine urban-mobility projects that are expected to move four million people per day once they have been finished.

Milan's Blue Line (the route under construction) is expected to reduce co2 emissions in the city by 2 per cent every year once completed in 2023 but, for Salini, improving quality of life is not just about providing greener transport options. He points as well to the economic importance of large-scale projects. "Governments are facing recessions and often taking the decision to reduce investment. In our sector there is a multiplier effect: when you spend €1bn on public works, you get €3bn in gdp growth." He also believes that infrastructure is vital for wellbeing, helping people to get the most out of their surroundings and offering more choice about where to live.

Salini Impregilo's work in Genoa, he says, is a perfect example. The city and its port have struggled following the collapse of the Morandi Bridge last summer. Now the firm, which has been contracted to erect the new Renzo Piano-designed replacement together with Fincantieri, is already working to incorporate high-speed rail tunnels to link the area to Milan. That's the power of great infrastructure, says Salini. "Imagine your life where you can live by the seaside and commute to Milan in an hour, and enjoy more work opportunities there."

That's not to say that there haven't been criticisms. The Five Star Movement, part of the coalition government, often stands against large-scale projects due to fears of corruption and wasteful spending. Contractors working on the Genoa rail tunnel for Salini were investigated for bribery; still, last winter the project was allowed to proceed after a cost-benefit analysis by Italy's infrastructure minister, a Five Star member. Yet Salini is bullish. "There wasn't much argument about the Milan-Rome high-speed rail link," he says. "This changed the way people live and work now." He's eager to do much more over much greater distances. "For the 'boot of Italy', which is difficult to reach, high-speed rail could be fantastic for tourism and development," he says.

Despite its Italian origins, 90 per cent of the firm's €6bn revenue in 2018 came from abroad. Previous commissions include new locks for the

Panama Canal, Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque and the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre in Athens. Some, such as dams in several African countries, have faced controversy due to a perceived lack of public consultation by governments; others have proven more straightforward. Metro lines have become key: the company is working on Copenhagen's new Cityringen as part of the Danish capital's ambitious plan to become carbon neutral by 2025.

Salini also sees opportunities in car-dependent North America. His firm is participating in a private initiative in Texas to link Dallas and Houston using Japanese-style bullet trains. "We are headed towards larger mega-cities so we need to think about fast intercity transport," he says. "High-capacity lines are more effective than planes. Just think about the effects that snowstorms have on airports in North America. At times they are unusable. With high-speed trains this will change."

Back in Milan, four German-made Herrenknecht boring machines are working in pairs from opposite directions to construct the 15km Blue Line and its 21 stations. Each of the huge contraptions is manned by a crew of 80 working around the clock in eight-hour shifts. The construction causes traffic problems at street level, a nuisance that Salini admits is hard to avoid. But the new line will ease the strain on Milan's roads: it is expected to reduce 30 million car journeys per year. "It takes years for people to see the positive changes during construction," says Salini. "In the end, they understand that it is worth it."

Salini Impregilo in numbers:

Employees: 35,000+

2018 revenue: €6bn

New orders (2018): €6bn

Projects completed: 2,000

Countries worked in: 105

Salini's ongoing projects:

1. Terzo Valico dei Giovi

A 53km high-speed rail line with 37km of tunnels linking Genoa to Milan and Turin.

2. Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

The gravity dam on the Blue Nile will be the largest in Africa and is set to triple Ethiopia's energy supply, as well as providing an exportable resource.

3. Riyadh Metro

Part of a larger construction project of the city's underground system, Line 3 will be 42km long with 22 stations.

4. Copenhagen Cityringen

The ring-like metro line stretches 17km with 17 stations. Its automated trains are set to run 24 hours a day at 100-second intervals.

5. Doha Red Line Underground

The 13km-long metro line is just one component of Salini's current portfolio in Qatar: the firm is also building the Al Khor sports complex for the 2022 World Cup.



03 of 07 Herrenknecht boring machines at work



05 of 07 Newly laid track in Milan