

**Drone-based Computer Vision-Enabled Self-Calibrated Traffic
Flow Parameter Estimation and Analysis Using Machine Learning
Approaches**

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SUMMARY

The acquisition of traffic system information, especially the vehicle speed and trajectory information, is of great significance to the study of the characteristics and management of the traffic system. The traditional method of relying on video analysis to obtain vehicle number and trajectory information has its application scenarios, but the common video source is often a camera fixed on a roadside device. In the videos obtained in this way, vehicles are likely to block each other, which seriously affects the accuracy of vehicle detection and the estimation of speed. Although there are methods to obtain high-view road video by means of aircraft and satellites, the corresponding cost will be high. Therefore, considering that drones can obtain high-definition video at a higher viewing angle, and the cost is relatively low, we decided to use drones to obtain road videos to complete vehicle detection.

In order to overcome the shortcomings of traditional object detection methods when facing a large number of targets and complex scenes, our proposed method uses convolutional neural network technology. We modified the YOLO v3 network structure and used a vehicle data set captured by drones for transfer learning, and finally trained a network that can detect and classify vehicles in videos captured by drones. At the same time, a self-calibrated road boundary extraction method based on image sequences was used to extract road boundaries and filter vehicles to improve the detection accuracy of cars on the road. Using the results of neural network detection as input, we use video-based object tracking to complete the extraction of vehicle trajectory information. Finally, the number of vehicles, speed and trajectory information of vehicles were calculated, and the average speed and density of the traffic flow were estimated on this basis.

In our actual experimental results, the proposed model can achieve a detection accuracy of more than 98% under different weather, lighting conditions and traffic flow scenarios. On the basis of the obtained vehicle trajectory data, we can also complete the estimation of the average speed and average density of the traffic flow on the test road. With reference to the Level of Service (LOS) measurement index for ordinary expressways and the actual speed limit of the test road, the average density of vehicles calculated can accurately reflect the degree of vehicle congestion on the road, which can provide a reference for the intelligent traffic management system. The data obtained from the experiment can be used as a reference data set for studying the safety index of freeway traffic system and connected vehicles after manual calibration.

Keywords: Drone-Based, Convolutional Neural Network, Transfer Learning, Road Boundary Extraction, Computer Vision, Perspective Transform, Traffic Flow Parameter Estimation, Speed Estimation

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CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION

With the development of intelligent transportation technology, the emergence of new technologies such as connected vehicles and unmanned vehicles has brought new challenges to the design of modern transportation systems. Considering the data requirements in the development of these complex and data-intensive technologies, the past traditional transportation system information acquisition technologies seem to have difficulty meeting the requirements of real-time speeds and positions. In the past decade, with the advancement of computer hardware and theoretical research, the research on convolutional neural networks (CNN) has made great progress. This technology is widely used in natural language processing, object detection and classification models. This thesis applies neural network to vehicle detection, combined with computer vision technology to propose a new method to obtain detailed and macro parameters of vehicles on the road from videos taken by drones. In the first chapter, we focus on the background and motivation of this research, formulate our research goal and summarize our contributions.

1.1 General Background

The dynamic parameters of the transportation system play a vital role in the management of the transportation system. These data are also essential for traffic system analysis. Especially now connected vehicle research has entered a new stage, high-quality traffic system dynamic parameter data (e.g., speed, density, delay, trajectory data) can provide strong support for the development of related control systems. For now, mainstream vehicle dynamic parameters

collection methods include video analysis, GPS (Global Positioning System) probe car, Radar and magnetic field sensors and other methods [1].

In the past few decades, video processing technology has made great progress, but due to the fixed angle of CCTV cameras on the roadside infrastructure, the traditional CCTV system is unable to provide video of vehicle driving without mutual occlusion. Therefore, the method of analyzing the traditional road surveillance system video still faces limitations. As for the method of using probe cars equipped with GPS devices to monitor the road condition, although this method can be used to estimate the vehicle's driving time on a particular road and give information such as the degree of congestion. However, due to the limitation on the number of probe vehicles, it is impossible to cover all roads at the same time. In addition, this method can only obtain fuzzy information about the road system, which cannot provide information such as the number of vehicles and accurate vehicle speed. Radar sensors have been widely used to monitor the number and speed of vehicles on the road, and provide a certain degree of protection for the safety of high-speed roads. But once the number of vehicles is too large, this system is not able to provide accurate data. Other methods also have applications in specific situations, such as using magnetic induction coils to estimate the speed and number of vehicles, but they also produce obvious errors when vehicles are congested on the road, so their application scenarios are also limited.

1.2 Research Motivation and Objectives

From the above comparison, we can see that traditional traffic parameter acquisition methods have their own limitations. Through complex operations, we may be able to obtain good results, but the corresponding costs will also increase. To this end, we hope to propose a new traffic monitoring method that can obtain vehicle trajectory extraction, carry out statistics on the number of vehicles and speed estimation, and ensure the accuracy of the results without spending high manpower and material costs.

Among all the methods mentioned above, video analysis method may be affected by weather and light conditions but it still can give reliable dynamic traffic system information.

However, if we continue to use the road video obtained by the traditional fixed-view CCTV system, we will still face the problem of not being able to accurately locate the vehicle and estimate the vehicle speed. Although we can use higher altitude videos taken by helicopters to avoid mutual occlusion between vehicles, from an economic point of view, we cannot use helicopters and other aircraft to obtain road videos from aerial photography at different time periods every day. Taking these factors into consideration, we decided to use drones for road video recording. At present, consumer-grade drones on the market can already record 4K+30fps videos from a high-view and achieve a flying height of up to 500 meters and a flying distance of about 2 kilometers. At the same time, the price of a drone is generally one thousand to several thousand dollars. In contrast, a road surveillance camera with a fixed angle of view costs about ten times more, not to mention the high cost of a single helicopter flight.

Based on these conditions, the research goal of this thesis is to study, design and implement a system that uses drones to obtain high-view road videos, uses trained neural network to complete vehicle detection and obtain vehicle trajectories, and then uses computer vision technology to complete the estimation of vehicle speed. Our goal is to explore whether such a system can provide accurate and reliable road macro dynamic parameters, and try to find out what improvements can obtain better efficiency of this system, and propose new goals for future work.

1.3 Overview of Research Contribution

The advantage of our research is that this system uses drones to obtain high-view road videos that cannot be obtained by traditional road monitoring systems, which can effectively reduce the error caused by mutual occlusion of vehicles and improve the accuracy of the results from the root cause. At the same time, unlike the existing articles that use drones to hover over a fixed point to complete vehicle detection on a fixed road segment, our drone uses a pre-set route to obtain a road monitoring video. Therefore, the accurate position and trajectory of the vehicle on a longer road can be obtained. On this basis, our research is combined with neural network technology, which can avoid the traditional object detection process that requires complex parameter adjustment in different environments. Our main contributions are listed below.

- **Transfer-Learning-Based Neural Network for Vehicle Detection.** In this work we tried to train a neural network using transfer learning (TL) technology according to the previous researches. Built on the basis of YOLO v3 (You Only Look Once version 3.0) neural network, we modified the structure of the original network and retrained it with a small dataset for drone-based vehicle detection competition. The process was finished on Google Colaboratory platform and the network worked pretty well in our experiments. Although the speed of detection on videos with resolution of 1920×1080 is only about 5 frames per second, the accuracy on our test videos is above 96% on average. If we reduce the resolution of videos, we can acquire higher process speed.
- **Computer Vision-Enabled Self-Calibrated Road Boundary Detection.** In order to improve the accuracy of vehicle detection and avoid the interference of roadside vehicles and vehicles on branch roads, we proposed a computer vision-based self-calibrated road boundary detection method. This method combines the Hough transform in digital image processing to complete the preliminary detection of straight lines in the picture, and then uses the boundary positions of the initial several frames and the relationship between two consecutive frames to complete the preliminary extraction of the boundaries. On this basis, the precise road boundaries are further determined based on the positions of the vehicles detected in the current picture.
- **Vehicle Tracking and Trajectory Extraction.** Considering the errors that may occur when only using neural network for vehicle detection, for example, the network incorrectly recognizes objects as vehicles, and some vehicles are not detected. At the

same time, in order to obtain the precise trajectory and speed information of each car, we used OpenCV to complete the further tracking of the vehicles based on the detection results of the neural network. This method can further improve the accuracy of vehicle detection and complete the recording of each vehicle's trajectory.

- **Traffic Flow Parameter Estimation.** On the basis of vehicle detection and extracted vehicle position information, we have realized the estimation of macroscopic parameters of traffic flow. In the final output, we can count the total number of vehicles on the current frame and the cumulative total number of vehicles from the beginning of the video, and the speed of each vehicle is also marked on the corresponding vehicle. At the same time, we can count the density and average speed of vehicles over time.
- **Calibrated Vehicle Trajectory Dataset.** On the basis of the results of our experiments, we processed the videos taken by the drones and manually corrected the results to obtain a data set with accurate vehicle trajectories. This data set can be used for road system safety factor evaluation, and can also be further used as a benchmark data set for subsequent system improvements.

1.4 Thesis Organization

In this introduction chapter we have outlined the general background of this work, the motivation and goal of our research, and a summary of the work's major contribution. The rest of this thesis is focused on the construction of our proposed method. After reviewing

related work, we will elaborate on the research methodology of our work. Later, after discussing the details of our proposed method, we will summarize the process of the entire system and conduct a series of experiments under different conditions. Details of the content of the subsequent chapters are listed below.

- **Chapter 2** reviews the literatures of works mostly related to our research. This chapter includes background of objective detection, convolutional neural network and transfer learning, road boundary extraction, vehicle tracking and traffic flow parameter estimation. By reviewing related work, this chapter provides a theoretical basis for our system design.
- **Chapter 3** gives details of our research methodology. We provide the design and system architecture to give a whole view of our work. Then we dig deeper into how the various parts of the proposed system cooperate closely to complete the detection of vehicles on the road and the estimation of traffic macro parameters.
- **Chapter 4** shows the results of the experiments done using our proposed model and the analysis of the final results. In this chapter, we detailed the hardware equipment and software environment used in this research. After using the drone to obtain the road video, by processing and detecting the video, the statistics of the number of vehicles on the road and the extraction of the trajectory of the detected vehicles are completed. On this basis, we completed the estimation of the speed of the detected vehicles and the estimation of traffic flow parameters.

- **Chapter 5** puts forward some of the current limitations by reviewing and summarizing the methods we proposed. The current algorithm only uses a CPU as the main unit of calculation and cannot reach the speed of the GPU, so real-time detection is not achieved. In addition, we need to continue training the neural network to improve the detection accuracy of different vehicles in different scenarios, so as to further improve the overall performance of the algorithm.
- **Chapter 6** makes a summary of this research and gives conclusions about the research results. This paper proposes a new method that uses video taken by drones as input, combined with convolutional neural networks and traditional computer vision technology to complete vehicle detection and vehicle trajectory extraction. On this basis, the macro parameters of traffic flow are estimated, and the results obtained by the proposed method can provide detailed and accurate traffic parameter data sets for future research on intelligent vehicle network.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews some of the works most relevant to our research. These researches provide references and theoretical basis for our proposed method. This chapter is divided into four main sections: video-based vehicle detection related works, convolutional neural network related works, road boundary extraction related works, drone-based vehicle tracking-related researches. All the solid results of these previous works have provided us with theoretical basis and inspired us to use drones to record videos to overcome the inherent disadvantages of traditional vehicle detection systems such as fixed viewing angles and vehicle occlusion problems.

2.1 Video-Based Vehicle Detection

Video-based vehicle detection systems can generally be divided into two categories for two stages: hypothesis generation (HG) models and hypothesis verification (HV) models [2]. Generally, HG models extract the regions of the picture that most likely contain the vehicles using the characteristics of the vehicles. The results obtained by using HG models need to be evaluated using hypothesis verification models. The common technique in this step is machine learning. Sometimes, the models of the second step also need to classify the detected vehicles into the correct types. This kind of methods are usually considered as two-stage methods.

Since most vehicle detection systems are based on video, correspondingly, these methods usually rely on features or motion to complete vehicle detection. Feature-based methods use prior knowledge to detect the vehicles in the frame. Motion-based approaches rely on the differences caused during the motion process of vehicles to distinguish between the vehicle and the background. The result of this step is usually used as input to HV models. Here we mainly review HG models which can predict the positions of vehicles in the images.

2.1.1 Feature-Based Methods

Feature-based methods need to use information from the frame to decide the regions of interest where vehicles may exist. Here we give review on several approaches using color space, edges, vehicle lights.

1) Color

When trying to identify a vehicle from the image, a very intuitive phenomenon is that the color of the vehicle is generally different from the road. Although the vehicle may be difficult to recognize directly due to factors such as light, weather, and background texture, its color would always maintain its own characteristics compared with the surrounding background [3]. In the pictures captured by most photographic equipment at present, in the color space composed of three elements of red, green and blue (RGB space), the colors of all objects can be displayed with different numerical combinations of these three variables.

Therefore, when we want to detect a vehicle with a certain color, such as a red car, we need to analyze the value of the red channel in the RGB space.

2) Edges

Consider that the vehicle can usually be simplified as a three-dimensional structure similar to a cuboid. Therefore, when we observe from the front or rear of the vehicle, we will always notice that there are lines that are parallel or perpendicular to the coordinate axis of the viewing angle system, such as windows, trunks and other parts of the vehicle. As an inherent property of the vehicle, even if the vehicle is in the process of moving, we can always detect these edges to determine the boundary of the vehicle [4].

3) Vehicle Lights

The aforementioned vehicle detection methods have their own advantages in different application scenarios, but when the detection environment is night, these methods will lose their advantages. In the case of poor lighting conditions at night, the outline, shadow, color and other information of the vehicle will become difficult to obtain. In this scenario, the vehicle's lights can be used to easily identify the vehicle from a low-brightness or completely black background [5].

2.1.2 Motion-Based Methods

The vehicle detection method mentioned above can be applied separately in each frame of the video. Only need to use the prior knowledge of the vehicle, we can detect the vehicle from a static picture. However, in the video of road traffic flow, the vehicles are often in a moving state. At this time, in the absence of prior knowledge, we can distinguish them from the static background with the help of the movement of the vehicles. Such methods often require a series of continuous pictures to provide information about vehicle movement and background. These methods can be divided into non-parametric methods and parametric methods.

1) Non-parametric Methods

When it comes to using movement to detect vehicles, the most intuitive method is to compare two consecutive frames [6], and determine the position of the moving vehicle by extracting the pixels whose pixel values have changed in the two frames before and after and comparing them with the set threshold. The threshold selection of this method is affected by the lighting conditions and the segmentation results may appear gaps as the detection object moves slowly. For this reason, some researchers proposed the method using frame F_i and F_{i+5} to calculate the difference to detect the slow-moving vehicles [7], but when the vehicles are moving fast, different vehicles may overlap, resulting in detection errors.

Another detection method is to subtract the background from the current frame to obtain the moving vehicle detection result [8]. However, due to the presence of slow-moving or parked vehicles, the background of this method will be quickly filled up by these relatively static vehicles in practical applications, resulting in incorrect recognition.

2) Parametric Methods

Common parameterization methods include optical flow method and background modeling method. The relative movement between the object and the observer causes optical flow. Using optical flow algorithm, we can perceive and track the displacement of the vehicle. By moving the centroid of the vehicle between consecutive frames and calculating the speed of the vehicle, we can estimate the distance of the vehicle [9].

Different from the optical flow method, in the background modeling method, the background is regarded as motionless, and any moving objects are regarded as part of the foreground. In order to identify moving objects, this method usually includes background initialization, foreground object detection and background update. In this way, by continuously updating the background, the separation of the moving object and the background can be accurately completed [10].

2.2 Convolutional Neural Network and Transfer Learning

In the previous section, we reviewed some of the common methods of vehicle detection. In contrast, in the field of computer vision, the model needs to finish the detection and label the corresponding object types of every instance of objects in the screen in object detection task. At this time, traditional object detection methods may not be able to meet this demand.

At first, when the neural network showed good performance, it was limited by the development of hardware and theory, which restricted further development. After a long period of stagnation, with the development of AlexNet [11], researchers in the field of computer vision discovered the great potential of convolutional neural networks and applied them to object detection [12], image classification [13], image segmentation [14] and other fields. Compared with traditional object detection and classification methods, neural networks can better extract and learn higher abstract level object features, and can accurately complete target contour extraction and object classification. The performance of traditional target detection methods will gradually saturate when faced with a large amount of data, that is, as the amount of data increases, although its performance will be improved, the gain brought by the larger amount of data is very limited. However, the neural network can get better performance through the training of large amounts of data in the right scenario.

2.2.1 Convolutional Neural Network

By using window sliding detection technology [15], we can reduce the time complexity required for target detection tasks. This method first requires a window with a preset size, and then gradually slides the window across the entire screen, and at the same time classifies and labels the items in each window to complete the identification of all objects in the screen. In order to complete the detection and classification of items, we need to train a classifier that can recognize different objects. Just like teaching children what a car is, we need to give positive examples that include cars and negative examples that do not. The training of the classifier is completed with the help of the preset loss function and other measures. As the convolutional neural networks have great potential in object detection, classification, and image segmentation. After years of development, we now have art-of-the-state neural networks like R-CNN [16], Faster R-CNN [17], YOLO [18] series and SSD [19].

CNNs use the deep learning algorithms and usually deal with high dimensional data like images and videos. To obtain a higher level of abstraction of input features, CNNs usually have a multi-layer architecture, which may contain layers like convolutional layer(s) (conv), fully connected layer(s) (FC) and etc. [20] Here we briefly introduce some constituent layers of the convolutional neural network to understand the structure and corresponding functions of CNNs.

1) Convolutional Layer

The convolutional layer is an indispensable structure of CNN. The input picture or other data is operated with the convolution kernel, that is, a two-dimensional activation map is output by calculating the dot product of the data and the convolution kernel. Through this step, the network can learn which filter should be activated when a particular feature appears. Neurons that lie in a same feature map share same weight parameters and therefore the network would not need to set weight parameter for each of them, which can reduce the complexity of the whole network [21].

As the figure bellow shows, set a 3×3 sub-block of the input matrix as M with elements $m_{i,j}$ and the kernel as matrix K , then we have

$$M \otimes K = \frac{1}{9} * \sum_{i=0, j=0}^{i=2, j=2} m_{i,j} = 3 \quad (1)$$

The definition of convolution operation in CNN is different from mathematical two-dimensional convolution. The convolution operation here means the elements at the corresponding position of matrix are multiplied and added up [22]. After completing the convolution operation of the first sub-block, move one stride S to the next sub-block and perform the same operation until the entire input matrix completes the convolution operation.

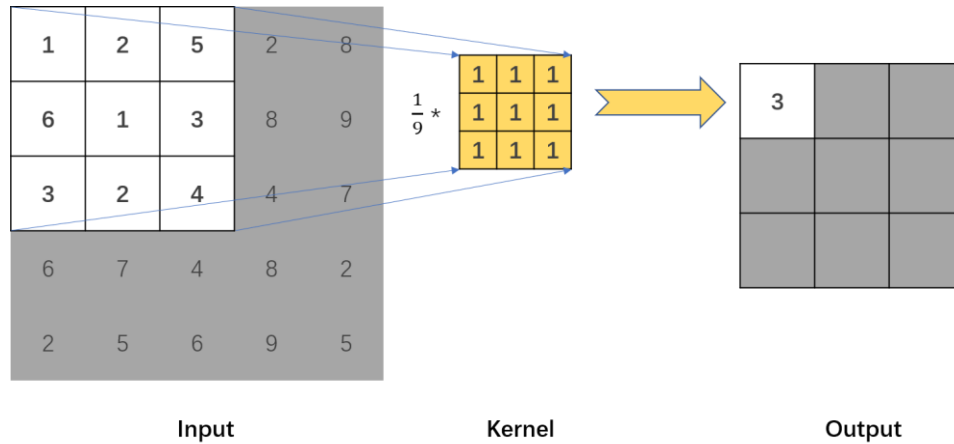


Figure 1: Convolution Calculation Visual Diagram.

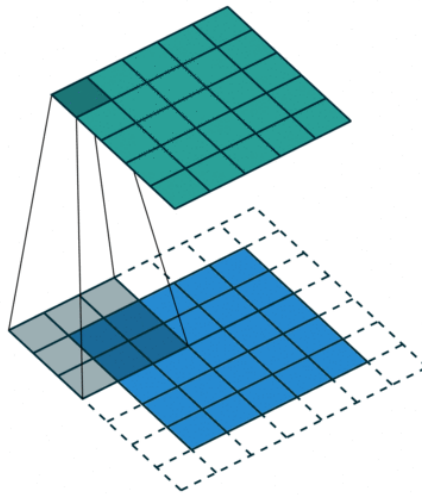


Figure 2: This picture shows the process of a simple convolution operation.

A convolutional layer usually has multiple convolution kernels to extract different features. From this link¹.

2) Activation Functions

The activation function plays an important role, and the common functions are sigmoid, Tanh, ReLU, etc. [20] The graphs of some functions are shown below. Through the

¹ <https://towardsdatascience.com/a-comprehensive-guide-to-convolutional-neural-networks-the-eli5-way-3bd2b1164a53>

activation of these functions, the input signal is transformed into an output signal, which will be used as the input for the next layer. If there is no activation function, the output y of the entire network will be a linear combination of the input features x .

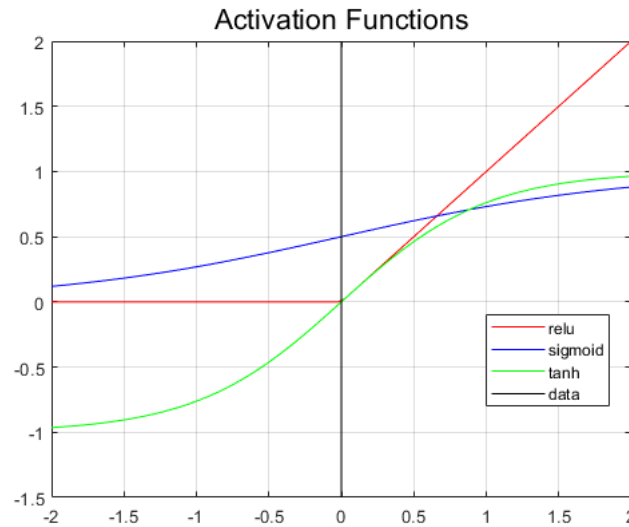


Figure 3: Commonly Used Activation Functions.

3) Pooling Layer

The role of the pooling layer is to down sampling to reduce parameter dimensions, remove redundant information, compress features, simplify network complexity, reduce calculations, reduce memory consumption, and so on. While using the pooling layer to reduce parameters, it can also make the network easier to converge. Common pooling methods include average pooling and maximum pooling.

Take maximum pooling as an example here.

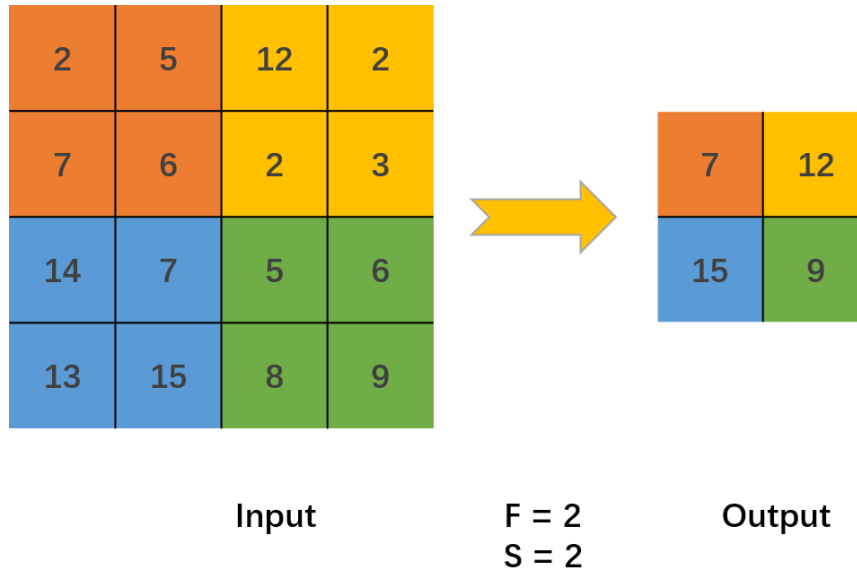


Figure 4: A max pooling operation with filter size (F) =2 and stride (S) = 2.

4) Fully Connected Layer

Each node of the fully connected layer is connected to each node of the previous layer, so that the previously obtained features can be integrated for classification or regression.

Because of this feature, this structure needs to consume a lot of memory resources. For example, an FC layer has 1024 nodes, and the output of the upper layer also has 1024 nodes, so 1024×1024 parameters are needed for transmission (without bias parameters).

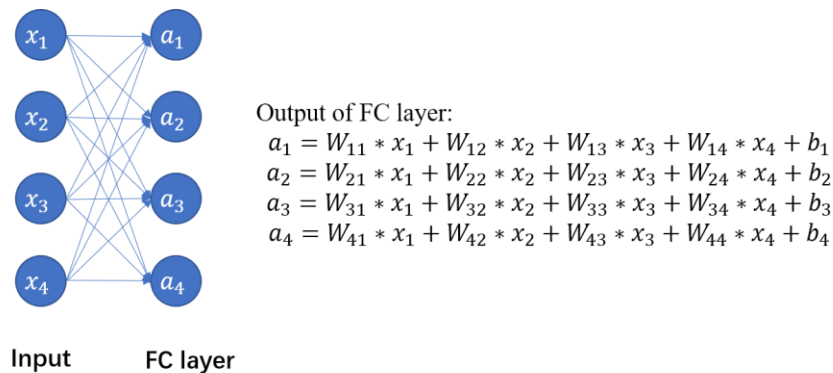


Figure 5: The structure and the output of FC layer. x_i stand for the output of last layer.

$W_{m,n}$ stand for the weight parameters. b_k stand for the bias parameters.

5) Loss Layer

The loss layer can measure the difference between the network prediction result and the ground truth, thereby changing the network training parameters to optimize the network.

Common loss functions include Softmax, Cross-entropy, etc.

According to the process of the neural network to complete the target detection, they can be divided into two categories: two-stage methods and one-stage methods.

a) Two-Stage Methods

In the two-stage detection method, the first stage completes the proposal of the regions of interest (ROI) or the locations of the target objects, and then the second stage completes the detection and classification of these proposals and marks the result with bounding boxes.

As a representative of this type of neural network, R-CNN [16] is also the first model to use convolutional neural networks to complete two-stage target detection. The structure diagram of the R-CNN network is shown in the figure. The structure of the first stage uses the input picture to propose the ROI to be classified through the algorithm. The second stage of the convolutional neural network consists of 5 convolutional layers and two fully connected layers, which is able to classify the proposed areas from first stage.

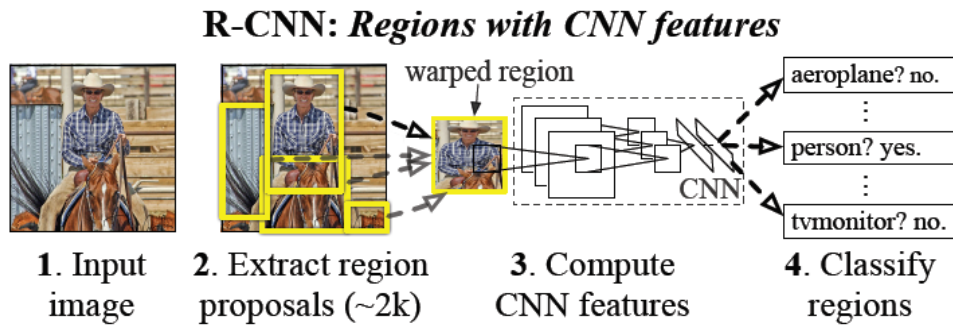


Figure 6: R-CNN structure from [13].

b) One-Stage Methods

The one-stage method, as the name suggests, is to merge the ROI proposal and classification into one step. While using the input features for object detection, prediction of the category of the object is also done. The representative of this kind of method is the YOLO [18] series neural network. After processing the characteristics of the input picture, the YOLO network divides the picture into a fixed number of grids, and each grid predicts a fixed number of bounding boxes with confidence. The confidence score is obtained by multiplying the object detection probability by the intersection ratio of the predicted box and the actual box. When the confidence score exceeds a preset threshold, the YOLO network considers that a certain category of object has been detected in the area.

2.2.2 Transfer Learning

While training a NN, researchers usually need numerous labeled samples to “feed” the complex network so that it would be able to identify different objectives and achieve high

accuracy. However, researchers may not be able to acquire big data set containing ten thousand of labeled pictures to train their own models. To solve this, scientists proposed a method called transfer learning (TL) to make it possible to train a network for new tasks using a pre-trained model. Transfer learning relaxes the assumption that the training data must be independently and identically distributed (i.i.d.) with the test data [23]. Therefore, compared with normal neural network training, transfer learning can greatly reduce the computational complexity, data set size, and training time.

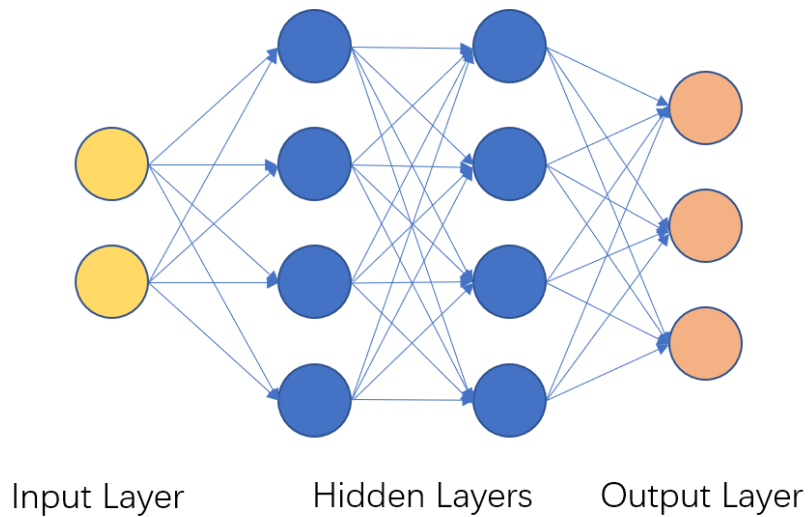


Figure 7: A simple neural network structure with 2 hidden layers.

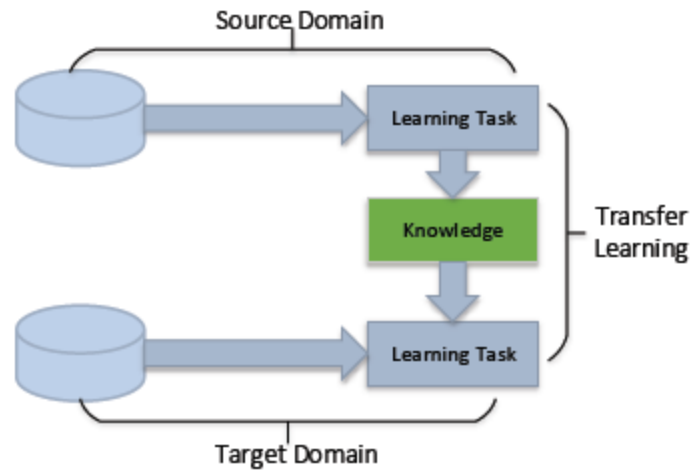


Figure 8: Learning Process of TL from [23].

Deep neural networks have been widely used in various scenarios, so a large amount of transfer learning methods have also been proposed to train networks that meet different needs. Based on the techniques used in TL, transfer learning can be divided into four types: instance-based transfer learning, mapping-based transfer learning, adversarial-based transfer learning and network-based transfer learning [23]. Like the fig shows, the second model can be retrained by using a small data set to identify trucks based on a network trained to detect cars.

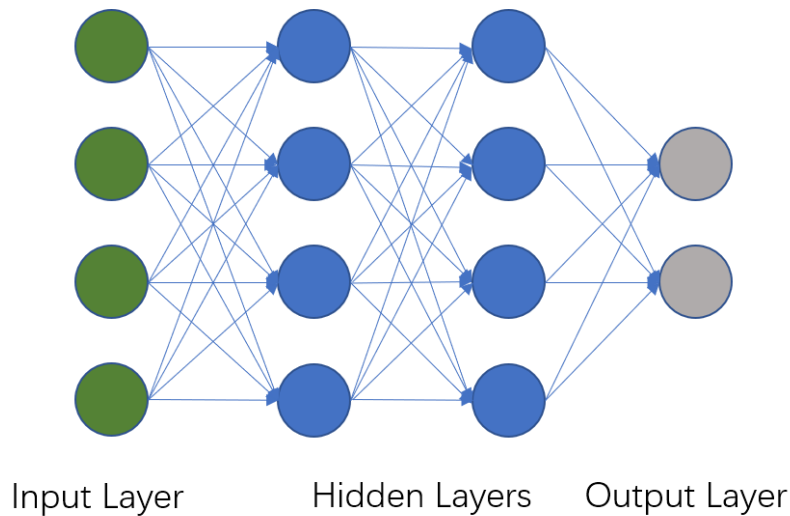


Figure 9: A network trained using TL method. The input and output layers are adjusted to satisfy the need of new task, but the hidden layers structure is the same as the Fig.8's.

2.3 Road Boundary Extraction

A large number of algorithms have been developed to extract road boundaries under different scenarios. Videos for analysis are usually from three main sources according to the view difference: low view from cameras fixed in or on vehicles, mid-height view from planes like helicopters and high view from satellites. However, with the wide application of UAVs, it is easier to acquire mid-height view videos of roads. This thesis focuses on analyzing videos taken by UAV and then needs to extract road boundaries from mid-height view videos.

Without considering special scene requirements, most road boundary extraction algorithms can be divided into two types: feature-based and model-based methods [24]. Usually, feature-based methods need to separate the road boundary according to the differences between lanes and backgrounds. When processing video, the commonly used features are generally color

space, edges, and patterns that recur in special cases. In [25], the color space of the picture is used for processing. The values of R, G and B channels are all considered to propose the regions where may contain road areas. In this way, the image area with a specific color can be extracted, but the result is easily affected by light, shadow and camera angle. While using edge features, since the image pixels on both sides of the edge will change drastically, the common method is to use this feature to extract the edge, and then further filter out the road boundaries [26]. Some would use Hough transformation method to find candidate lines and then find out most likely results as boundaries [27]. In [28] and [29], the method incorporated morphological operations and gradients to find edges as road boundaries. However, the edge-based method may not give promising result once the lanes are not clearly shown in the pictures. In general, in order to obtain better processing results, different methods usually use mixed features as input.

In contrast, model-based methods may be more robust than feature-based approaches. As the model needs a lot of road samples to be built, the researchers usually collect different road samples with different contours, background colors and shadows. However, if the road has sudden changes on its color, texture or backgrounds, it may lead to wrong detection results. Normally, the model-based methods would represent the boundaries using models with prior knowledge. Then the aim of model-based methods would be trying to find out the fittest parameters for the models. Several different strategies for model fitting were proposed in [30, 31]. In [30], a quadratic road surface model was first fitted by a RANSAC approach. Then the primary result was refined by a region growing-like process, driven by the 3D resolution and the uncertainty model of the sensor to give detected result. In [31], the author proposed

Least Square Estimation (LSE) based approach to fit a model for the road surface. Both feature-based and model-based methods would give results of lane boundaries but the model-based methods are more inclined to express the results as concise mathematical expressions.

In this paper, since the UAV usually flies under good weather conditions, we need to pay more attention to the spin of the UAV and the changes of features because the video collected do not have temporal and spatial stability. Due to this reason, model-based methods may not be robust, so hybrid of color, edge is used as input feature to extract road boundaries. To make the extraction result more reliable, relationship between two consecutive frames are also considered to avoid failure of edge detection.

2.4 Drone-Based Vehicle Tracking

In order to accurately calculate the number of detected vehicles and the speed of their movements, video-based object tracking technology is applied in this process. In this thesis, we are using videos obtained by drone to detect and track vehicles. Since the drone is also moving along the direction of the road, the estimated speed of vehicles that moving in the same direction with drone should minus the speed of drone to acquire real speed estimation result. As for those vehicles in the opposite direction with the drone, their speeds should add the drone speed to get their estimated speed. In such a scenario, drone-based vehicle tracking is simplified to video-based object tracking that needs to consider the movement of the lens. For computer vision researchers, moving object tracking has always been a challenging task.

In its development history, object tracking methods can be divided into two categories: generative model tracking and discriminative model tracking.

Generative model is the research focus of early object tracking algorithms. Related algorithms include optical flow method [32], Mean-shift algorithm [33], Camshift algorithm [34] and so on. This type of algorithm first uses the characteristics of the target to build a target model, and then searches for the target characteristics in subsequent frames. If the matching features are found, it is considered that the target object is found, and the entire tracking process is iteratively completed in sequence. This type of method does not make full use of the background information. Therefore, due to the randomness and diversity of the appearance of the target, when the ambient light changes and the motion causes the target to rotate, blur or be blocked, the accuracy of the tracking result will be reduced.

In contrast to the generative model, the discriminant model takes into account both target features and background information, and uses the difference between the target model and background information to extract the target [35]. This method is considered to have great potential through the testing and evaluation of data sets by researchers. After the filtering method in the communication field was introduced into the practice of object tracking, a method called correlation filtering showed surprising results in terms of speed and accuracy [36, 37, 38]. On this basis, with the development of deep learning technology, researchers have begun to use neural networks to complete target detection and tracking.

This research uses the results of neural network detection as input for object tracking, and uses the discriminative correlation filter tracker with channel and spatial reliability to build a tracker list to track one or more target vehicles in the picture. This type of tracker can accurately track the vehicles detected in the picture, and save the position of each vehicle in each frame, which is used to calculate the moving speed of the vehicle and extract the trajectory data set.

CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter gives details in each step of our drone-based computer vision-enabled self-calibrated traffic flow parameter estimation model. The system's module composition, key algorithm design and parameter calculation process are provided in detail.

3.1 System Architecture and Algorithm Design

As the figure 10 shows, the proposed method has five key modules to process the videos taken by a drone: (1) vehicle detection CNN (2) road boundary extraction (3) vehicle tracking (4) perspective transformation (5) parameter estimation.

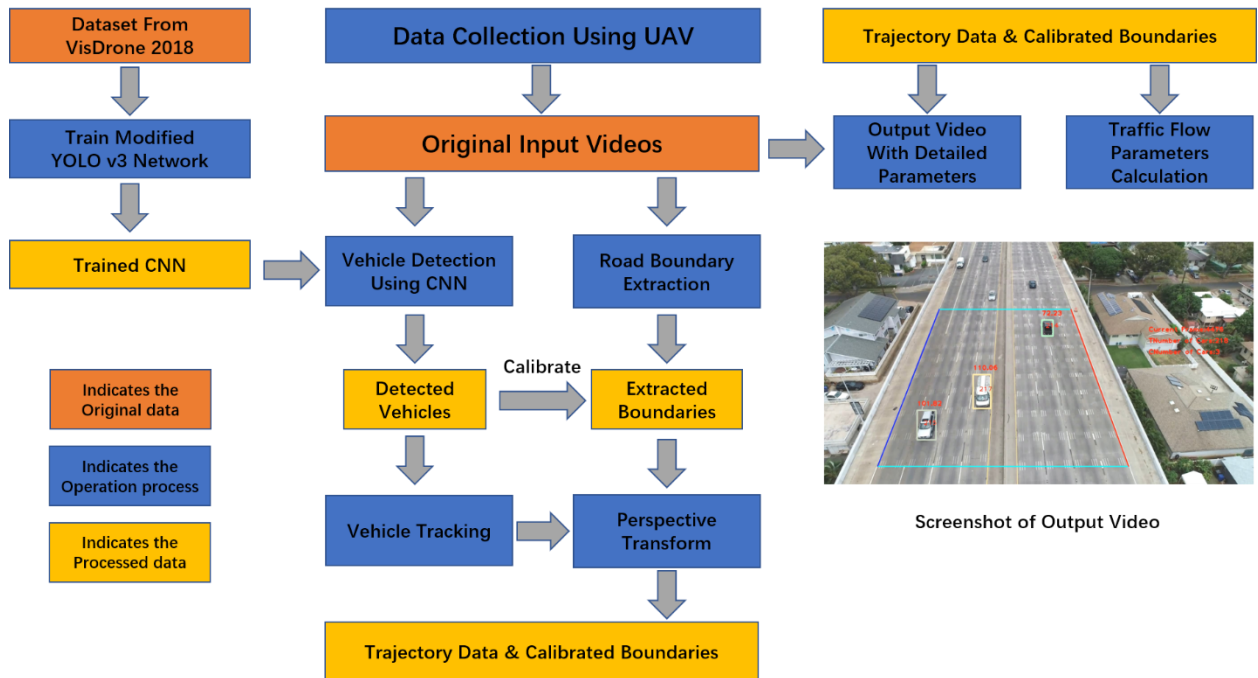


Figure 10: The Flow Chart of the Proposed Approach.

3.2 CNN Network Design and Transfer Learning Mechanism

3.2.1 Modified YOLO v3 Network

For this project, the model used for transfer learning is You Only Look Once version 3 (YOLO v3) [39]. You only look once (YOLO) is a state-of-the-art, real-time object detection system. The version used is YOLO v3, which is able to classify about 80 different kinds of objects. The key architecture of YOLO v3 is darknet53, which is a convolutional neural network comprises of 53 convolutional layers.

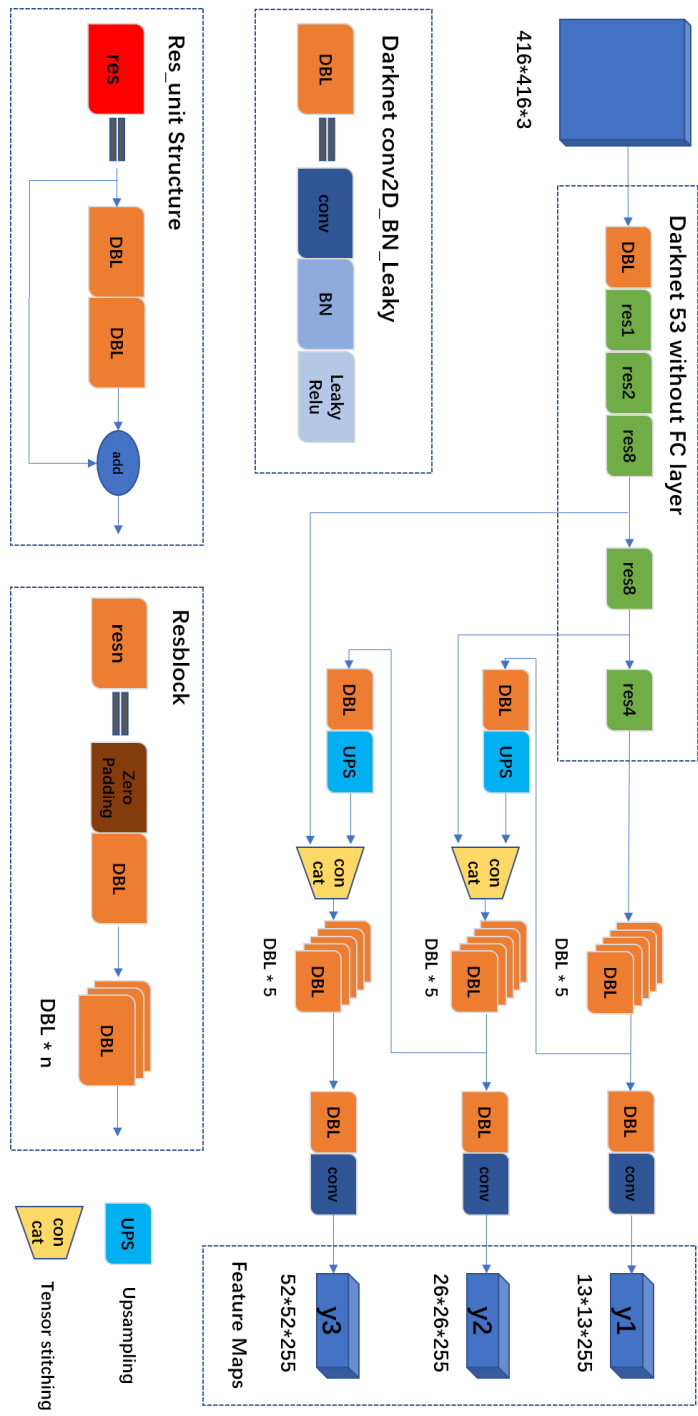


Figure 11: YOLO v3 Structure.

Figure 11 shows the detailed structure of YOLO v3. The structure used is the YOLO v3 pre-trained structure. The input picture is processed and resized to a size of $416 \times 416 \times 3$. After

the processing by Darknet 53, in order to perform feature extraction and detection of objects of different sizes, the subsequent network structure uses tensor stitching to stitch together the results of different processing stages to extract feature maps of different scales. Finally, in the output y_1, y_2, y_3 , we got three feature maps of different scales respectively. Since there are 80 types of objects to be recognized, the last dimension of the feature map, 255, is equal to $3 \times (5 + 80)$. We can see that the three outputs have different scales. This is because the network needs to detect objects of different sizes. Since the smaller feature map has a larger receptive field, the 13×13 size feature map is used to detect large-sized objects, the 26×26 size feature map is used to identify medium-sized objects, and the 52×52 size feature map is used to identify small-sized objects. In this way, objects of different sizes can all be considered, and the detection ability of the network is enhanced.

In the picture below, we show how YOLO v3 detects and classifies objects in the picture. The network divides the picture into $S \times S$ grids, and each grid is responsible for predicting B bounding boxes, the corresponding confidences and C classes probabilities. Each box needs to have five basic parameters ($x, y, w, h, \text{confidence}$). Therefore, the output dimension of the feature map we get is $S \times S \times B \times (5 + C)$. After obtaining the feature maps of the picture, the subsequent fully connected (FC) layer is used to predict the classification probability of the object and give the coordinates of the bounding boxes.

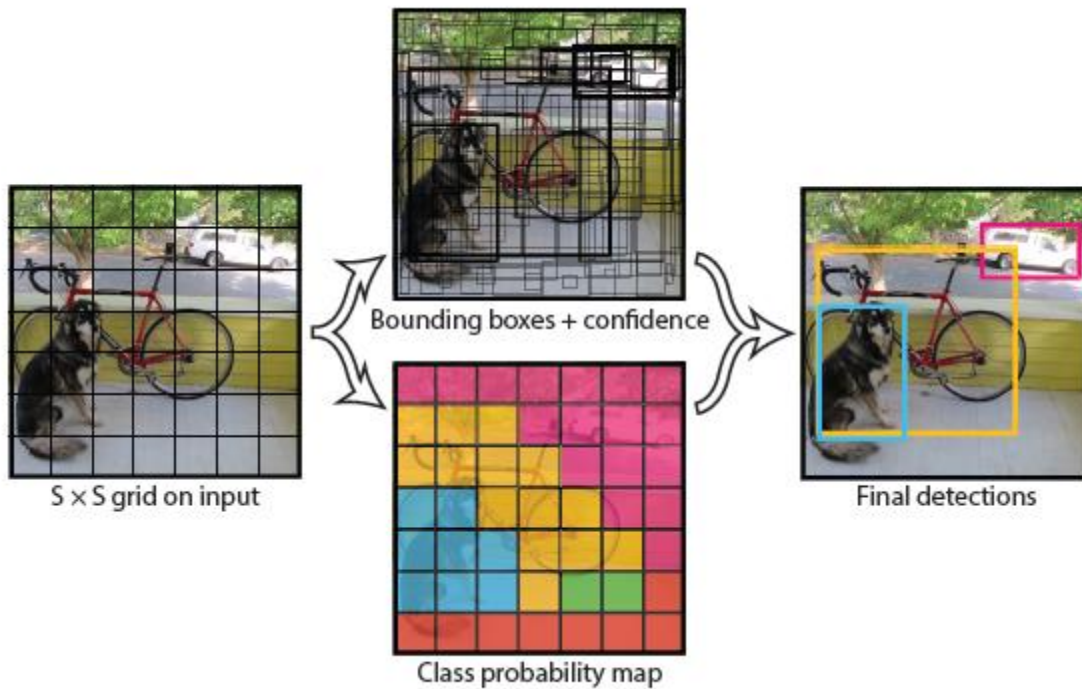


Figure 12: YOLO v3 Detection and Classification.

In our research, the types of vehicles that we need to consider only include cars, trucks, buses, vans, and motorcycles. Therefore, the dimension of the output tensor we get in actual training and detection is actually 30.

3.2.2 Transfer Learning Mechanism

Based on YOLO v3, to train our own CNN for vehicle detection, the transfer learning was achieved using a data set from a drone video detection contest named as “VisDrone 2018” [40]. The training data set contains 6287 labeled pictures (total 1.44 GB) with several cars in each of them. After setting the parameters, the model was trained for about 30 hours for 18000 epochs and the final average training loss is 7.7.



Figure 13: Examples of Training Dataset.

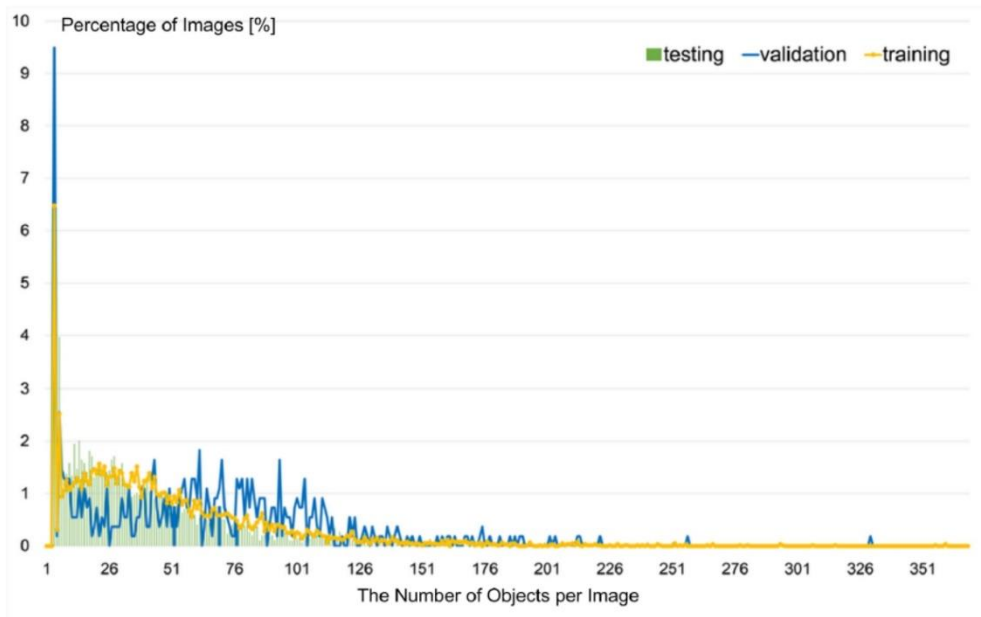


Figure 14: The Number of Objects Per Image of Dataset.

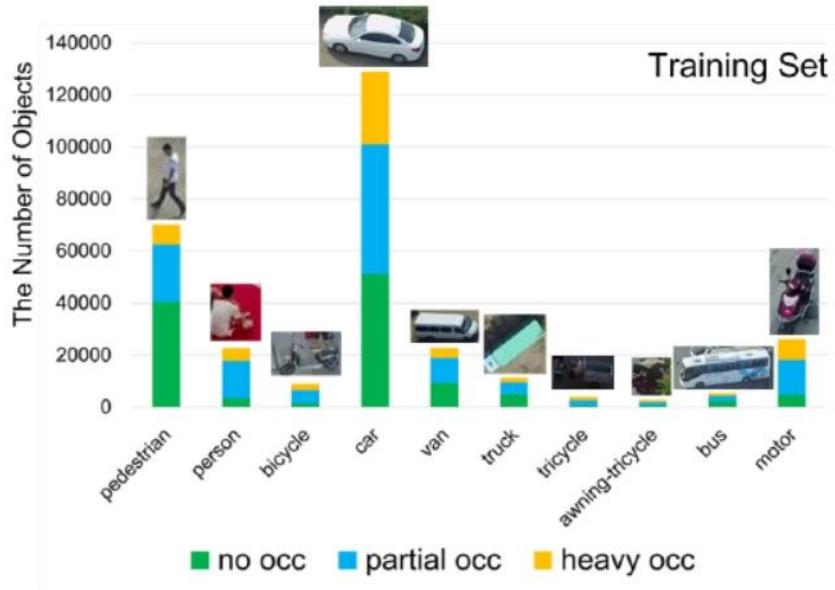


Figure 15: Occlusion Degree of Objects.

The training process is completed on Google Colaboratory. By uploading training data to Google Driver and synchronizing the folder of the laptop with Google Driver, the training results can be synchronized to the laptop in time. The weight parameters of each training 1000 epochs neural network will be saved once.



Figure 16: Device Synchronization Process.

After the training process, the network was used to detect vehicles in the video taken by a drone and saved their bounding box coordinates and centers into .txt files. The picture shows one frame of the output video and the boxes that mark vehicle locations in the frame. In the test

drone videos, the trained network can achieve an average accuracy of 94%.

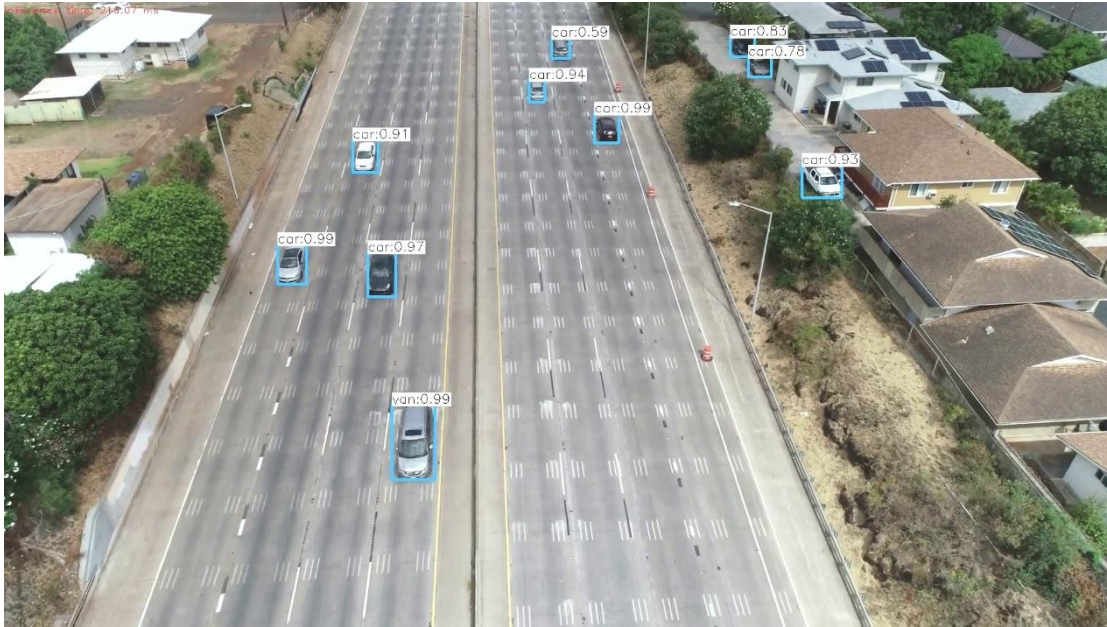


Figure 17: A screenshot of the output video. The markers show positions of the detected vehicles, the predicted vehicle type and the corresponding confidence level.

3.3 Image Sequence Based Self-Calibration Design and Vehicle Tracking

To calculate the dynamic parameters of traffic system, the model must acquire the boundaries of the road to distinguish the vehicles in the road from the vehicles in the background of the video. We propose a self-calibration road boundary extraction method based on image sequence. After completing the rough road boundary extraction, we need to filter out the vehicles on the road and further complete their tracking to extract the trajectory data of each vehicle for subsequent calculations. Section 3.3.1 illustrates the steps to extract precise boundaries from each frame of a video. It is worth noting that the road boundary extraction was actually carried out twice, the first time was to extract directly from the picture using

digital image processing technology, and the second time was to use the obtained vehicle position information as a reference for estimation.

3.3.1 Road Boundary Extraction

In general, this process is completed in two major steps. The first step is based on digital image processing technology, using OpenCV to complete the preprocessing of the image and extract all the boundary lines. Under ideal conditions, we assume that 5 standard road boundary lines can be detected in each frame. Then the leftmost and rightmost boundary lines are the outer boundaries of the road. However, considering the interference of light intensity and shadows, and the road boundary line may become inconspicuous due to wear and tear, it may happen that the boundary line cannot be detected. In the case that the drone is not flying at high speed, the background of the two consecutive frames will not change drastically. We can use the result of the previous frame as a substitute, but due to the interference of shadows from trees and roadside buildings, the outer boundary obtained in this step cannot be guaranteed to be accurate, and it may affect our subsequent calculations. Therefore, we need to obtain more accurate inner boundary lines.

Taking the above factors into account, the second step is to use the outer boundary lines to complete the preliminary filtering process of the vehicles detected by the neural network. In the subsequent process, we will decide the locations of boundaries according to the positions of the leftmost and rightmost vehicles on the road. Similarly, the relationship between two consecutive frames is also applied here. After completing the above two steps, we can get

precise road inner boundary lines. The detailed process and principle of the algorithm are given below.

- (1) Read and turn a frame into gray scale picture, then adjust the brightness of the picture to lighten the dark part of the road boundaries.



Figure 18: Left: original frame. Right: adjusted frame.

- (2) Perform adaptive threshold segmentation on the frame after Gaussian noise reduction and morphological operations on the segmented picture.

Different from the global methods that use all pixel values to determine the segmentation threshold, the adaptive threshold segmentation method divides the screen into small neighborhoods for processing. In each neighborhood (a 19×19 size for the neighborhood is used in this study), the average value of the neighborhood's pixel values is calculated using the mean method or the Gaussian mean method as the threshold. All pixels greater than this threshold are set to 255, and those lower than this threshold are set to 0.

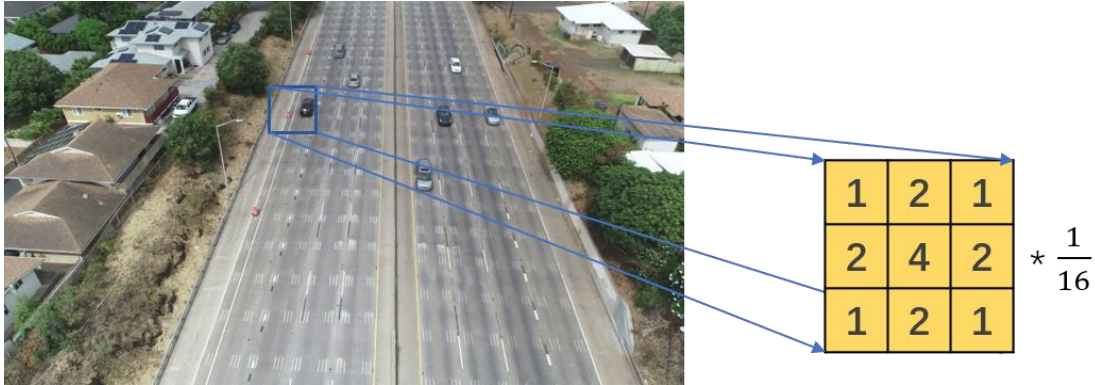


Figure 19: A simple example of Gaussian mean method in a neighborhood.

After completing the segmentation operation, we need to use the closing operation of the morphological operation to complete the connection of the discontinuous lines in the picture to facilitate the subsequent straight lines extraction. The closing operation needs to perform a dilation operation on the picture first and then a corrosion operation to smooth the boundary of the object and connect the adjacent objects. Here we use a cross structure like the figure shows to perform all the operations.

Dilation: If there is an overlapping area with structure A in the process of moving structure B, record the position. The set of all positions that overlap with structure A when moving structure B is the result of structure A's expansion under structure B.

$$A \oplus B = \{z \mid (\hat{B})_z \cap A \neq \emptyset\} \quad (2)$$

Erosion: If the intersection of structure B and structure A completely belongs to the area of structure A, save the location point, and all points that meet the conditions constitute the result of structure A being corroded by structure B.

$$A \ominus B = \{z \mid B_z \subseteq A\} \quad (3)$$

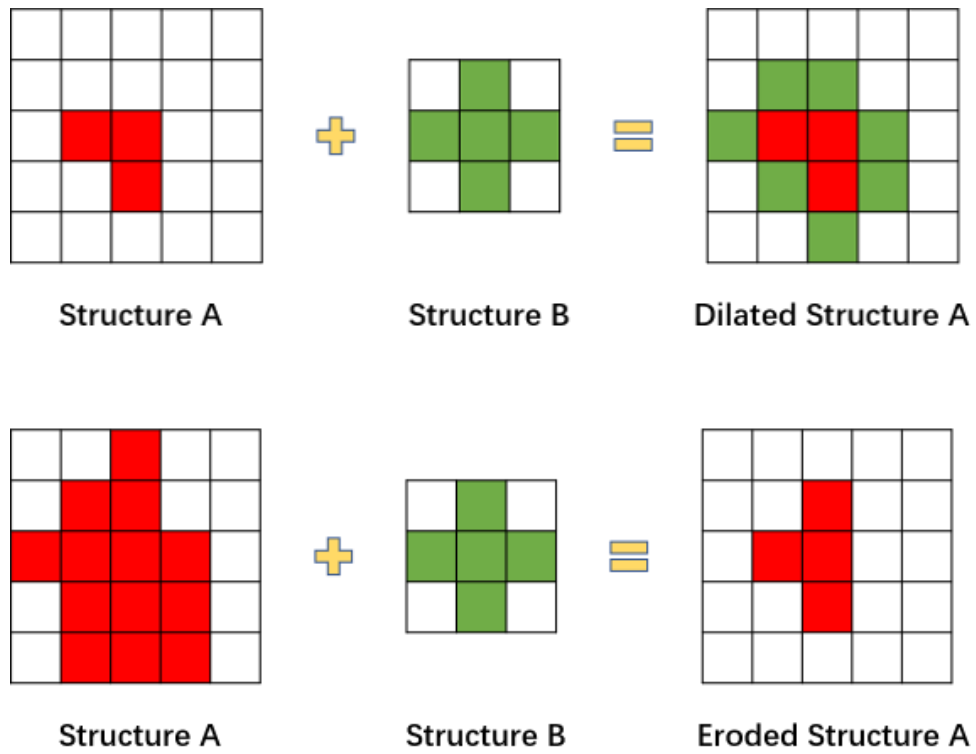


Figure 20: Example of Dilation and Erosion operations.

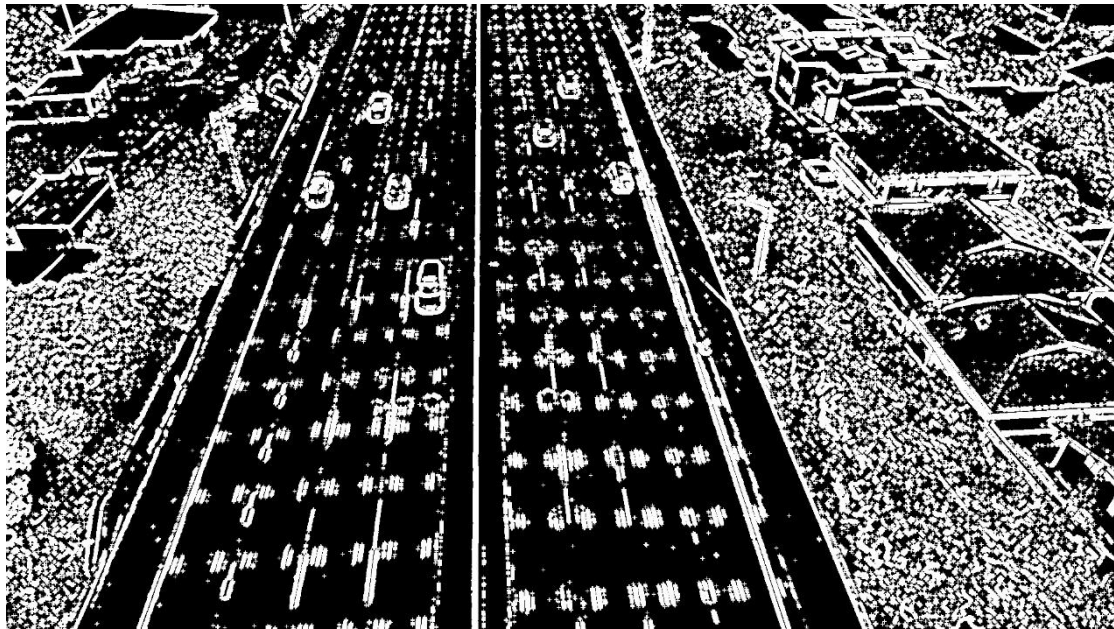


Figure 21: Result of adaptive threshold segmentation and morphological operations

(3) Use Progressive Probabilistic Hough Transform (PPHT) [41] to detect straight lines in the picture.

The PPHT has been commonly accepted as one of the best line detection methods based on Hough transform theory. In polar coordinates, a straight line can be expressed as

$$\rho = x \cos(\theta) + y \sin(\theta). \quad (4)$$

In this way, even a straight line perpendicular to the coordinate axis can be represented by a pair of parameters (ρ, θ) . The steps show how to get straight lines with a length larger than a preset minimum value:

- a) Randomly select a new point to update the accumulator array, with contributions to all available bins (bin stands for a pair of (ρ, θ)). Then remove the selected pixel from the input image.
- b) Check if the highest peak that was modified by the new pixel in the updated accumulator is greater than a pre-defined threshold. If not then go to Step a).
- c) Find the longest segment from all lines with the parameter (ρ, θ) which was specified by the peak in Step b). The selected line can be expressed using the beginning point A and ending point B.
- d) Remove all the points of the longest line from the input image.
- e) “Unvote” from the accumulator all the pixels from the line that have previously voted. Then these points do not attend any other voting process.
- f) If the selected segment is longer than a pre-defined minimum length, then the point

pair of the beginning and ending points will be recorded as one of the output results.

g) Go to Step a).

Finally, we can have an output list containing all the segments that longer than the min length value. The list is saved as:

$$LineList = \{(x_1, y_1), (x_2, y_2)\}, \dots, \{(x_{n-1}, y_{n-1}), (x_n, y_n)\},$$

the first point in each pair is the beginning point, and we assume there are n lines detected.

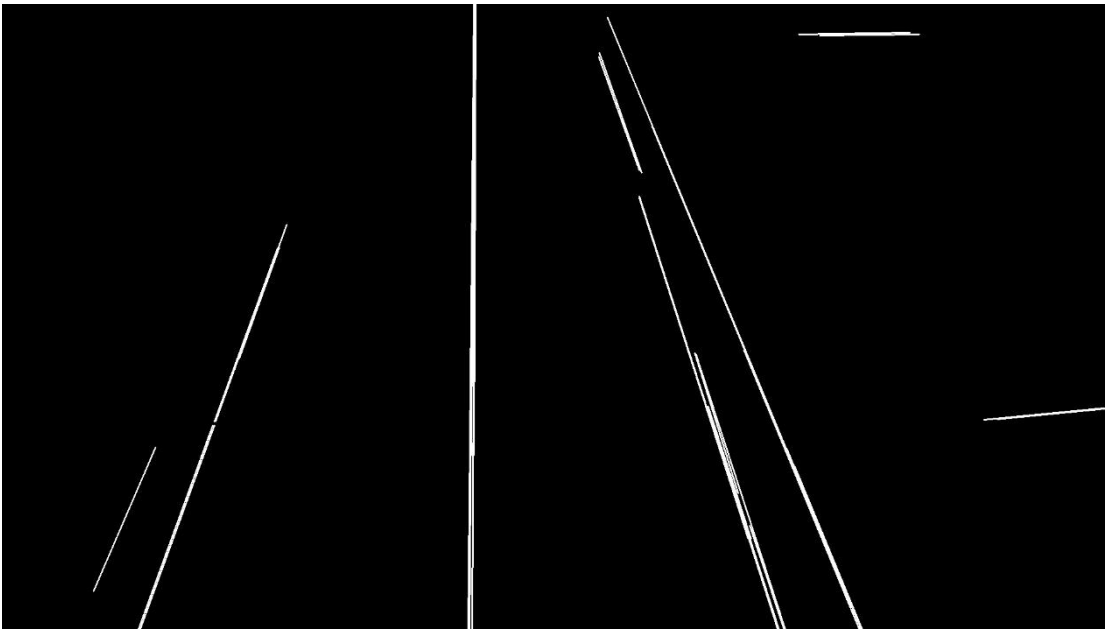


Figure 22: Result of Hough transform.

(4) A mask designed based on prior knowledge was used to filter out the detected line clusters on the road. The filtered lines can be saved as:

$$LineList = \{(x_1, y_1), (x_2, y_2)\}, \dots, \{(x_{m-1}, y_{m-1}), (x_m, y_m)\}.$$

- (5) Use the K-means clustering method [42] to filter out the center points of each cluster, and use the average values of the slopes of the clustered lines as the actual slopes.

Now the clustered lines will be saved as:

$LineList = \{(x_1, y_1, k_1), \dots, (x_s, y_s, k_s)\}$, (x_i, y_i) stands for the beginning point and k_i is the slope of corresponding line.

- (6) Estimate the boundaries of the next frame considering that the boundaries of two consecutive frames will not change drastically, and compare with the detected boundaries to determine the actual boundaries of the current frame.

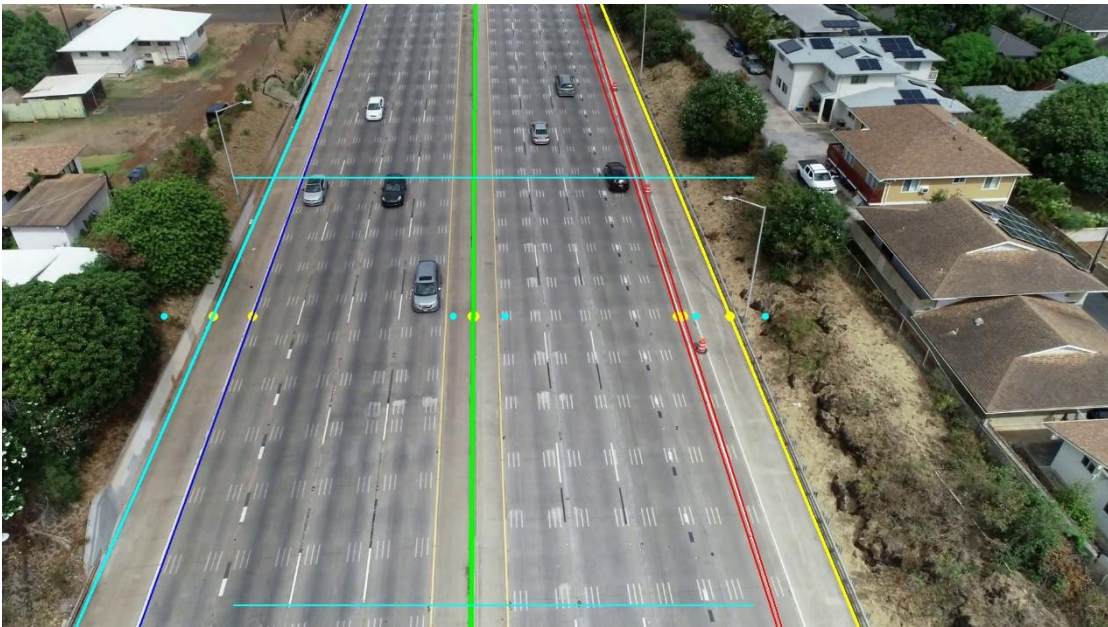


Figure 23: Detected boundaries. Straight lines of different colors indicate that edges are at different positions on the road plane. Yellow points are the result of K-means clustering.

(7) Save all the detected road boundaries after K-means clustering (including road center lines) for later steps to determine more accurate locations of the road boundaries.

3.3.2 OpenCV-Based Vehicle Tracking

Based on the detected vehicle bounding box files, the vehicle trajectories are extracted using OpenCV CSRT tracker [43]. The process is performed with the following five steps:

Step 1: Tracker Initialization

For the first frame Fr_0 of the video, read the corresponding bounding box file “frame0.txt” and initialize the tracker list with bounding boxes.

The bounding boxes are saved in this form:

$\{x, y, w, h, cx, cy\}$, (x, y) is the top left corner coordinate;

w is the width of bounding box; h is the height;

(cx, cy) denotes the center of bounding box.

Step 2: Update Trackers

Assume the current frame is Fri , update the trackers to get predicted bounding boxes using the current frame.

Step 3: Match Prediction and Ground Truth

Compare the predicted boxes with the detected boxes using CNN to find the boxes

corresponding to the vehicles in the scene. If a predicted box is not matched, maybe it is because that the NN did not detect the corresponding vehicle, the tracker will also be saved.

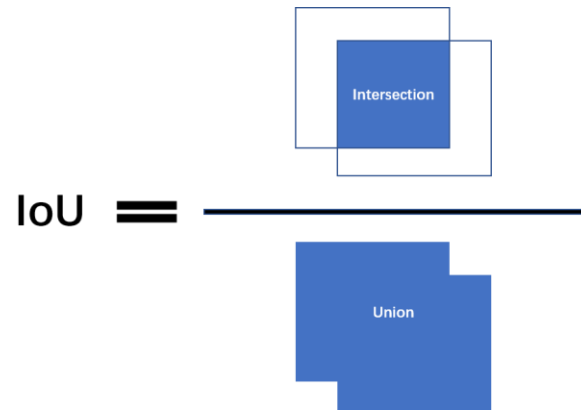


Figure 24: Intersection over Union (IoU).

In order to find the prediction box corresponding to the actual vehicle position, we use the Intersection over Union (IoU) [44] indicator for measurement. The predicted boxes are compared with the vehicle positions of the frame one by one, and their IoUs are calculated at the same time. If the preset minimum threshold is reached, then the corresponding bounding box is considered to be found. In the UAV's perspective, there is generally no mutual occlusion between vehicles, which can simplify the judgment process.

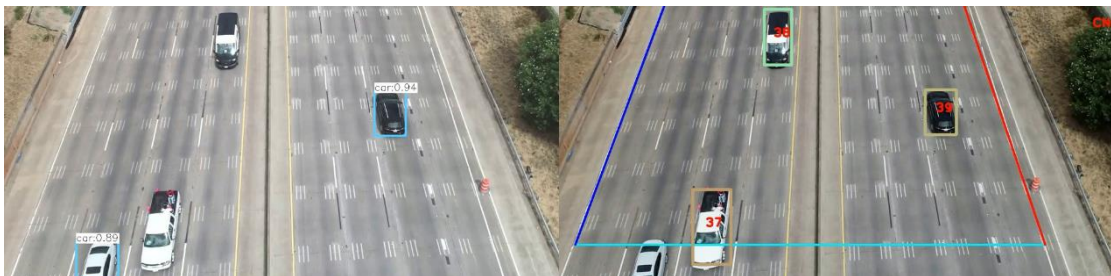


Figure 25: Left: detection result of NN. Right: NN detection combined with object tracking. The cars marked as 37 and 38 are detected using our proposed method. At the same time, the white car in the lower left corner is no longer marked because it exceeds the ROI range.

Step 4: Test Boundary Conditions

If the boxes reach the boundary conditions, the corresponding tracker is set to an unusable state and would not be updated in next frames.

Assuming the center of a predicted bounding box is (x_p, y_p) , now that we have ensured that all the vehicles in the picture are in the ROI, we only need to consider the case where the ordinate exceeds the given range, that is:

$$y_p < THR_{ul} \text{ or } y_p > THR_{ll}, \text{ if } x_p < MID;$$
$$y_p < THR_{ur} \text{ or } y_p > THR_{lr}, \text{ if } x_p > MID$$

Where THR_{ul}, THR_{ll} denotes the upper left and lower left thresholds of the left part of ROI respectively; THR_{ur}, THR_{lr} denotes the upper right and lower right thresholds of the right part of ROI respectively; MID denotes the center line's x coordinate. The preset thresholds on the left and right sides may be different. This is because the camera angle of the drone may affect the heading of the vehicle during the flight, and thus affect the relative position of the center of the vehicle.

Step 5: Determine the Final Positions of Road Boundaries

According to the detected road boundaries and the coordinates of the left-most and right-most vehicle center points in the current frame, the road boundaries that actually need to be drawn in the current screen are determined.

Assume that in the current frame, the detected vehicles are arranged in order from left to right. The center coordinate of the leftmost vehicle is (x_{left}, y_{left}) , and the center coordinate of the rightmost vehicle is (x_{right}, y_{right}) . Now that we have saved all the detected borders, if the borders on the left and right sides are all present, then by comparing with the leftmost and rightmost vehicle center positions, we can get the candidates for the precise borders on the left and right of the current frame.

In the next step, we need to compare the candidates with the precise boundaries of the previous frame. The leftmost and rightmost boundaries of the previous frame are $(x_{left_{Fr_{i-1}}}, y_{left_{Fr_{i-1}}}, k_{left_{Fr_{i-1}}}, b_{left_{Fr_{i-1}}})$ for the left side and $(x_{right_{Fr_{i-1}}}, y_{right_{Fr_{i-1}}}, k_{right_{Fr_{i-1}}}, b_{right_{Fr_{i-1}}})$ for the right side.

If the result of this frame is closer to the central area, then use the current candidates as the accurate boundary. At last, the leftmost and rightmost boundaries of the road obtained in the current frame are $(x_{left_{Fr_i}}, y_{left_{Fr_i}}, k_{left_{Fr_i}}, b_{left_{Fr_i}})$ for the left side and $(x_{right_{Fr_i}}, y_{right_{Fr_i}}, k_{right_{Fr_i}}, b_{right_{Fr_i}})$ for the right side.

If there is a left (right) side boundary that is not detected in the previous boundary extraction step, then we use the slope of the left (right) side boundary of the previous frame and the center coordinates of the vehicle in the outermost lane on that side to estimate the boundary.

The missing leftmost or rightmost boundaries of the road obtained in the current frame would be $(x_{left} + offset_x, y_{left}, k_{left_{Fr_{i-1}}}, b_{left_{Fr_{i-1}}})$ for left side

or $(x_{right} + offset_x, y_{right_{Fr_i}}, k_{right_{Fr_{i-1}}}, b_{right_{Fr_{i-1}}})$ for the right side.

3.4 Flow Parameter Estimation

3.4.1 Perspective transformation

When the human eyes receive the view of the real world, objects in the vicinity will look larger than those in the distance. This is often referred to as the perspective phenomenon. Because the camera has optical perspective characteristics similar to the human eye, two parallel straight lines on both sides of the road in real life will converge into a point in the distance in the picture. Before proceeding further, the model needs to perform perspective transformation [45] on the picture.

Assume the original point coordinate in the frame is (x, y) , the transformation matrix is M and the corresponding coordinate in the transformed picture is (x', y') , we have

$$\begin{bmatrix} u \\ v \\ w \end{bmatrix} = M \begin{bmatrix} x \\ y \\ 1 \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} a_{11} & a_{12} & a_{13} \\ a_{21} & a_{22} & a_{23} \\ a_{31} & a_{32} & a_{33} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} x \\ y \\ 1 \end{bmatrix} \quad (5)$$

$$x' = \frac{u}{w} = \frac{a_{11}x + a_{12}y + a_{13}}{a_{31}x + a_{32}y + a_{33}} \quad (6)$$

$$y' = \frac{v}{w} = \frac{a_{21}x + a_{22}y + a_{23}}{a_{31}x + a_{32}y + a_{33}} \quad (7)$$

Based on the boundaries extracted, the algorithm transforms the ROI in the original frame into a rectangular picture to estimate the distance and then the speeds of vehicles move between two consecutive frames.

Suppose the center coordinate of a car is (x_1, y_1) in the current frame, and (x'_1, y'_1) in the transformed coordinate system. In the next frame, its center coordinate becomes (x_2, y_2) , and the transformed coordinate becomes (x'_2, y'_2) . Since we assume that the picture will not change drastically between two consecutive frames, using the same actual ROI area size as a measure, the displacement of the center can be considered as the moving distance of the vehicle in two consecutive frames.

$$D = \sqrt{(x'_2 - x'_1)^2 + (y'_2 - y'_1)^2} \quad (8)$$

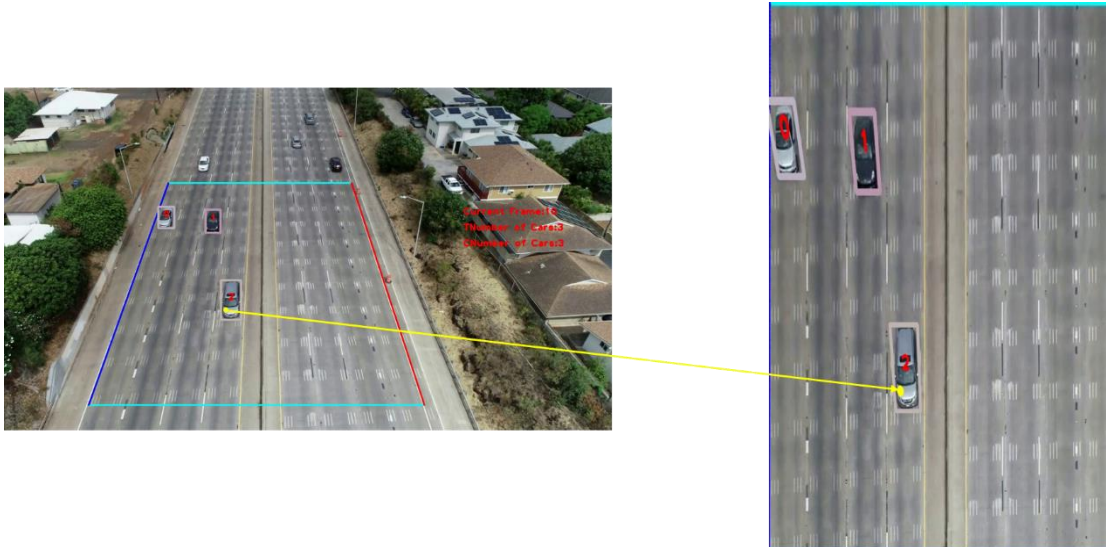


Figure 26: The Result of Perspective Transformation. The ROI in the left image was transformed into the picture on the right. The yellow point coordinates can be converted using matrix M mentioned above.

3.4.2 Parameter estimation

a) Vehicle number

After using neural network to complete the detection of vehicles, the model needs to calculate the number of vehicles running in the current frame and the total number of vehicles based on the detection results. Since the neural network may not recognize some vehicles during the process of detection, the following situations may occur while calculating the number of vehicles:

- 1) All vehicles in the screen are detected by the neural network, and the result that should be displayed is the number of vehicles detected;
- 2) Some vehicles in the picture are not detected by the neural network, but in the previous frame, some trackers were used to complete the tracking of these vehicles, and these trackers are still within the ROI range. At this time, the number of vehicles is the number of vehicles detected by the neural network plus the number of available trackers;
- 3) All the vehicles in the picture are not detected by the neural network. If the trackers used in the previous frame are still within the ROI range, the number of vehicles in the picture is the number of available trackers.

When calculating the total number of detected vehicles, after obtaining the number of vehicles in the current frame, the model only needs to count and add the number of new vehicles that

appear in each frame. However, it should be noted that the neural network may detect a car in the previous frame, but may not detect the same car in the subsequent frames. Under such circumstances, this car should not be treated as a new car. In fact, in order to deal with this situation, the model looks for the matching results of the vehicles detected in the current frame from the prediction results of the trackers in the previous frame. If the corresponding tracker is found, the model will no longer add a new tracker for this car. Instead, the model uses its current position to update the corresponding tracker.

b) Vehicle speed

After the detection and tracking of the vehicle is completed, the speed of the vehicles needs to be calculated and marked on the corresponding vehicle in the output video. When the neural network marks the position of the vehicle, the bounding box is marked with a rectangle that can include the outline of the vehicle (possibly including its shadow). However, in the tracking process, the tracker estimates the corresponding position of the next frame according to the size of the frame of the vehicle given in the previous frame, so the position of the center point of the vehicle may have a large drift.

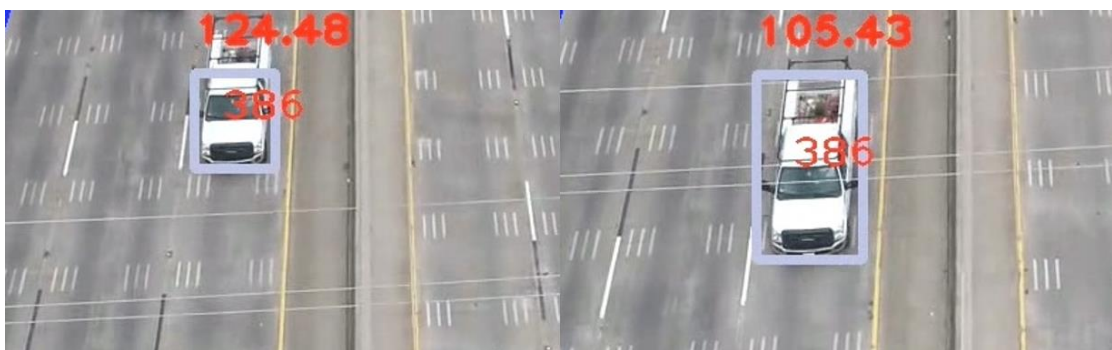


Figure 27: Center Drift. The detection result of the neural network may not

be accurate enough, which may cause the center to drift when tracking.

To reduce the error caused by the drift of the center point of the vehicle, when calculating the speed of the vehicle, the moving distance of 5 consecutive frames is averaged, and the speed calculated using this value is regarded as the moving speed of the vehicle in these 5 frames. If the total number of frames that the vehicle appears is not an integer multiple of 5, then the moving distance of the last few frames is also averaged to estimate the speed. In addition, after the speed of the vehicle is estimated, considering that the drone is also flying in the direction of the road, vehicles traveling in the same direction as the drone need to subtract the speed of the drone. Correspondingly, the speed of the drone's flight needs to be added to the vehicle driving in the opposite direction to the drone. In this way, the true speed of the vehicle can be estimated.

It is worth noting that in the first frame when a vehicle appears, the speed is 0 by default (because the position of the previous frame cannot be obtained). However, in order not to affect the display result in the video, the speed of the second frame is used as the speed of the first frame considering that the speed of the vehicle generally does not change drastically when running at high speed.

c) Vehicle Average Speed

The average speed of vehicles indicates the degree of congestion on the road. When the average speed of vehicles is higher than a certain value, it means that there is almost no congestion on the road and the traffic flow is almost free flow. When the road is heavily congested, the average speed of the vehicle becomes very close to zero.

Assuming that there are N vehicles on the road at time T , the average speed of each vehicle can be calculated using the detected vehicle trajectory data, denoted as $V_i, i = 1, 2, \dots, N$. Then the average speed of vehicles on the road at this time can be simply estimated as the average of their speeds:

$$V_{avg.} = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N V_i, \quad i = 1, 2, \dots, N \quad (9)$$

d) Vehicle Density

Generally speaking, we can calculate the density of vehicles per unit distance by dividing the total number of vehicles detected in a certain period of time by the total distance (usually 1 km is used as the unit distance). On this basis, we can further divide this result by the number of lanes to get the density of vehicles on each lane. In the case of this thesis, we only use the former as the parameter to measure traffic flow.

Suppose that the starting time is $T_0 = 0$, and it becomes T_i after a period of time. During this time, the total number of detected vehicles is N , the number of lanes is L , and the average flying speed of the drone is V_d , and the flying distance is $S_d = V_d \times T_i$.

Considering the detection distance S_{ROI} of the drone's ROI, we can calculate the average density of vehicles at time T_i :

$$Density = \frac{N/L}{S_d + S_{ROI}} \quad (10)$$

CHAPTER 4 - EXPERIMENTAL TESTS

4.1 Testing Hardware and Environment

The UAV used for recording videos of freeway is DJI Phantom 4 Pro. The drone is controlled by a remote controller. An iPad mini installed with flight control software is used as the flight control panel and the display screen. The drone itself is equipped with a GPS device and is able to be automatically stabilized against wind disturbances. According to the user manual, the drone could reach a height of 500 m and a max control range of 7000 m. The flight process can be controlled manually or be autonomous by the aid of GPS system, which makes it possible to follow preprogrammed waypoints. The camera is fixed on the gimbal at the bottom of the drone, and can achieve a shooting angle from -90° to $+30^{\circ}$. In the recording mode, it can record 4K (3840×2160 30fps) videos and save them in the form of .mov to a MicroSD card. Some screenshots are shown in the following section, which were recorded by the drone on freeway following the pre-programmed waypoints.



Figure 28: Configuration of Hardware.

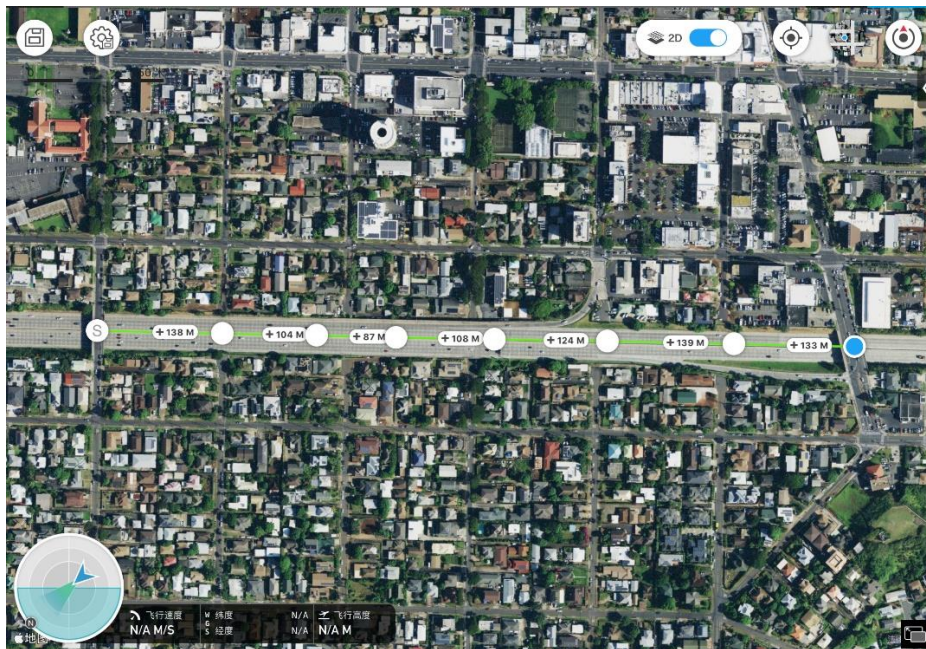


Figure 29: Preset Waypoint Information.

As for the code running environment, the neural network was constructed under Python 3.7 in Ubuntu 18.04 system frame. The vehicle tracking module uses OpenCV 3.4.2 to read and




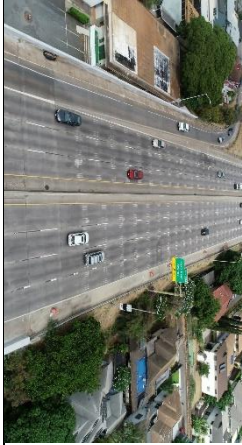
process video and images. The final codes run on a laptop computer that uses an I7 6700HQ model CPU and 16 GB RAM.

4.2 Testing Scenarios and Data Collection

4.2.1 Testing Scenarios

In order to test the performance of our proposed model in different scenarios, we used a drone to obtain videos of the same road at different times. The road section selected in this experiment is on the H1 freeway in Honolulu, Hawaii, with a total length of about 880 meters on approximately a straight alignment. When recording videos by drone, one must consider that the UAV used is small in size and cannot resist strong wind. Therefore, we chose days in field when the winds are calm and the weather is sunny or cloudy, and different lighting conditions are also considered. Table 1 provides a detailed description.

Table 1 Description of Test Videos

Number	Time	Weather	Light Condition	Screenshot	Road Type	Length
1	Morning (8:00-9:00)	Clear	<i>High ambient lighting</i> (Objects with shadows)		Freeway	00:27
2	Noon (12:00-13:00)	Clear	<i>High ambient lighting</i> (Objects with shadows)		Freeway	05:27
3	Afternoon (17:00-18:00)	Windy	<i>Moderate ambient lighting</i> (Objects with shadows)		Freeway	06:00
4	Evening (18:00-18:30)	Windy	<i>Low ambient lighting</i> (No obvious shadows)		Freeway	05:40

Note: The videos used in the experiment were not shot on the same day, but we tried our best to choose suitable weather and lighting conditions to test the performance of the model in different scenarios.

4.2.2 Data Collection

The hardware devices used in this experiment have been shown and explained in detail in the previous chapters. In order to avoid drone flight accidents that may be caused by manual operation, and try to keep the drone's viewing angle as stable as possible. With the help of specialized software, we have set up a series of fixed waypoints through many tests and adjustments, using the GPS function of the drone. After the drone takes off, turn on the automatic flight on the software, and the software will wirelessly transmit the waypoint information to the drone. Then the drone will automatically follow the preset route and fly at a constant speed. In this process, the camera of the UAV is used to complete the collection of road video information, and the videos were stored in the UAV's micro SD card in the 4K+30fps .mov file format.

4.3 Experimental Results and Analysis

4.3.1 Model Calibration and Metrics of Evaluation

To verify the effectiveness of our proposed model and calibrate the parameters, we first used a short video as verification data. This video is also from the H1 freeway and is about 27 seconds long. The detailed description of this short clip is listed above.

Before we start the test, we first need to give definition of metrics to measure performance. Considering that the model we proposed is to detect the number of vehicles on the road, extract vehicle trajectory data then estimate vehicle speed, traffic flow density and average speed on this basis, we propose the following measurement standards for these data:

1) Metrics of Evaluation for Vehicle Detection

Table 2 Confusion Matrix

Total Population		Predicted Condition	
		Positive	Negative
True Condition	True	True Positive (<i>TP</i>)	True Negative (<i>TN</i>)
	False	False Positive (<i>FP</i>)	False Negative (<i>FN</i>)

Start from the concept of binary classifier, **Precision**, which is the fraction of relevant instances among the retrieved instances, and **Recall**, which is the fraction of the total amount of relevant instances that have been retrieved, are commonly used in detectors performance evaluation [46]. They are defined as in the following equations:

$$Precision = \frac{TP}{TP+FP} \quad (11)$$

$$Recall = \frac{TP}{TP+FN} \quad (12)$$

In an ideal state, both the accuracy rate and the recall rate should be high, which shows that the model can accurately identify the correct result while ensuring a low error

recognition rate. Based on these two parameters, the **F-measure** is the trade-off between Recall and Precision, which have equal importance in the equation bellow:

$$F = 2 * \frac{Precision*Recall}{Precision+Recall} \quad (13)$$

2) Metrics of Evaluation for Traffic Flow Density

According to the level of service (LOS) criteria table from [47], flow conditions are considered "free" when less than 12 vehicles per mile per lane are on a road. "Stable" is sometimes described as 12–30 vehicles per mile per lane. As the density reaches the maximum mass flow rate (or flux) and exceeds the optimum density (above 30 vehicles per mile per lane), traffic flow becomes unstable, and even a minor incident can result in persistent stop-and-go driving conditions. A "breakdown" condition occurs when traffic becomes unstable and exceeds 67 vehicles per mile per lane.

Table 3 Level of Service for basic freeway sections for 70 km/h design speed [47]

LOS	Flow Condition	Service Volume	Speed	Density
		(veh/h/lane)	(miles/h)	(veh/mile per lane)
A	Free	700	>60	<12
B	Stable	1100	>57	<20
C	Stable	1550	>54	<30
D	High Density	1850	>46	<40
E	Near Capacity	2000	>30	<67
F	Breakdown	Unstable	<30	>67

3) Metrics of Evaluation for Average Speed

Since the freeway section used for the test contains forks and has different speed limits in different sections, we partially refer to the LOS standard table given above and the actual speed limit standards to investigate the average speed of the traffic flow. On this basis, a rough judgment of road congestion is given.

In the test phase, after processing the 27-second video (marked as video No. 1), we got the following test results:

Table 4 Preliminary Test Results

Ground Truth	TP Sample Number	FP Sample Number	FN Sample Number	P	R	F-measure
90	88	2	0	97.78%	100%	98.88%

Since the videos were taken by us using a drone, there is no corresponding data set containing the number and speed of vehicles. Therefore, in the result, the actual total number of vehicles (i.e. ground truth), TP, FP, and FN data are all manually counted.

The speeds of the vehicles are saved in a .csv file. For the convenience of calculation, the speeds of the vehicles used in the calculation are in feet/s. By calculating their average value, we get an average vehicle speed of 14.66 miles/h (23.60 km/h) on the left lanes. Since the road in the test video is close to the fork, the speed limit is 25 miles/h. Considering this actual speed limit, the data we get is within a reasonable range. At the same time, referring to the

standards given above, this section of the road is already in severe congestion. The following results will also give a consistent judgment.

As for the traffic density, through estimation, the total length of the 7-lane test section is about 160m (about 0.1 mile), and the total number of vehicles detected by the model is 88, so the traffic density on this road section during this time period 126 veh/mile per lane.

According to the LOS standard listed above, this section of the road is actually in a state of congestion, and it has also been verified from the actual picture that vehicles on the left lane have already started to queue up.



Figure 30: Actual Traffic Conditions in Congestion.

The processed results of this test video prove the effectiveness of our model, and that the model can provide more accurate results.

4.3.2 Experimental Results

After testing and adjusting the parameters of the model, this part gives the processed results of the remaining three longer videos. Here is the result of vehicle detection:

1) Vehicle Detection

Table 5 Experimental Results of Vehicle Detection

Number	Ground Truth	TP Sample Number	FP Sample Number	FN Sample Number	P	R	F
2	516	499	7	10	98.62%	98.04%	98.33%
3	663	647	5	11	99.23%	98.33%	98.78%
4	513	495	2	16	99.60%	96.87%	98.22%

2) Vehicle Average Speed

Table 6 Experimental Results of Vehicle Average Speed

Number	Estimated Average Speed (Left)	Estimated Average Speed (Right)	Flow Condition (Left)	Flow Condition (Right)	Actual Speed Limit
2	53.60 miles/h	41.07 miles/h	High Density	Near Capacity	50 miles/h
3	55.93 miles/h	42.68 miles/h	Stable	High Density	50 miles/h
4	58.64 miles/h	44.49 miles/h	Stable	High Density	50 miles/h

3) Vehicle Density

Table 7 Experimental Results of Vehicle Density

Number	Detected Number of Vehicles	Total Length of Road Section	Number of Lanes	Estimated Vehicle Density (veh/mile per lane)
2	512	900 m	8	114
3	661	1000 m	8	133
4	506	900 m	8	113

4.3.3 Analysis of Results

In the previous parts of this chapter, we have listed the evaluation criteria and experimental results respectively. From the experimental results, our model has a good performance in vehicle detection and speed estimation. In different scenarios, our proposed method can achieve a vehicle detection precision rate of over 98%. At the same time, the F value is also maintained above 98%. It shows that our model has excellent performance in both accuracy and recall.

The estimated average vehicle speeds can also provide an intuitive judgment of the degree of road congestion. The average speeds of vehicles on the left and right lanes obtained from the test videos are shown in Table 6. The road flow conditions corresponding to them are also given. From the results, we can see that the average speeds of the vehicles in the lanes on the right are lower than those of the vehicles on the left. The reason for this result is that on this section of the road, the lanes on the right are uphill, so the average speeds of the vehicles are lower. Therefore, the estimated flow conditions of the right lanes are “near capacity” or “high capacity”, while the flow conditions of the left lanes are “stable” or “high capacity”.

However, the estimation of traffic flow density is quite different from the actual result. Refer to the LOS standard table we quoted, when the vehicle density exceeds 67 veh/mile per lane, the road in this scenario should be nearly saturated. Vehicles are very likely to fall into long-term congestion on the road due to minor effects, such as an emergency braking of a vehicle. Going back to the scene we tested, we can judge from the video we actually recorded and the estimated average speed that the traffic flow is obviously in a relatively stable state and not close to the

maximum capacity. By analyzing the actual situation, the reason for this phenomenon is actually that the road section we used to record the video is not completely closed, that is, the road is connected by forks, so the total number of vehicles counted by our model includes vehicles entering and leaving the freeway at forks. In addition, refer to the results obtained by using the test video labeled 1, which also exceeds the standard line of 67 veh/mile. Since that section of road is relatively short, it can be approximated as a closed section of road. Therefore, the estimated result reflects the actual condition of the road, that is, the road is indeed congested.

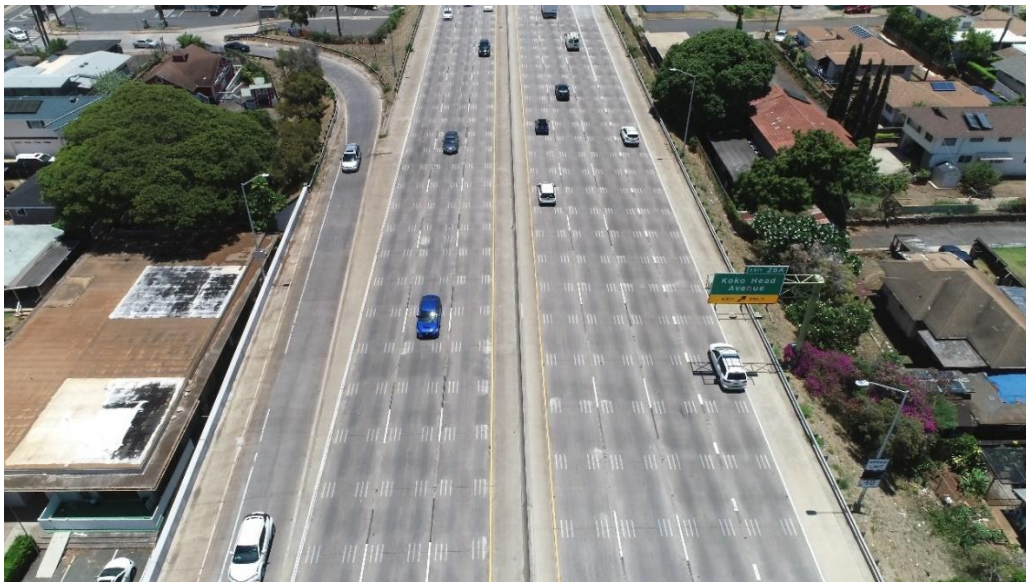


Figure 31: Road Fork on the Test Section.

Based on the reasons listed above, we can explain the result that traffic flow density higher than the reasonable value in our test in this way: the test road section is not closed, so the estimated density value actually includes the traffic flow on the branch road, so the result is still reasonable. But this also reminds us that we need to be more rigorous in choosing test scenarios in subsequent tests, and try to choose closed roads to avoid the impact of traffic on branch roads.

In summary, our model has achieved a vehicle detection rate of more than 98% under different weather, light and traffic conditions, and can accurately estimate two key macro traffic flow parameters: the average speed of the traffic flow and density. The results obtained by the model can provide powerful support for road congestion analysis. At the same time, we also save detailed detection results, such as vehicle trajectory data and real-time speed of vehicles in .csv files. After manual calibration, these data can be used to estimate the safety index of the traffic system and for the research of intelligent traffic management systems.

CHAPTER 5 - RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Although the method we propose can accurately detect vehicles and record vehicle trajectory information, and estimate the macro parameters of traffic flow, there are still some limitations. Mainly divided into the following aspects:

- 1) **The detection process is not real-time.** Due to the limitations of the current hardware equipment, we are unable to complete the vehicle detection on the screen while the video obtained by the drone is returned. On the one hand, because the flight control and monitoring process uses Apple's iPad mini, and the data processing platform is a windows system laptop, the data cannot be transmitted to the processing equipment at the same time. On the other hand, we currently only use an Intel 6700 HQ CPU as the data processing unit, and it is difficult for us to achieve the 20fps real-time monitoring requirement without GPU acceleration.

- 2) **Data acquisition is limited to the daytime when the weather is good.** Due to the small size of the drone, it is susceptible to severe weather conditions, such as strong winds and rain, and cannot normally fly and record videos. At the same time, since the UAV does not have infrared photography function, it cannot fly and record videos at night. In addition, the battery capacity of the drone can only allow 30 minutes of continuous flight at a time. Perhaps with the development of drone technology, these problems can be solved.
- 3) **The detection of road boundaries is sometimes disturbed by the surrounding environment.** Although the road boundary detection effect is better in the experiment, it will still be affected by the roadside building lines. Even if this effect can be eliminated to a certain extent with the help of the inter-frame relationship of two consecutive frames, further optimization may still be needed in more complex scenes.
- 4) **Changes in the height of the road will interfere with the estimation of vehicle speed.** Although the drone can roughly estimate its height from the ground, it cannot automatically adjust the flying height according to the height from the ground when flying on a preset route. Therefore, when the road surface appears uphill or downhill, it may affect the results of the videos and thus affect the estimation of the vehicle speed. In our experiments, manual adjustment can ensure that the height of the drone from the road is always the same, but in more complex situations, we may need to seek better drone control algorithms and sensors to complete the drone's fixed altitude cruise.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSIONS

This study provides a feasible and relatively accurate method for the dynamic parameter estimation of the transportation system. The proposed method integrates road boundary detection, vehicle detection and tracking, and vehicle speed estimation, and can further provide detailed road macro parameters on the basis of obtaining the basic structure information of the road system. From the experimental results, in the obtained freeway videos obtained by the UAV, our proposed method achieves about 98% vehicle detection accuracy on average, and provides highly reliable vehicle speed estimation results. On this basis, we can further calculate the vehicle density on the road and the average speed of the vehicle. Thus, the degree of vehicle congestion on tested road can be evaluated, which provides reference information for the intelligent traffic management system.

This approach is proved to be an effective method different from traditional road detection methods. First of all, the use of drone to record the road system can achieve complete recording of an entire section of the road considering at a low budget level. The traditional fixed-angle road monitoring system needs to integrate the videos of different road segments to complete the vehicle detection and parameter estimation of the entire road. However, under the model we proposed, a single drone can be used to record video of the entire closed road. And because of the high angle of view, the video taken for vehicle detection will not be affected by the mutual occlusion between vehicles. Second, the proposed model can obtain both road boundaries and vehicle trajectories, which can provide a reliable navigation reference for smart vehicles when the GPS system cannot provide accurate road and

surrounding vehicle information. In addition, due to this method, accurate vehicle speed and position information can be obtained. In future research, we can also use this as input data to complete the evaluation of the road safety factor, and obtain accurate evaluation results through the statistics of possible vehicle collisions and acceleration and deceleration.

After completing the construction of the entire model, we also noticed some directions for future work in the actual experimental process. First, we need to obtain more training data to train the neural network to improve the detection accuracy of different types of vehicles. Second, since the center position of the vehicle output by the tracker may have a large drift in different frames, the accuracy of the target tracking algorithm needs to be further improved. At present, in the vehicle detection stage, it takes about 220ms on average to complete the detection of one frame of video. In the future, we will further improve the detection speed by using better hardware and improved algorithms. Finally, due to the current limitation of computing power, we cannot achieve real-time detection of vehicles and output videos with calculated parameters. Next, we will try to develop more efficient algorithms to reduce resource consumption.

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