IJCRT.ORG ISSN : 2320-2882

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)
An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Maximizing Section Throughput Using Ai-Powered Precise Train

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Abstract

The rapid growth of cities and the increasing demand for sustainable travel have pushed our railway networks to their limits. Traditional control systems, which rely on static timetables and manual dispatching, often struggle to adapt to real-time problems like delays or equipment failures. This leads to tracks being underused and passengers facing longer waits. This paper introduces an AI-driven framework designed to maximize track "throughput"—essentially getting more trains through a section safely and efficiently. This system uses **Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning (MARL)**, allowing trains to act as intelligent agents that adjust their speed, route, and priority in real-time. By using a "Curriculum Learning" strategy, that trained the AI to handle everything from normal operations to extreme weather and major disruptions.

Index Terms - Train Traffic Control, Section Throughput, Reinforcement Learning, Multi-Agent Systems, Railway Optimization, Artificial Intelligence, Safety-Critical Systems, Deep Q-Networks.

1.INTRODUCTION

In modern transportation, AI has become a vital tool for solving complex, fast-moving problems. Railway operations are particularly challenging because they involve constant interaction between multiple trains, changing track conditions, and unpredictable delays. Traditional rule-based methods often lack the flexibility needed to optimize these movements in real-time.

This work uses AI to move beyond rigid schedules. By enabling trains to make autonomous decisions about their speed and routing, existing infrastructure can be improved. The goal is to solve bottlenecks and increase capacity without the massive expense of building new tracks.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

Reinforcement Learning (RL) has gained increasing attention in railway traffic management due to its capability to handle complex, dynamic, and large-scale decision-making problems. Traditional optimization-based railway scheduling methods often struggle with scalability and adaptability when faced with disturbances such as delays, congestion, or fluctuating demand. Recent studies demonstrate that RL-based approaches can overcome these limitations by learning adaptive control policies directly from interactions with simulated or real-world environments.

Wu et al. [1] proposed a deep reinforcement learning framework for optimal heavyhaul railway scheduling, where the agent dynamically adjusts dispatching decisions to improve operational efficiency. Their results showed that RL-based scheduling can outperform conventional heuristic and rule-based approaches, particularly under high traffic density and uncertain operating conditions. However, the primary objective of this work was delay reduction and schedule feasibility, with limited emphasis on maximizing section-level throughput.

The integration of RL with digital twin technology has further enhanced the applicability of AI in railway systems. Sresakoolchai et al. [2] demonstrated how reinforcement learning combined with digital twins can support railway infrastructure maintenance and operational planning. Their work highlights the importance of high-fidelity simulation environments in safely training RL agents, enabling large-scale experimentation without affecting real-world operations. While their study focuses mainly on maintenance optimization, it establishes a strong foundation for applying digital twin–based RL to real-time traffic control problems.

Multi-agent reinforcement learning (MARL) has emerged as a natural modeling choice for railway networks, where multiple trains operate simultaneously and interact with shared infrastructure. Wei et al. [6] investigated MARL-based control strategies for guidance and coordination applications, showing that coordinated learning among agents leads to superior system-level performance compared to independent learning. Their findings emphasize the role of cooperative reward design and coordination mechanisms, which are crucial for managing congestion and avoiding conflicts in dense railway networks.

Throughput maximization, although critical for high-capacity rail corridors, has received comparatively less attention in RL-based railway studies. Lv and Gao [10] addressed this gap by focusing on maximizing throughput in high-speed railway systems through optimized allocation of train-to-train communication resources. Their work formulates the problem as a Markov Decision Process (MDP) and demonstrates that intelligent resource allocation can significantly enhance system throughput. However, the scope of their study is limited to communication-layer optimization and does not directly address train movement coordination or traffic control.

Safety remains a fundamental concern in applying RL to railway operations. Xu and Gao [23] introduced a safe reinforcement learning framework for railway traffic control, explicitly incorporating safety constraints such as collision avoidance and signal compliance into the learning process. Their approach ensures that performance improvements are achieved without violating operational rules, making it particularly relevant for real-world deployment. This work provides a strong methodological basis for integrating safety-critical constraints into RL based traffic management systems.

Existing literature confirms the effectiveness of reinforcement learning for railway scheduling, coordination, and optimization. However, most studies prioritize delay minimization, communication efficiency, or maintenance planning. Limited attention has been given to **section throughput maximization under safety-critical constraints**, particularly using multi-agent RL frameworks. This gap motivates the present work, which builds upon prior research while focusing explicitly on maximizing throughput through coordinated, safe, and scalable RL-based train traffic control.

3.PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

3.1 System Architecture

The proposed system follows a layered modular architecture that provided in the figure 3.1:

Perception Layer: Acts as the system's eyes, collecting real-time data on train positions, speeds, and track availability.

Decision Module (The AI Brain): Using a Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning framework, each train acts as an autonomous agent. They coordinate with each other to determine the best speed and routing for the entire section.

Execution Module: Translates AI decisions into actual commands for acceleration, braking, and switching.

Safety & Monitoring Module: This is the "fail-safe." It enforces hard rules like minimum distance between trains and speed limits. If the AI suggests a move that violates safety, this module overrides it instantly.

Learning Module: Uses a "Curriculum Learning" strategy to train the AI. It starts with easy scenarios and gradually moves to "worst-case" disruptions **to** ensure the system is battle-tested.

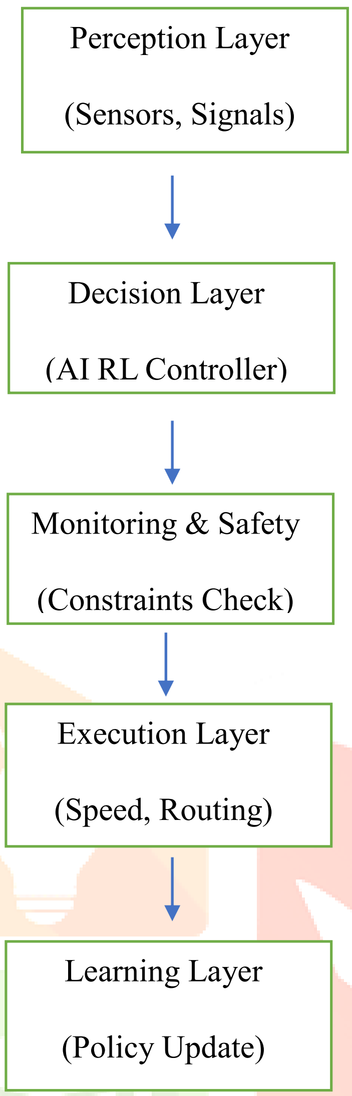

Figure 3.1 System Architecture

3.1.1 Learning Module

The learning module is responsible for continuously improving the decision-making policies of the AI controller. It leverages both historical operational data and simulated experiences to update reinforcement learning policies. To achieve stable and efficient learning, a curriculum learning strategy is employed, where agents are progressively trained on scenarios of increasing complexity, ranging from normal operations to severe disruptions and extreme conditions.

3.2 Reinforcement Learning Formulation

- **State (S):** Train positions, speeds, block occupancy, delays, priorities, environmental factors
- **Action (A):** Acceleration/deceleration, routing decisions, dwell time changes
- **Reward (R):** R = w1*(Throughput) – w2*(Delay) – w3*(Energy) – w4*(Safety
- Violations)
- **Policy (π):** Learned using Actor-Critic (PPO) with LSTM for temporal dependencies.

3.2.1 Deep Q-Learning in Reinforcement Learning

Deep Q-Learning is a method that uses deep learning to help machines make decisions in complicated situations. It's especially useful in environments where the number of possible situations called states is very large like in video games or robotics.

Before understanding Deep Q-Learning it's important to understand the main concept of Q learning. It is a model-free method that learns an optimal policy by estimating the Q-value function which tells how good it is to take a certain action in a certain situation. The goal is to find a plan that gives the highest total reward over time.

Q-Learning works well for small problems but struggles with complex ones like images or many possible situations. Deep Q-Learning solves this by using a neural network to estimate values instead of a big table.
Key Challenges Addressed by Deep Q-Learning

- High-Dimensional State Spaces: Traditional Q-Learning uses a table to store values but this becomes impossible when there are too many situations. Neural networks can understand and work with many different situations at once so they are better for complex problems.
- Continuous Input Data: Real-world problems often have continuous data like video images. Neural networks are good at handling this kind of information.
- Scalability: Deep learning helps Q-Learning grow and handle bigger, harder tasks that regular Q-Learning couldn't solve before.

3.2.2 Architecture of Deep Q-Networks

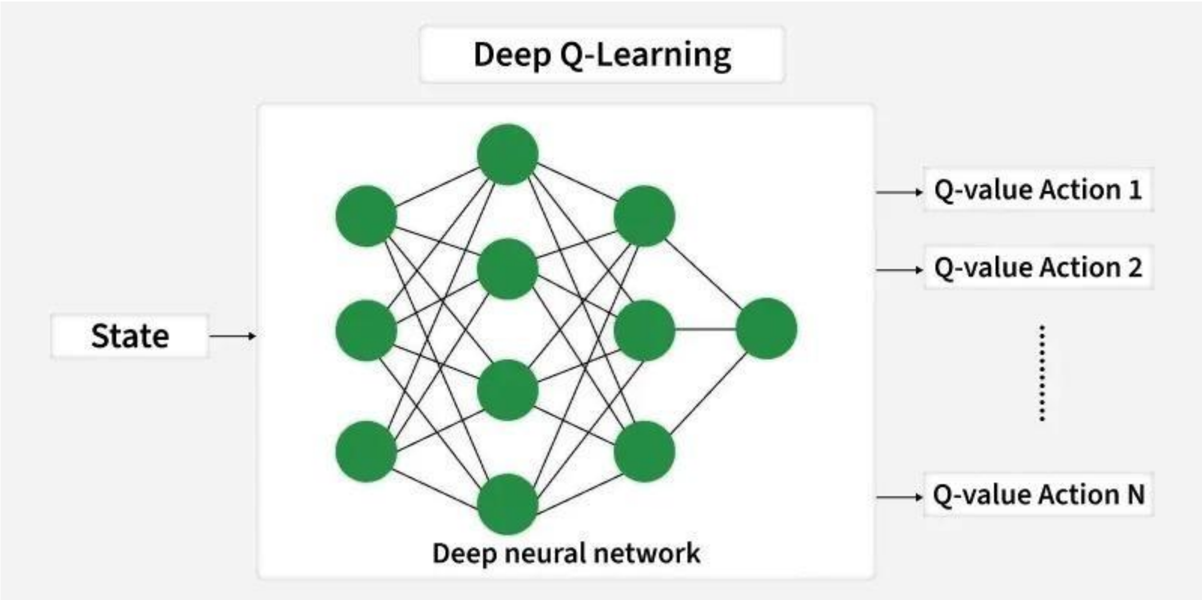

Figure 3.2 Deep Q-Networks Architecture

A DQN consists of the following components:

1. Neural Network
   - The network approximates the Q-value function $Q\ (s,\ a;\ \theta)$ where θ represents the trainable parameters.
   - For example, in Atari games the input might be raw pixels from the game screen and the output is a vector of Q-values corresponding to each possible action.
2. Experience Replay
   - To stabilize training, DQNs store past experiences (s, a, r, s') in a replay buffer.
   - During training, mini-batches of experiences are sampled randomly from the buffer, breaking the correlation between consecutive experiences and improving generalization.
3. Target Network
   - A separate target network with parameters θ^{-} is used to compute the target Q-values during updates. The target network is periodically updated with the weights of the main network to ensure stability.
4. Loss Function:
   - The loss function measures the difference between the predicted Q-values and the target Q-values: $L(\theta) = E\ [(r + \gamma \max_{a'} Q\ (s',\ a';\ \theta^{-}) - Q\ (s,\ a;\ \theta))^2]$

3.2.3 Training Process

The training process of a DQN involves the following steps:

1. Initialization:
- Initialize the replay buffer, main network (θ) and target network (θ^{-}).
- Set hyperparameters such as learning rate (α), discount factor (γ) and exploration rate (ϵ).
2. Exploration vs. Exploitation:
- Use an ϵ-greedy policy to balance exploration and exploitation:
- With probability ϵ, select a random action to explore.
- Otherwise, choose the action with the highest Q-value according to the current network.
3. Experience Collection: Interact with the environment, collect experiences (s, a, r, s') and store them in the replay buffer.
4. Training Updates:
- Sample a mini-batch of experiences from the replay buffer.
- Compute the target Q-values using the target network.
- Update the main network by minimizing the loss function using gradient descent.
5. Target Network Update: Periodically copy the weights of the main network to the target network to ensure stability.
6. Decay Exploration Rate: Gradually decrease ϵ over time to shift from exploration to exploitation.

3.4 The Control Logic

The AI uses an **Actor-Critic (PPO)** algorithm. Its "Reward Function" is designed to balance four main goals: maximizing the number of trains (throughput), minimizing delays, saving energy, and—most importantly—preventing safety violations.

4.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

Extensive simulation experiments were conducted to evaluate the performance of the proposed AI-powered train traffic control system. The experiments covered diverse operational scenarios, including single-track sections, railway junctions, and mixed-traffic environments involving both passenger and freight trains. These scenarios were designed to reflect realistic operating conditions and varying levels of congestion and disruption.

The experimental results demonstrate significant performance improvements over conventional control strategies. The proposed system achieved a section throughput improvement of 20–40%, indicating more efficient utilization of constrained railway infrastructure. Additionally, the average train delay was reduced by up to 46%, highlighting the system's effectiveness in mitigating congestion and cascading delays. The AI-based control strategy also resulted in energy savings ranging from 5–12%, primarily due to smoother speed regulation and reduced unnecessary stopping. Importantly, no safety violations were observed across all simulation runs, confirming strict adherence to operational and safety constraints.

4.2 Discussion

The observed performance gains can be attributed to the system's ability to dynamically coordinate train movements using predictive and cooperative decision-making. By minimizing overly conservative buffers and adjusting train behaviour in anticipation of downstream conditions, the AI system enables smoother traffic flow and early conflict resolution. This capability is particularly effective in bottleneck scenarios such as single-track sections and junctions.

When compared with First-Come-First-Served (FCFS) strategies, heuristic dispatching methods, Mixed-Integer Linear Programming (MILP) optimization, and human dispatcher based control, the proposed approach exhibits superior adaptability and real-time responsiveness. Unlike offline optimization methods and manual control, the AI-powered system continuously adapts to real-time disturbances, enabling consistent performance improvements under dynamic and uncertain operating conditions.

5.CONCLUSION

This paper portrays the design and implementation of an AI-powered train traffic control system aimed at maximizing railway section throughput under real-time operational conditions. As part of this project, a multi-agent reinforcement learning framework was developed in which individual trains were modelled as intelligent agents capable of making adaptive decisions related to speed control, routing, dwell time, and priority management. A high-fidelity simulation environment was created to represent realistic railway sections, including single-track segments, junctions, and mixed-traffic scenarios.

The proposed work successfully implements a multi-objective reward structure that balances throughput maximization, delay reduction, energy efficiency, and strict safety constraints. Curriculum learning was employed to progressively train the agents across increasingly complex operational scenarios, ensuring stable learning and robust performance. Extensive simulation experiments conducted so far demonstrate notable improvements in section throughput, significant reductions in average delays, measurable energy savings, and zero safety violations.

These results validate the feasibility and effectiveness of the proposed AI-based approach as a scalable and practical solution for intelligent train traffic control, providing a strong foundation for further development and real-world deployment.

6.FUTURE ENHANCEMENTS

While the current project focuses on maximizing throughput within isolated railway sections such as single-track segments and junctions, future work will extend the proposed AI powered control framework to multi-section corridors and network-wide railway systems. This enhancement will enable coordinated decision-making across multiple interconnected sections, allowing the system to optimize traffic flow at a larger scale and handle complex interactions between successive bottlenecks.

In future stages, the project aims to integrate the AI control system with real-world railway signalling infrastructure and passenger information systems. This integration will allow AI-generated control decisions to be synchronized with operational signalling protocols and provide real-time updates to passengers regarding delays and schedule adjustments, improving overall service reliability and transparency.

To enhance adaptability under changing operational conditions, online learning mechanisms will be incorporated into the system. Unlike offline training, online learning will enable the AI agents to continuously update their policies based on live operational data, allowing the system to respond effectively to long-term demand variations, seasonal changes, and unforeseen disturbances.

Another important future enhancement involves the development of Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) interfaces. These interfaces will present AI decision logic in an interpretable form, enabling human dispatchers and operators to understand, trust, and supervise AI-generated actions, which is essential for adoption in safety-critical railway environments.

Finally, the project will progress toward field trials using real operational railway data. By validating the proposed system with real-world datasets and pilot deployments, the effectiveness, robustness, and scalability of the AI-powered traffic control framework can be thoroughly assessed, paving the way for practical implementation in operational railway networks.

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