Improving Short-term Travel Speed Prediction with High Resolution Spatial and Temporal Rainfall Data

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Summary

What we did:
- Incorporated high-resolution rainfall and wind data into a travel speed prediction model to assess how having localized rainfall data to predict travel speed compares to the classical method of utilizing a single city-wide rain gauge.
- The results show that, high-resolution rainfall features in many instances are better predictors of future rainfall on the target segments, leading to overall better prediction results.

Background

- In 2018, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania recorded its wettest year on record since 1871 and 77 other cities across the United States (US) that same year also experienced record-setting rainfall.
- Studies from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reveal that about 14% of vehicle crashes occur in adverse weather conditions.
- Existing broadcast emergency response systems such as flood warnings reach a wide-range of people, but the messages sent from this system are generic and do not include descriptive information (e.g., roads to avoid).
- In order to promote better management of the transportation system, we propose a data-driven approach to predict and quantify traffic conditions in real-time (i.e., 30 minutes ahead).

Method

Acknowledgments: This research was supported by a US DOT University Transportation Center grant, award No. DTRT12GUTC11, the Provost’s Office and Civil and Environmental Engineering Department at Carnegie Mellon University, which both provide funding for the Presidential Postdoctoral Research Program, and by the Hillman Foundation support of the Traffic 21 Institute at Carnegie Mellon University.

Case Study: Washington Boulevard (Pittsburgh, PA)

Rainfall Features
- Gauge Adjusted Radar Rainfall: Provides calibrated rainfall data at a resolution of 1-km by 1-km for Allegheny County
- Rain Gauges: Provides observed rainfall data; 33 rain gauges scattered throughout Allegheny County

Other Features
- Speed: XD based speed data from INRIX, covers all main roads within a 6 mile radius of Washington Blvd.
- Incidents: PennDOT Road Conditions Reporting System
- Weather: Hourly Weather data from Darksky (e.g., humidity, visibility, temperature)
- Local Events: Home games of major sports teams (MLB, NFL, NHL)
- Temporal: information on day of week, hour, and whether the observed day is a Federal holiday

Exploring the Role of High-Resolution Rainfall Features

- For this analysis, we ran each model with a single city-wide rain gauge and with high-resolution rainfall features, and compared model performance during periods when there is no rain, light rain, and moderate to heavy rain.
- The model with the single city-wide rain gauge uses observed rainfall data from the rain gauge closest to Pittsburgh International Airport (PIT), which is about 4.8 km (3 mi) west.
- By comparing the results of the models we see that incorporating high resolution rainfall features improves overall model performance in all weather conditions.
- The greatest improvements in accuracy from incorporating high resolution rainfall features for Washington Blvd. comes during moderate and heavy rainfall events where MAPE improves from 18.8% to about 18.1%, a 3.9% improvement in travel speed prediction accuracy.

Conclusion

- The incorporation of high-resolution rainfall features offers overall improvements in model performance when compared to only using a single city-wide rain gauge, but the magnitude of improvement and those weather conditions where model performance improves is likely to vary by roadway segment.
- High-resolution features tend to have much higher correlations with future rainfall on Washington Blvd., leading to substantially better prediction results during certain rain events.

Future Work

- Utilize raw doppler radar and rain gauge features in a travel speed prediction model.
- Predict rare events such as roadway network flooding.
- Perform travel speed prediction on different facility types such as highways and rural roadways.