

# Real-Time Traffic Prediction Through Stochastic Gradient Descent

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**Abstract:** The escalating challenges of urban traffic congestion pose a critical issue that calls for efficient traffic management system solutions. Traffic forecasting stands out as a paramount area of exploration in the field of Intelligent Transportation Systems. Various traditional machine learning techniques have been employed for predicting traffic congestion, often requiring a significant amount of data to train the model. For that reason, historical data are usually used. In this paper, our first concern is to use real-time traffic data. We adopted Stochastic Gradient Descent, an online learning method characterized by its ability to continually adapt to incoming data, facilitating real-time updates and rapid predictions. We studied a network of streets in the city of Muscat, Oman. Our model showed its accuracy through comparisons with actual traffic data.


## 1 INTRODUCTION


In urban regions, traffic congestion has become a serious issue impacting economic activity, environmental sustainability and quality of life. As cities burgeon in size and complexity, the challenge of managing and alleviating traffic congestion becomes an increasingly difficult task. According to GITNEX data report of 2024 (Castillo, 2024), traffic congestion costs the average American commuter \$1,377 per year in wasted time and fuel. An overall value of 8 billion hours is annually wasted by Americans due to traffic congestion. The statistics are equally challenging for the United Kingdom, where congestion is projected to cost each driver £1,317 in 2030, resulting in a yearly total of £4.4 billion. Additionally, Nairobi, Kenya, faces an estimated annual cost of \$1 billion due to traffic congestion. Meanwhile, in Toronto, Canada, traffic congestion costs the country a significant \$6


billion annually.


Accordingly, the issue of traffic congestion has led to increased interest and research in Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), particularly in traffic congestion forecasting. Real-time data plays a vital role in effective traffic management, enabling quick interventions to enhance traffic flow and alleviate congestion. Therefore, predicting traffic congestion occurrence is crucial for addressing it effectively (Alberto, 2003). Various traditional methods have been employed to forecast traffic patterns. However, the problem is that the majority of them are trained on a fixed data set and update their parameters based on the entire data set at once, in contrast to, online learning methods that continuously adapt to incoming data in a sequential manner, allowing real-time updates and quick predictions. Online learning methods are, therefore, commonly used when dealing with real time data. These methods were used in various domains such as virtual energy storage capacity, medical data analysis, flight control, etc. In this paper, our objective is to explore the application of online learning methods in predicting roads traffic congestion. We use real time data from the Google Maps API. Traffic congestion prediction is handled in our paper by the implementation of Stochastic Gradient


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Descent (SGD) algorithm. The obtained output results are compared with real traffic values, showing accurate and effective prediction results.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents a literature review of the existing methods. Section 3 describes some of the online learning methods used for prediction in different domains, highlighting the advantages of applying these methods in the domain of traffic congestion prediction. Section 4 presents the case study, describing the studied network, the principle of features generation and prediction horizons calculation, and the use of SGD for traffic prediction. In section 5, we show the results generated by our model. Finally, Section 6 presents the conclusions derived from this study and some perspectives.

## 2 STATE OF THE ART

Traffic congestion forecasting has led to a growing research area. Various machine learning models have been used to predict traffic. Some of the most used methods include Time Series Analysis methods, specifically AutoRegressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA) and Seasonal ARIMA (SARIMA), which are valued for their simplicity and interpretability. Alghamdi et al. (Alghamdi et al., 2019) treated the problem of traffic congestion using ARIMA-based modeling for non-Gaussian traffic data. They focused on short-term predictions, exploring factors that influenced congestion. The authors based their model on Auto Correlation Function (ACF) and Partial Auto Correlation Function (PACF) analyses of hourly traffic flow observations in a specific roads network of California, USA. Zhou et al. (Zhou et al., 2005) developed a traffic prediction model, combining linear time series ARIMA with the non-linear Generalized Auto Regressive Conditional Heteroscedasticity (GARCH). This hybrid model was able to capture various traffic characteristics at both large and small scales, addressing the complexity of network behavior. ARIMA models were suitable for modeling temporal patterns due to their simplicity and interpretability. They were particularly efficient for capturing regularities in historical traffic data. However, their shortcomings become apparent when we deal with complex non-linear relationships present in dynamic and rapidly changing road traffic conditions. In situations where traffic patterns are dynamic, these methods might find it difficult to adjust to the variation of real-time traffic data.

Other approaches for predicting traffic congestion include the utilization of Neural Networks. Various

architectures of neural networks were proposed in the literature, such as Feedforward Neural Networks (FNN) (Louati et al., 2022) (Olayode et al., 2022), Recurrent Neural Networks (RNN) (Lu et al., 2021) (Guo et al., 2020), and Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks (Sunindyo and Satria, 2020) (Afrin and Yodo, 2022).

Oliveira et al. (Oliveira et al., 2016) conducted a comparative study between the existing types of neural networks used for forecasting network traffic. The studied models included Multi Layer Perceptron (MLP) with backpropagation, MLP with resilient backpropagation (Rprop), Recurrent Neural Network (RNN), and deep learning Stacked Auto Encoder (SAE). (Redhu et al., 2023) proposed a model entitled Multi-View Dynamic Graph Convolution Network (MVDGCN). It addresses the complex spatial-temporal patterns in traffic flow. The authors used Graph Convolution Network (GCN) to understand the relationships between the different traffic stations in the studied network, which helped them to capture spatial dependencies. The authors used historical datasets (NYCTaxi and NYCBike). GCNs showed accurate results. However, the computational complexity of these models makes them less suitable for real-time applications. Fan et al. (Fan et al., 2019) developed a prediction model leveraging a combination of deep RNN and Gated Recurrent Unit (GRU) neural network techniques. The proposed model aims to detect network failures, optimize the performance, and enhance the overall network security through accurate traffic prediction. The model was validated by comparing prediction values with actual traffic values in real-world environments. This approach showcased the potential of neural network-based models. However, challenges for such models may include computational intensity, especially in real-time applications, and the complex training process associated with deep neural networks.

Other prediction models used Random Forests (Evans et al., 2019) (Hamad et al., 2020) and Support Vector Machines (Zhu and Zheng, 2020) (Radzuan et al., 2020) to predict traffic.

Evans et al. (Evans et al., 2019) focused on evaluating the RoadCast algorithm, which is an existing random forest algorithm. RoadCast was specifically developed to forecast road traffic conditions several hours, days, or even months in advance. The benefit of this work was that RoadCast's forecasting accuracy was improved by incorporating contextual data, such as public holidays and events, which increases its ability to adjust to variations in real-world traffic conditions. In contrast, the effectiveness of this algorithm was highly dependent on the quality and

availability of data. Variability in data quality and quantity could impact the algorithm's performance. Chen et al. (Chen et al., 2019) analyzed the spatio-temporal correlation properties of traffic states using floating cars data. The paper introduced an enhancement of the random forest algorithm, addressing the spatio-temporal correlation features of urban road traffic states.

To summarize, despite their high predictive accuracy, Random Forests (RFs) pose some challenges for traffic congestion prediction. Training a Random Forest with a large number of trees and features may be computationally expensive. In real-time applications, where quick predictions are crucial, the computational complexity of the model may be a limitation. In addition, the performance of Random Forest models is highly dependent on the quality, and quantity of the training data. If the training data are insufficient to fully represent the variability of traffic conditions, the model's predictive performance may be sub-optimal.

Apart from the previously mentioned models, there are other methods for traffic prediction, such as Bayesian Networks (Kim and Wang, 2016) (Afrin and Yodo, 2021), Genetic Algorithms (Lopez-Garcia et al., 2015) (Abdulhai et al., 2002) and K-Nearest Neighbors (Priambodo and Jumaryadi, 2018) (Yu et al., 2016), etc.

All the presented models were able to capture complex patterns and relationships in underlying traffic data. They are effective for both short-term and long-term traffic predictions. However, they require a large amount of data for training, which explains the use of historical data for almost all of them. Nevertheless, these methods might struggle to capture the dynamic nature of traffic states when dealing with real time data. Using real-time data increases complexity and, thus, requires careful consideration of the rapid changes of road conditions. For this matter, we are considering the use of online learning methods that are known for their ability to handle real time data.

In the next section, we introduce some studies that employed online learning methods for prediction across diverse domains. Subsequently, we delve into the specific method used in our study.

### 3 ONLINE LEARNING METHODS

Online Learning represents a dynamic paradigm within machine learning, where models are updated continuously as new data becomes available, enabling real-time updates and short-time predictions. In online learning, the model receives data in a sequential manner, one sample at a time, and updates its param-

eters based on each new sample. This stands in contrast to traditional learning models, where the model trains on a fixed data set and updates its parameters using the entire data set simultaneously. Online learning is particularly valuable for scenarios where data fluctuates over time and where rapid predictions are needed.

There are several online learning methods that have been used for prediction tasks, such as SGD, Adaptive Gradient Descent (ADAGRAD), Online Passive-Aggressive (PA), RMSprop (Root Mean Square Propagation), AdaDelta, etc. Some of these models were used in the literature to generate predictions in different domains, such as the prediction of virtual energy storage capacity, health data analysis, Predicting kids malnutrition, flight control, etc. Khan et al. (Khan et al., 2022) focused on the analysis of medical data. They proposed a machine learning-based stochastic gradient descent method in order to manage medical records and optimize day-to-day transactions in e-Healthcare applications. Vijayalakshmi et al. (Vijayalakshmi et al., 2022) addressed the challenges associated with the integration of renewable energy sources (RES) in smart grids. They developed a model that uses Artificial Neural Network (ANN) and SGD to predict Air Conditioners energy capacity, facilitating the Virtual Energy Storage System VESS implementation. Fawazdhia et al. (Fawazdhia and HSM, 2023) studied the prediction of stock prices. They employed both SGD and Adam optimization. The final results showed that values of the next day's stock prices were successfully predicted.

In summary, online learning methods have been successful in providing real-time adaptability to changing data, allowing continuous model updates and rapid responses to evolving patterns. Taking advantage of this, our aim in this work is to employ these methods in the transportation field. In particular, we use SGD to predict traffic congestion in the city of Muscat, Oman. The dynamic nature of SGD aligns well with the real-time aspects of traffic patterns. As new traffic data becomes available, SGD allows more accurate predictions and enhances the system's responsiveness to sudden changes in traffic conditions.

In the next section, we present the used data, the principle of traffic congestion estimation and prediction, and the results obtained by using our system.

## 4 TRAFFIC PREDICTION IN MUSCAT, OMAN

We conducted our study on a network of roads in Muscat, Oman. Figure 1 illustrates the general architecture of our network system. We are using Smart Road Signs (SRSs) which serve as the main component in the studied roads network (Hamdani et al., 2022).

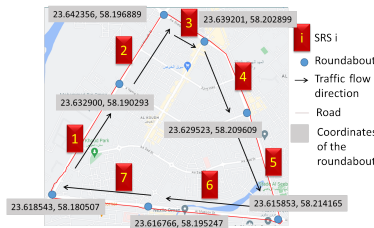


Figure 1: The studied Roads Network, Muscat, Oman.

These Smart Road Signs are able to collect real-time traffic data, estimate traffic conditions and predict congestion across various time horizons based on the current traffic status. When compared to the current Dynamic Message Signs (DMSs), that display the traffic condition as determined by traffic management centers, the Smart Road Signs we are using possess intelligence and autonomy, which enables them to analyze data and forecast future traffic values.

The studied road traffic network comprises seven roundabouts, considered as significant contributors to traffic congestion. We placed one Smart Road Sign before each roundabout so that it can alert drivers heading towards that roundabout. Each Road Sign receives information about the traffic conditions in its own studied road and the roads occupied by its neighboring road signs. In order to enhance prediction accuracy, Smart Road Signs communicate with each others and collaborate to give effective results. The studied direction of traffic is represented by black arrows in the same figure.

The developed Smart Road Signs are currently in a simulation phase. The solution is not deployed in a real operational environment. We are testing and evaluating their performance under real conditions. This phase allows for the assessment of the system’s functionality, performance, and predictive capabilities before potential real-world deployment.

In the following, we present the used data, the features generation process, the principle of prediction horizons identification and the use of SGD for traffic prediction.

### 4.1 Used Data

In order to get real time traffic data, we used Google Maps API. We considered the Directions API and API distance matrix <sup>1</sup>. These APIs provide the Travel Distance and Travel Time for a matrix of origins and destinations. Using Google Map API, we obtain information on the studied roads between the specified start and end points (the roundabouts).

### 4.2 Features Generation and Prediction Horizons Calculation

In this section, we present the principle of features calculation, their exploitation per road signs and the prediction horizons definition.

#### 4.2.1 Features Calculation

Google Maps API offers Travel Time between two points, providing two types: estimated Travel Time, reflecting standard travel duration under free-flow road conditions, and actual real Travel Time, showing the real-time duration vehicles take to travel between points.

Knowing the actual real Travel Time value, we can calculate the average speed and compare it with the maximum allowed speed in the same road. This is how our features are generated.

Equation 1 illustrates the calculation of our features.

$$F_{i,j} = \left[ \left( \frac{TD_{i,j}}{TT_{i,j}} \right) \frac{1}{V_{\max,i,j}} \right] \times 100, \quad (1)$$

where:

$F_{i,j}$  is the feature from point i to point j.

$TD_{i,j}$  is the Travel Distance between the two points i and j.

$TT_{i,j}$  is the actual real Travel Time from point i to point j.

$V_{\max,i,j}$  is the maximum permissible speed in the road from point i to point j.

The final value of the feature is between 0 and 100, but may exceed 100 if the vehicle drivers are surpassing the maximum allowed speed in the studied road. According to (He et al., 2016), such value can be classified according to three threshold values: 25, 50, and 75. If the feature is between 0 and 25, it indicates a heavy congestion. If it is between 25 and 50, the traffic presents a mild congestion. Otherwise, we have a smooth to very smooth traffic condition.

All the seven road signs of our network work simultaneously. Each road sign generates three distinct

<sup>1</sup><https://developers.google.com/maps>



features taken at different timestamps. Based on the time windows between these times, we determine our prediction horizons. We describe this principle in detail in the next subsection.

#### 4.2.2 Prediction Horizons Calculation

Let  $f_i$  represent the feature generated at time  $t_i$  by a given road sign, where  $i$  varies from 1 to  $n$ , and  $n$  is the number of features. The time window for generating the next feature is determined by checking in which range the current feature falls. Thus, the time window for generating the next feature,  $f_{i+1}$ , is determined based on the value of  $f_i$ :

$$t_{i+1} = t_i + \begin{cases} 1 \text{ minute} & \text{if } 0 \leq f_i < 25, \\ 5 \text{ minutes} & \text{if } 25 \leq f_i < 50, \\ 10 \text{ minutes} & \text{if } f_i \geq 50. \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

The process continues by generating subsequent features based on the previous ones. Predictions are made after every set of three features generated by each road sign at the different timestamps. The prediction horizon for each set,  $PH_k$ , is calculated by summing the time windows of the three different features:

$$PH_k = \sum_{i=1}^3 \Delta t_{k,i}, \quad (3)$$

where  $k$  represents the index of the feature set and  $\Delta t_{k,i}$  is determined by the value of the feature according to the specified traffic conditions.

In the next section, we explain the use of SGD to predict Traffic congestion.

### 4.3 Real-Time Traffic Prediction Using SGD

We studied traffic in the roads presented in Figure 1, mainly Al Khouhd Street, Al Mazoon Sreet, and al Shabab Street. The studied scenario covers the time period from 08/11/2023 09:00 to 08/11/2023 11:00.

Road signs gather real time data from Google Maps API, calculate features and predict traffic each set of three features.

The generation of the prediction values for one set of three features is given by Algorithm 1. It shows the most important steps for the traffic prediction with SGD.

The Inputs of our system consists of the real-time data recorded from 09:00 AM to 11:00 AM since this period of the day is considered as peak hour. In turn, the system generates as output prediction values of the seven deployed road signs.

The first step is the initialization of our system. We import necessary libraries: torch, torch.nn.functional, torch\_geometric.data, pandas, and numpy. Afterward, we define the number of features and the number of output predictions. In this case, as we consider a set of three features for each road sign, the number of features per road sign is 3, and the number of output predictions is 1. This process is then iterated over time to make all necessary predictions within the studied period.

The next step involves generating features for each road sign, where feature arrays are transformed into PyTorch tensors. Following this, a data instance object is created, encompassing the data from all working road signs within our network.

In the definition of the OnlineSGD model, we start by establishing the OnlineSGD class, equipped with fit and predict methods.

**Data:** Real Time Data from External Source

**Result:** Traffic Prediction Values

Initialization;

Define number of features (num\_features);

Define number of output predictions

(num\_predictions);

Generate features for each node:

$X \leftarrow \text{generate\_features}()$ ;

Create a Data instance object from features:

$data \leftarrow \text{Data}(x = X)$ ;

Initialize the OnlineSGD model:

$model \leftarrow \text{OnlineSGD}(\text{learning\_rate} =$

$0.01, \text{num\_epochs} = 1000)$ ;

Train the model:

$model.\text{fit}(data.x)$ ;

Test the model:

$predictions \leftarrow model.\text{predict}(data.x)$ ;

**for**  $i$  **in**  $\text{range}(\text{len}(predictions))$  **do**

    Print prediction:

$\text{print}(predictions[i])$ ;

**end**

Algorithm 1: OnlineSGD for Traffic Congestion Prediction.

Our system's performance depends on two key parameters: the learning rate and the number of epochs, set during model initialization. After testing various values, we fixed the learning rate ( $\alpha$ ) at 0.01 and the number of epochs at 1000. During fitting, the model iterates through epochs and instances, updating weights using stochastic gradient descent (SGD) and calculating loss every 100 epochs. In the prediction method, predictions are made using the learned weights.

## 5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we showcase the outcomes of our model. Figures 2 to 8 show the results of prediction generated by the seven road signs placed in our network. Curves in blue represent the prediction values generated by our model. The ones in red represent the real values of roads' traffic.

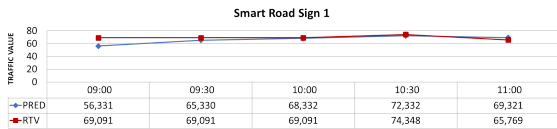


Figure 2: Traffic prediction values and real traffic values of Road Sign 1.

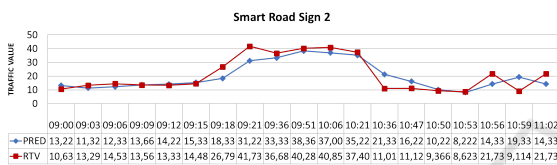


Figure 3: Traffic prediction values and real traffic values of Road Sign 2.

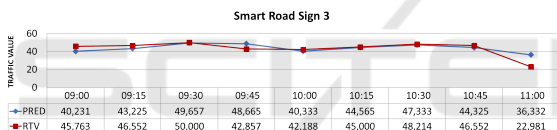


Figure 4: Traffic prediction values and real traffic values of Road Sign 3.

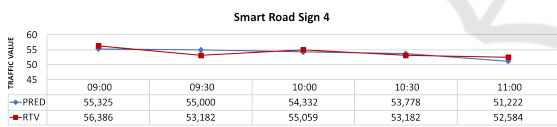


Figure 5: Traffic prediction values and real traffic values of Road Sign 4.

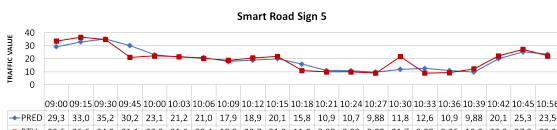


Figure 6: Traffic prediction values and real traffic values of Road Sign 5.

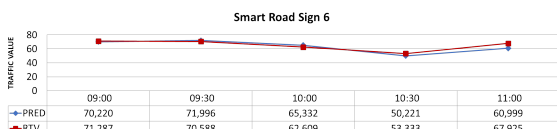


Figure 7: Traffic prediction values and real traffic values of Road Sign 6.

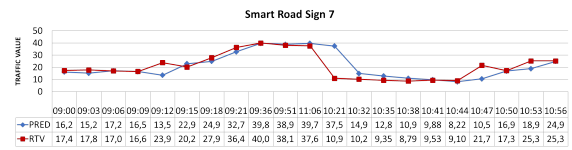


Figure 8: Traffic prediction values and real traffic values of Road Sign 7.

If we take a look at the predicted traffic values of Road Sign 1 (Figure 2) at different times, we can see that the prediction at 09:00 shows a small gap from the actual value, when compared to the other points in the graph. Subsequent predictions get closer to reality by the time and we can clearly see that the points of prediction and real values almost overlap. Notably, the 10:00 and 10:30 predictions are very accurate, aligning closely with the real traffic. Other road signs showed closer results, Road Sign 4 and 6 show five predictions during the studied period. Predicted values by Road Sign 4 are very close to the real traffic values. For the Road Sign 6, they are almost overlapped.

Examining Figure 2, a noteworthy observation is the significant difference in the number of predictions between Road Sign 1 and other road signs, like Road Sign 4 and Road Sign 6. Road Sign 2 generates 19 prediction values within a 2-hour period. The short prediction horizons for this road signs indicate severe congestion on the studied road. Initial traffic values range from 10.636 to 14.489, escalating to 41.739, which is considered as a mild congestion, before returning to lower traffic values.

The curves in Figure 3 illustrate how the predictions mirror the traffic fluctuations. However, a notable deviation occurs at 10:59, where our model predicts a value of 19.332, while the actual traffic value is 9.114. This is explained by the sudden traffic change from 21.736 to 9.114 within a short time.

Figure 4 illustrates the outcomes associated with Road Sign 3. Deviations between prediction and real traffic values are clear for the last instance (at 11:00). The real traffic has the value of 22.981 whereas our prediction value is 36.332. Examining the preceding traffic value reveals a sharp decline from 46.552 to 22.981, indicating a sudden decrease. Although our model detects this decrease in traffic, the predicted value remains somewhat distant from the real traffic value.

Similar scenarios were observed at 10:30 for Road Sign 5 (Figure 6) and at 09:12 and 10:47 for Road Sign 7 (Figure 8). In all these instances, the issue is associated with an unexpected deviation in the values of real traffic.

Overall, our model demonstrated accurate results

in predicting traffic, with prediction values consistently following the curve of the real traffic data. However, a challenge arises in cases where the traffic behaves unexpectedly, exhibiting sudden increases or decreases. In such instances, the model doesn't always detect these abrupt changes. Future work could address this limitation by incorporating additional data, such as weather conditions or incident reports. Alternatively, combining the SGD with other methods might be interesting and could enhance the model's ability to capture and respond to such abrupt variations.

In order to give a more comprehensive understanding of the model's accuracy, we used the Mean Absolute Error (MAE) metric.

The Mean Absolute Error is calculated by taking the absolute difference between the predicted values and the actual values and then averaging those differences. In other words, MAE quantifies the average magnitude of errors made by a predictive model. When the MAE value is low, it indicates that, on average, the model's predictions are close to the actual values. This suggests a higher level of accuracy in the model's ability to estimate outcomes. On the contrary, a higher MAE implies that the model tends to make predictions that are, on average, farther away from the actual values.

The MAE is given by equation 4.

$$MAE = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n |y_i - \hat{y}_i|, \quad (4)$$

where:

- $n$  is the number of total predictions.
- $y_i$  represents the real value of traffic.
- $\hat{y}_i$  represents the predicted value of traffic.

Table 1 presents the Mean Absolute Error (MAE) values corresponding to each operational road sign within the studied network. The analysis of these values reveals insights into the predictive accuracy of each sign.

Table 1: Mean Absolute Error Values of the generated Road Signs.

	SRS1	SRS2	SRS3	SRS4	SRS5	SRS6	SRS7
MAE	4.57	4.24	3.75	1.11	2.58	3.05	3.97

Notably, SRS4 stands out with the lowest MAE of 1.11, indicating highly accurate predictions. This suggests that the road sign 4 performs very well in estimating traffic conditions.

In comparison, SRS1 and SRS2, have higher MAE values, respectively 4.57 and 4.24, suggesting less precision in forecasting compared to SRS4. However,

it is important to note that, given the nature of the traffic values ranging from 0 to 100, these MAE values for SRS1 and SRS2 still fall within a good range. The analysis further reveals that SRS3, SRS5, SRS6, and SRS7 lie in between the aforementioned extremes.

To sum up, our smart road signs showcase a range of performances, with some yielding more accurate predictions than others.

Understanding MAE values for each road sign is crucial for evaluating our predictive model's reliability in estimating traffic conditions. Our model has shown impressive effectiveness in this context.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

This paper suggested the use of online learning techniques in the field of transportation. We developed a model based on Stochastic Gradient Descent to predict the traffic congestion. We used Smart Road Signs that collaborate to cover a road network in the city of Muscat, Oman. Real time data were gathered from Google Maps API. They were exploited to generate features that served for the prediction phase. We emphasize the use of real time data since it enables timely insights and dynamic route adjustments. It can also facilitate data-driven decision-making, benefiting from up-to-the-minute information, which contributes to effective urban mobility management. Seven road signs were placed in our Network. Each of them generated a number of prediction considering different prediction horizons. The reached results were compared with real traffic values. Our system showed its accuracy in predicting traffic congestion. By having a data that changes frequently, our model showed its performance to adapt to the new incoming data. As future work, we aim to use other online learning methods such as ADaptive GRADient Descent. We also intend to work on different context and road types.

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