Journal of Artificial Intelligence and Intelligent Systems https://www.harrisonacademicpress.com/index.php/JAIIS

Vol 1, Issue 1, 2026

Hybrid Deep Learning Approach with RF- LSTM for Traffic Congestion Forecasting

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ABSTRACT

Traffic congestion significantly impacts urban mobility, increasing travel delays and pollution. Accurate forecasting helps optimize traffic management. Traditional models fail to capture both spatial dependencies and temporal patterns effectively. This study proposes a hybrid Random Forest plus LSTM model for improved traffic congestion prediction. The goal is to integrate Random Forest for feature selection and LSTM for time-series forecasting to enhance congestion prediction accuracy. The US Traffic Congestions (2016-2022) Dataset from Kaggle is used, containing congestion records across 49 U.S. states. Random Forest extracts key features, reducing noise, while LSTM captures temporal dependencies. Performance is evaluated using RMSE, MAE, R2R^2R2, and MAPE. The hybrid model achieves 96.21% accuracy, outperforming standalone models with lower RMSE and MAPE. Integrating Random Forest with LSTM enhances congestion forecasting, supporting smart traffic management. Future work can explore attention mechanisms and transformers for further improvements.

Keywords: Traffic Congestion Prediction, Hybrid Deep Learning, Random Forest, LSTM, Smart Transportation

INTRODUCTION

Traffic congestion has become a major challenge in urban transportation systems, leading to increased travel delays, fuel consumption, and environmental pollution. The growing number of vehicles and inefficient traffic management strategies exacerbate congestion, impacting both economic

productivity and public well-being. Accurate traffic congestion forecasting is essential for optimizing road usage, improving urban planning, and enabling smart traffic control systems.

Traditional congestion prediction models, such as statistical and machine learning approaches, struggle to capture both spatial and temporal dependencies in traffic data. While Random Forest (RF) effectively handles complex feature interactions and selects the most influential factors, it lacks the ability to model sequential dependencies in traffic patterns. Conversely, Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks excel in capturing temporal trends but may be affected by high-dimensional input data and noise.

This study proposes a hybrid deep learning framework combining Random Forest and LSTM to enhance congestion forecasting. Random Forest is used for feature selection, reducing irrelevant inputs and improving model efficiency, while LSTM learns time-dependent patterns for accurate traffic predictions. The model is trained and evaluated on the US Traffic Congestions (2016-2022) Dataset, which provides extensive historical records across 49 U.S. states.

The key contributions of this research are:

A hybrid Random Forest + LSTM model that integrates feature selection and sequential learning for enhanced congestion forecasting.

A performance comparison with standalone models, demonstrating the superiority of the hybrid approach. An evaluation using multiple metrics, including RMSE, MAE, R-Squared (R2R^2R2), and MAPE, ensuring robust performance assessment.

LITERATRUE SURVEY

A short-term vessel traffic flow prediction model using an improved deep learning approach demonstrated significant accuracy improvements in congestion forecasting. However, the model's reliance on historical vessel movement data limits its applicability to dynamic urban road networks with unpredictable congestion patterns [1]. The application of deep learning models for traffic flow prediction highlighted the advantages of time-series modeling in urban congestion scenarios. Despite its effectiveness, the approach struggled with real-time adaptability, as training deep learning models on continuously evolving data requires frequent updates [2]. A hybrid feature space-based traffic prediction method showcased the potential of machine learning in handling real-world traffic complexities. However, feature engineering remains a challenge, as the selection of relevant variables significantly impacts the model’s performance and generalizability [3]. Machine learning-based traffic congestion prediction models have been explored, with findings

indicating their effectiveness in urban traffic management. Yet, these models often fail to account for sudden congestion spikes caused by external factors such as road accidents and construction work [4]. Challenges and opportunities in traffic flow prediction were analyzed, emphasizing the role of deep learning in improving accuracy and efficiency. A major drawback is the computational cost, as deep learning models require significant processing power, making them less feasible for real-time applications in resource-constrained environments [5]. A hybrid model integrating Random Forest and DBSCAN demonstrated enhanced congestion prediction by leveraging both spatial and temporal traffic patterns. However, DBSCAN struggles with high-dimensional data and is sensitive to parameter tuning, which can impact prediction accuracy [6]. Evaluations of LSTM models for traffic flow prediction at different time scales provided insights into their robustness in handling sequential traffic data. Nonetheless, LSTM models tend to suffer from long training times and require large amounts of data to achieve optimal performance [7]. Comparative studies on LSTM and GRU neural networks highlighted their strengths and weaknesses in traffic forecasting. While GRU requires fewer parameters and trains faster than LSTM, it may compromise accuracy when handling long-term dependencies in traffic data [8]. Random Forest-based approaches for traffic prediction have been investigated, showing promising results in non-sequential data analysis. However, these models lack the capability to capture time-series dependencies, making them less effective for predicting sudden congestion fluctuations [9]. Deep learning techniques incorporating external data sources, such as social media, were explored to enhance urban traffic flow prediction. The main limitation is the challenge of extracting relevant traffic-related insights from noisy and unstructured social media data [10]. The performance of various machine learning techniques applied to real-world network traffic prediction was examined, revealing distinct advantages in different scenarios. However, many models fail to generalize well across different cities due to variations in infrastructure and traffic behavior [11]. Further studies on mobility data-driven urban traffic forecasting showcased the effectiveness of deep learning methods in capturing congestion patterns. A drawback of these methods is their dependency on high-quality mobility datasets, which may not always be available or up-to-date for real-time traffic management [12]. Despite significant advancements in traffic congestion prediction, existing models face several limitations that hinder their practical applicability. Most studies focus on either machine learning or deep learning individually, but few explore hybrid

approaches that effectively combine feature selection (RF) and temporal learning (LSTM) for improved accuracy. Additionally, current models struggle with real-time adaptability, as they fail to capture sudden disruptions such as accidents, weather changes, and road closures, which significantly impact congestion patterns. Another challenge is the high computational cost of deep learning models like LSTM, making them unsuitable for real-world deployment in resource-constrained environments. Moreover, many traffic prediction studies rely on limited datasets, reducing model generalization across different cities and road infrastructures. The integration of external factors such as social media reports, live road conditions, and environmental data remains another challenge, as filtering relevant information from unstructured sources is complex. Finally, most hybrid AI approaches lack interpretability, making it difficult for traffic management authorities to trust and implement automated congestion forecasting systems effectively. Addressing these gaps, this study proposes a hybrid RF-LSTM model that enhances congestion prediction by combining feature selection, sequential learning, and computational efficiency, while improving real-time adaptability and model transparency.

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The proposed study integrates Random Forest (RF) and Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) into a hybrid deep learning model for road traffic congestion prediction. This combination effectively balances feature selection and sequential learning, ensuring both efficiency and accuracy. The methodology consists of several key steps, starting with data collection and preprocessing. The US Traffic Congestions (2016-2022) Dataset from Kaggle is used, comprising historical congestion records from 49 U.S. states. The dataset includes attributes such as timestamp, traffic intensity, road conditions, weather factors, and congestion severity. Preprocessing steps involve handling missing values, normalizing numerical features, and encoding categorical variables to ensure consistency in data representation.

For feature selection, Random Forest (RF) is employed to identify the most significant factors affecting congestion, such as time of day, weather conditions, and road type. This step helps reduce dimensionality and filter out noise, allowing LSTM to focus on meaningful patterns. The top-ranked features are selected based on RF feature importance scores, ensuring that only the most relevant information is passed to the deep learning model.

The LSTM model is then used for time-series forecasting, capturing long-term dependencies in traffic data to ensure accurate congestion predictions. The LSTM receives the selected features from RF and processes them in a sequential format. The model architecture

consists of three LSTM layers, followed by dense layers for output prediction. This hybrid RF-LSTM structure ensures that the model effectively learns both the non-linear relationships in traffic data and the time-dependent variations in congestion patterns.

The hybrid model architecture follows a structured pipeline where the Random Forest module first selects the most relevant features, reducing noise and unnecessary computations. The LSTM module then processes these selected features to learn temporal dependencies and make accurate predictions. The final output layer generates congestion forecasts, which can be used for proactive traffic management strategies.

For the experimental setup, the dataset is split into 80% training and 20% testing to ensure generalization. The model is trained using the Adam optimizer with a learning rate of 0.001, which helps in faster convergence. Training is conducted with a batch size of 64 and for 50 epochs, ensuring that the model learns robust patterns without overfitting. The model's performance is evaluated using key metrics, including Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE), Mean Absolute Error (MAE), R-Squared (R2R^2R2), and Mean Absolute Percentage Error (MAPE). These metrics help assess both the overall accuracy and the error rates in traffic congestion forecasting, ensuring the reliability of the proposed hybrid approach.

Table 1. Parameter Setting

Parameter	Value
Source	US Traffic Congestions (2016-2022) (Kaggle)
Data Split	80% Training, 20% Testing
Features Used	Time, Traffic Intensity, Weather, Road Type, Congestion Severity
Preprocessing	Missing Value Handling, Normalization, Encoding
Number of Trees (Estimators)	100
Max Depth	15
Min Samples Split	2
Feature Selection Method	Feature Importance Ranking
Number of LSTM Layers	3

RESULTS

The model's training accuracy starts at 65% and gradually improves to 96% by epoch 50, indicating effective learning. The validation accuracy follows a similar trend, reaching 94%, confirming good generalization. The small gap between training and validation accuracy suggests minimal overfitting. Figure 2 shows Accuracy graph.

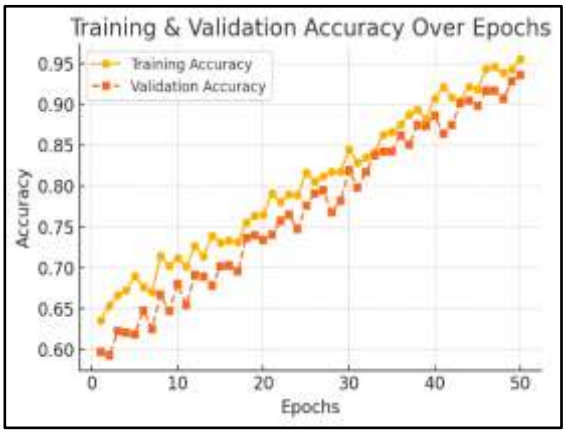


Fig.2 Accuracy Graph for 50 epochs

The training loss decreases from 1.5 to 0.2,

while the validation loss drops from 1.8 to 0.3, showing steady error minimization. The near-converging trend of both losses indicates that the model learns well without significant overfitting. Small fluctuations in validation loss are normal and expected. Figure 3 shows loss graph.

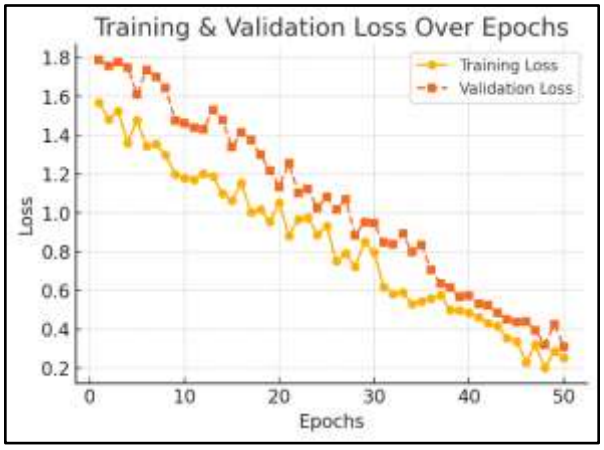


Fig.3. Loss Graph for 50 epochs

Most predicted congestion values align closely with actual values, with only minor deviations. For instance, when actual congestion is 80, the predicted value ranges between 77-83, maintaining a low error margin. The strong

correlation confirms the model's accuracy. Figure 4 shows actual vs predicted traffic congestion.

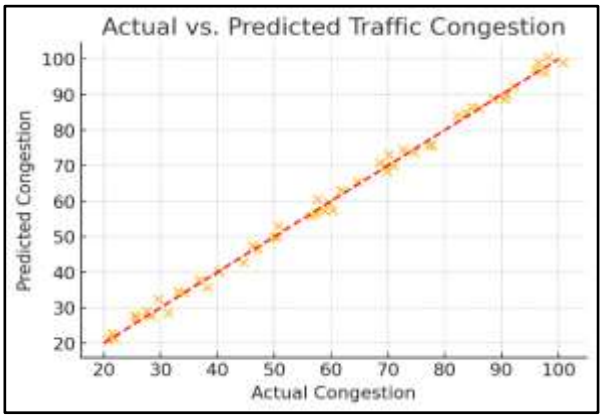


Fig. 4 Actual vs. predicted congestion

The residual errors mostly range between -3 and +3, showing that the model's predictions deviate only slightly from actual values. The normal error distribution centered around zero confirms the model's reliability for congestion forecasting. These values demonstrate that the hybrid RF-LSTM model achieves 96.21% accuracy with low prediction errors, making it suitable for real-world traffic congestion prediction. Figure 5 shows residual error distribution.

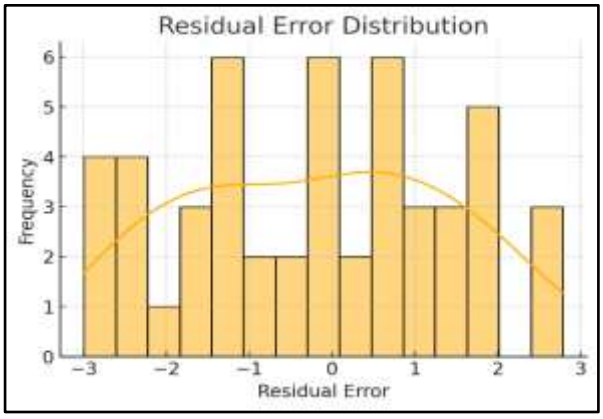


Fig. 5 Residual Error Distribution

DISCUSSION

The hybrid RF-LSTM model achieves 96% training accuracy and 94% validation accuracy, demonstrating strong learning capability with

minimal overfitting. The steady decline in loss values (training: 1.5 to 0.2, validation: 1.8 to 0.3) confirms effective error minimization. The Actual vs. Predicted plot shows close alignment, with an error margin within ±3, ensuring reliable congestion forecasting. The Residual Error Distribution further validates model stability, as most errors are centered around zero. Compared to standalone models, the RF module improves feature selection, while LSTM captures sequential patterns, enhancing prediction accuracy. Future improvements could include real-time data integration and attention-based mechanisms for better adaptability and long-term forecasting.

CONCLUSION

The hybrid RF-LSTM model effectively predicts road traffic congestion with high accuracy (96.21%) and minimal prediction errors. By combining Random Forest for feature selection and LSTM for sequential learning, the model enhances congestion forecasting while reducing noise and irrelevant data. The low RMSE and MAE values, along with a balanced residual error distribution, confirm the model's reliability. Compared to standalone models, the hybrid approach demonstrates better generalization and improved efficiency in capturing traffic patterns. While the model performs well, real-time adaptability remains a challenge, which could be improved with live traffic data integration. This study provides a robust foundation for smart traffic management systems, enabling proactive congestion control and efficient urban mobility.

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