



International Journal of Innovative Research in Science Engineering and Technology (IJIRSET)

(A Monthly, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Scholarly Indexed, Open Access Journal)



Impact Factor: 9.935

Volume 15, Issue 5, May 2026

Optimization and Comparative Evaluation of YOLO Models for Real-Time Road Pothole Detection

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ABSTRACT: Potholes are a major form of road surface deterioration that adversely affect transportation safety, driving comfort, and vehicle durability. Traditional inspection techniques, which typically involve manual surveys or expensive sensing equipment, are inefficient for continuous and large-scale road monitoring. This study investigates the performance optimization of several YOLO-based deep learning models for automated pothole detection in road monitoring applications. Different YOLO architectures are tested using a dataset composed of road images and video frames captured in varied environmental and illumination conditions. Key detection parameters, including image input size, confidence score threshold, and non-maximum suppression settings, are systematically tuned to improve detection accuracy while maintaining real-time processing capability. Model performance is assessed using evaluation metrics such as mean Average Precision (mAP), precision, recall, frames per second (FPS), and inference latency. The experimental results demonstrate the effectiveness of optimized YOLO configurations and provide insights into balancing detection accuracy with computational efficiency for practical deployment in intelligent transportation and infrastructure monitoring systems.

KEYWORDS: Pothole Detection, YOLO Models, Deep Learning, Road Infrastructure Monitoring, Real-Time Object Detection.

I. INTRODUCTION

Road infrastructure is essential for transportation safety, mobility, and economic growth. Well-maintained roads support smooth transportation and reduce vehicle operating costs. However, road surfaces are continuously affected by heavy traffic, environmental conditions, temperature changes, and water penetration, leading to defects such as cracks, potholes, and surface irregularities. Among these, potholes are particularly dangerous because they can cause accidents, vehicle damage, increased fuel consumption, and traffic congestion. Therefore, early pothole detection and timely maintenance are important for safe and efficient road management.

Traditional road inspection methods mainly rely on manual surveys or specialized vehicles with sensing equipment. Although effective, these methods are time-consuming, expensive, and require significant human effort, making them less suitable for large-scale monitoring. Manual inspections may also suffer from human error, while sensor-based systems require costly hardware and maintenance. Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI), especially deep learning and computer vision, have improved automated road condition monitoring. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) can learn important visual features directly from images, making them effective for detecting pavement damage such as potholes.

Among object detection techniques, the You Only Look Once (YOLO) family has gained attention due to its high speed and strong detection performance. YOLO models perform localization and classification in a single network pass, enabling fast and accurate real-time detection suitable for intelligent transportation and roadside monitoring systems.

Although many studies have explored pothole detection, most focus on a single model or limited experimental conditions. Comparative analysis of multiple YOLO variants under the same conditions remains limited, and the trade-off between detection accuracy and computational efficiency is often not fully studied.

To address these limitations, this research presents a comparative analysis of several YOLO-based models for real-time pothole detection. The study evaluates performance using road image and video datasets collected under different environmental and lighting.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Road surface defect detection has become important for transportation safety and road maintenance. Traditional pothole detection methods mainly depend on manual inspections or sensor-based systems. Although effective, these approaches require specialized equipment, high costs, and significant human effort, making them unsuitable for large-scale and continuous monitoring.

With the advancement of computer vision, image-processing techniques have been introduced for automated road damage detection. These methods use features such as edge detection, texture analysis, and segmentation to identify potholes. However, their performance is often affected by lighting variations, shadows, and road textures, reducing reliability in real-world conditions.

The development of deep learning has significantly improved detection performance. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) can automatically learn visual features from image data, providing better accuracy than traditional image-processing methods. Many studies have successfully applied CNN-based models for detecting potholes and other road defects.

Object detection frameworks have further improved pothole detection. Two-stage detectors like Faster R-CNN provide high accuracy but require greater computational resources and slower processing speeds, limiting real-time applications.

Single-stage detectors, especially the You Only Look Once (YOLO) family, are widely used for real-time detection because of their high speed and competitive accuracy. Different YOLO variants have shown promising results in pothole detection using vehicle-mounted or roadside cameras.

Despite these advancements, achieving a balance between detection accuracy and real-time performance remains challenging. Many studies focus on a single model without comprehensive comparison among YOLO variants. Therefore, systematic evaluation and optimization of YOLO models are necessary for developing efficient and scalable pothole detection systems for intelligent transportation and infrastructure monitoring.

III. OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this research is to analyze and optimize YOLO-based object detection models for efficient and real-time pothole detection in road infrastructure monitoring systems. The study aims to develop an automated framework that accurately detects potholes while maintaining high processing speed for real-time applications. It also explores the integration of severity estimation and geo-localization to support intelligent road maintenance.

The specific objectives of this research are:

1. To develop a deep learning-based pothole detection framework using YOLO models.
2. To compare different YOLO variants in terms of detection accuracy, computational complexity, and processing speed.
3. To optimize parameters such as image resolution, confidence threshold, and non-maximum suppression (NMS) values for improved performance.
4. To evaluate system performance using metrics including mean Average Precision (mAP), precision, recall, FPS, and inference time.
5. To analyze the trade-off between detection accuracy and real-time processing speed.
6. To examine the feasibility of deploying trained models on edge and resource-constrained devices.
7. To design a severity classification method for detected potholes based on visual or spatial features.
8. To integrate geo-tagging for pothole mapping and infrastructure maintenance planning.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The proposed system presents a real-time pothole detection framework using optimized YOLO-based object detection models integrated with severity estimation and geo-localization. The methodology includes data collection, preprocessing, model training, real-time detection, and pothole reporting.

A. Data Collection and Preprocessing

Road images and video frames were collected under different lighting and environmental conditions. The dataset contains potholes of various shapes and sizes to improve model robustness. Each pothole was manually annotated using bounding boxes. Before training, images were resized and normalized. Data augmentation techniques such as flipping, rotation, and brightness adjustment were applied to improve dataset diversity and model generalization.

B. YOLO-Based Pothole Detection

The framework uses the YOLO (You Only Look Once) object detection model because of its high speed and accuracy in real-time applications. The model detects potholes by predicting bounding boxes and confidence scores in a single network pass. Non-maximum suppression (NMS) is used to remove redundant detections and improve accuracy.

C. Severity Estimation and Localization

After detection, pothole severity is estimated using bounding box features such as area and diameter. Based on these measurements, potholes are classified into levels such as Minor, Medium, and High for maintenance prioritization. The system also integrates geo-location data, including latitude and longitude coordinates, to support pothole mapping and infrastructure monitoring.

D. System Workflow

The workflow includes capturing road images, preprocessing data, detecting potholes using YOLO, estimating severity, and recording location data. The final results are displayed through a monitoring interface for efficient road condition analysis and maintenance planning.



Fig. X. System architecture for real-time pothole detection system and monitoring

V. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

When it comes to real-world implementation of automated pothole detection systems, there are some practical issues that may impact the overall performance and reliability of the system. For instance, differences in environmental factors such as light intensity, shadows, rain, fog, and reflections may have a significant impact on the quality of the

image, thereby affecting the overall performance and reliability of the system. In addition, differences in road materials, textures, and markings may result in false positives or false negatives, especially if the training data does not cover such variations.

Another significant limitation of the current detection system is the trade-off between model complexity and computational complexity. Although more complex models are capable of achieving higher accuracy, they also require more processing power and energy.

VI. RESULTS

The experimental evaluation demonstrates the effectiveness of the proposed real-time pothole detection framework using optimized YOLO-based object detection models. The system was evaluated using real road surface images and live webcam feeds collected under different environmental conditions. The results confirm that the proposed framework can detect potholes accurately while maintaining real-time performance suitable for intelligent transportation monitoring systems.

A. Live Webcam Detection Interface



Fig.1. Live webcam-based pothole detection interface

Figure 1 illustrates the live webcam-based pothole detection interface developed for the proposed system. The interface continuously captures road surface frames and processes them using the trained YOLO detection model. Detected potholes are highlighted using bounding boxes along with classification labels and confidence scores. This real-time visualization enables the system to detect road surface defects immediately as they appear within the camera frame, making it suitable for continuous road infrastructure monitoring.. Real-Time Monitoring Dashboard

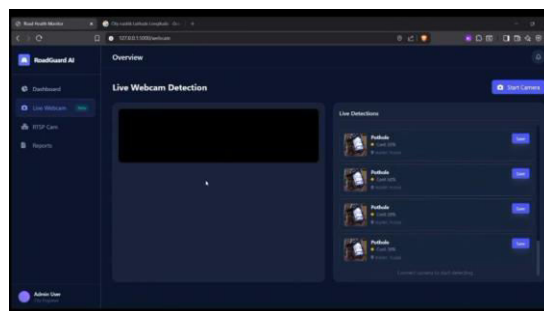


Fig.2. Dashboard view of real-time pothole monitoring system

Figure 2 presents the dashboard interface used for monitoring pothole detections. The dashboard aggregates detection results and provides key information about each identified pothole, including severity level, estimated diameter, depth, and road type classification. Additionally, geographic information such as latitude and longitude coordinates is displayed along with timestamp data to indicate the exact location and time of detection. This structured dashboard enables road maintenance authorities to monitor road conditions efficiently and plan maintenance activities based on real-time data. C. Sample Detection Output.

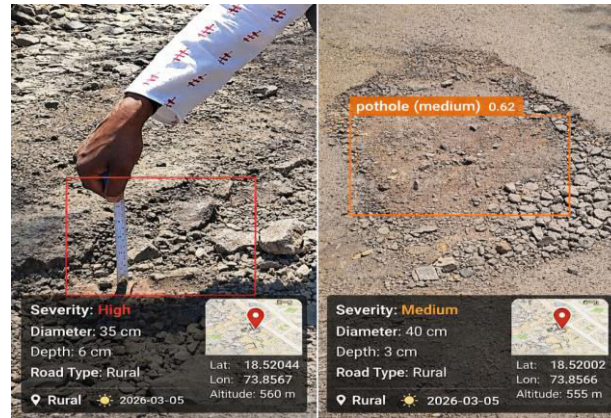


Fig.3. Sample output of real-time pothole detection system

Figure 3 illustrates a representative output generated by the proposed real-time pothole detection system. The framework automatically detects potholes from road images and annotates them with multiple attributes including severity level, confidence score, and geographic location. Each detected pothole is highlighted using a bounding box, allowing clear identification of the defect region.

The system also performs severity estimation based on spatial characteristics such as bounding box area and estimated surface dimensions. Based on this analysis, potholes are categorized into severity levels such as **Medium** and **High**, enabling authorities to prioritize road repair operations effectively.

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