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IoT-Based Urban Mobility Solutions for Traffic Congestion

Mingyue Wang^{1*}, Fatemeh Rasoulpour²

School of Computer and Information, Lanzhou University of Technology, China; wang.mingyue9811@gmail.com.

Morvarid Intelligent Industrial Systems Research Group, Iran; rasoulpour.72@gmail.com.

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Abstract

Urban traffic congestion presents a significant challenge in contemporary cities, affecting economic efficiency, environmental health, and overall quality of life. The swift growth of urban populations and the rise in automobile use have burdened conventional traffic management systems, which frequently fall short in adapting to real-time conditions. This congestion prolongs travel times and increases fuel consumption, air pollution, and economic losses due to reduced productivity.


This study investigates how the Internet of Things (IoT) can tackle these issues by facilitating adaptive, data-informed traffic management strategies. By incorporating real-time data gathering, edge computing for prompt local analysis, and Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven enhancements, IoT offers a robust foundation for contemporary traffic regulation. The paper reviews the present landscape of IoT-based systems, suggests a multi-tiered framework for managing congestion, and examines practical examples that demonstrate the efficacy of IoT solutions in minimizing delays and boosting urban transportation. Furthermore, it tackles challenges such as data security, scalability, and the integration with existing systems. It also looks into emerging trends like self-driving cars and 5G technology, which are expected to further strengthen IoT's contribution to sustainable urban traffic management.


Keywords: Edge computing, Internet of things, Smart city, Artificial intelligence optimization, Data privacy, Real-time analytics.


1 | Introduction

1.1 | Overview of Urban Mobility Challenges

In recent years, rapid urbanization and increasing vehicle ownership have transformed cities worldwide, leading to unprecedented traffic congestion. This surge in urban mobility has overwhelmed traditional traffic management systems, which cannot often respond effectively to real-time changes in traffic patterns. As the

 Corresponding Author: wang.mingyue9811@gmail.com

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number of vehicles on urban roads rises and infrastructure expansion lags, congestion has become a daily reality for millions, resulting in significant economic, social, and environmental challenges.

Traffic congestion directly impacts productivity by prolonging travel times and reducing hours available for work and leisure. Additionally, the extended idling of vehicles in traffic jams increases fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, compounding environmental issues like air pollution and climate change. Studies show that commuters in congested urban areas can lose hundreds of hours annually to traffic delays, leading to considerable financial costs for individuals and businesses.

Traditional traffic management approaches, such as fixed traffic signals, static road signage, and manual monitoring, are insufficient to handle the dynamic nature of modern urban traffic [1–3]. These systems often lack adaptability, making them ineffective at managing unexpected events such as surges in traffic volume, accidents, or temporary road closures. Given the growing demands on urban infrastructure, there is an urgent need for intelligent, scalable traffic solutions that can adapt in real time to improve traffic flow and enhance the quality of urban life.



Fig. 1. Urban traffic congestion overview.

1.2 | Importance of Internet of Things in Addressing Traffic Congestion

The Internet of Things (IoT) introduces an innovative approach to tackling urban traffic congestion by facilitating real-time communication and data exchange between vehicles, traffic signals, road sensors, and centralized traffic management systems [4], [5]. IoT creates a network of interconnected devices embedded in roads, traffic lights, and vehicles, which continuously collect and transmit data on current traffic conditions. This real-time connectivity enables adaptive and intelligent traffic management strategies that respond dynamically to changing traffic conditions.

IoT-based systems equipped with sensors and cameras allow traffic management centers to monitor congestion in real time and adjust traffic signals accordingly, optimizing vehicle flow and reducing delays. For instance, if an intersection experiences heavy traffic on one side, the system can dynamically extend the

duration of the green light to alleviate congestion. Connected vehicles, in turn, receive real-time updates and alternative route suggestions, enabling drivers to avoid heavily congested areas and reducing the strain on specific road segments.

Furthermore, IoT-based systems enhance road safety by monitoring vehicle speeds, detecting accidents, and alerting emergency services when needed [6], [7]. The data collected from IoT devices can be analyzed to identify recurring traffic bottlenecks, predict potential congestion hotspots, and inform long-term infrastructure planning. IoT thus offers a scalable, adaptive solution to urban mobility challenges, empowering cities to manage traffic flow efficiently, improve safety, and lessen the environmental impact of transportation.

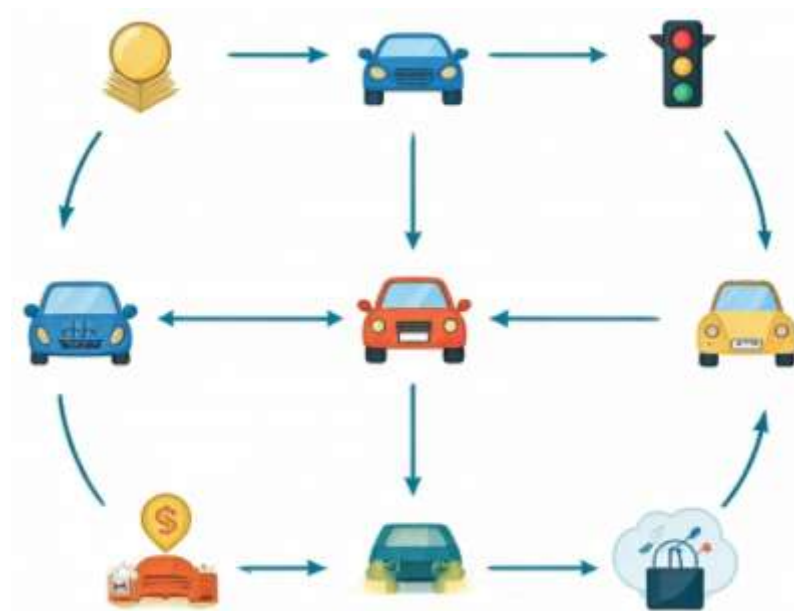


Fig. 2. Internet of things-based traffic management system architecture.

2 | Internet of Things Technologies in Urban Traffic Management

The IoT has transformed urban traffic management by creating a highly interconnected network of devices that can monitor and control traffic conditions in real-time. By connecting various components, such as road sensors, traffic cameras, and vehicles, IoT enables a seamless data flow, enabling traffic management systems to respond dynamically to congestion, accidents, and other disruptions [8], [9]. This section discusses the key infrastructure components of IoT-based traffic systems and emphasizes the importance of real-time data and connectivity.

2.1 | Internet of Things Infrastructure for Traffic Systems

IoT-based traffic systems rely on an integrated infrastructure of multiple devices and technologies, each playing a unique role in data collection and analysis. Key components include:

- I. Road sensors: embedded in roadways, these sensors detect vehicle speeds, traffic density, and flow patterns. They provide essential data on road conditions, helping to predict and address traffic buildup or slowdowns before they escalate.
- II. Cameras: traffic cameras are placed at key intersections and along busy streets. They monitor traffic flow, detect accidents, and assess real-time conditions. Cameras provide visual data that can be analyzed to improve traffic control and respond to incidents quickly [10].

- III. GPS devices: integrated with connected vehicles, GPS devices provide precise location data, enabling the tracking of vehicle movement across the city. This information is crucial for optimizing routes and helping drivers avoid congested areas [11], [12].
- IV. Connected vehicles: equipped with communication technology, these vehicles share data on their location, speed, and route with other connected vehicles and the central traffic system. Connected vehicles enable real-time rerouting and optimize traffic flow by preventing bottlenecks [13].
- V. Environmental sensors: besides traffic data, environmental sensors gather information on weather conditions, air quality, and road surface conditions. These sensors provide contextual data that allows traffic management systems to adjust based on external conditions, such as reducing speed limits during adverse weather [14].

Data from these components are sent to cloud or edge servers for processing, enabling the traffic management system to continuously monitor, analyze, and respond to traffic conditions as they evolve [15]. This constant data stream enhances the system's ability to predict and manage traffic patterns, allowing cities to handle congestion more effectively.

2.2 | Role of Real-Time Data and Connectivity

The power of IoT-based traffic systems lies in their ability to collect and process real-time data from multiple sources, enabling responsive and adaptive traffic management. The continuous connectivity among IoT devices—such as connected vehicles, roadside sensors, and cameras—allows for an integrated view of the traffic situation across the city. This comprehensive perspective helps minimize delays and optimizes traffic flow by enabling the system to make immediate adjustments.

For instance, vehicles with IoT capabilities move through the city continuously and send data to the central system, allowing it to adjust traffic signals dynamically and improve signal timing based on current traffic volumes. If a traffic jam or accident is detected, the system can reroute vehicles from the congested area, reducing wait times and distributing the flow evenly across available routes. This connectivity improves traffic management efficiency and offers drivers real-time information, enabling them to make informed choices and steer clear of delays.

In addition to vehicle connectivity, the data from environmental sensors ensures that traffic adjustments consider real-world conditions. During heavy rain, for example, the system might reduce speed limits and increase signal wait times to account for reduced visibility and slippery roads, thereby enhancing road safety. The seamless integration of all these data sources ensures that traffic management is responsive but also safe and efficient.

3 | Edge Computing for Traffic Management

3.1 | The Concept of Edge Computing

Edge computing tackles the challenges of cloud-based systems by processing data right at the source—like traffic lights or roadside sensors—rather than sending it to a central cloud server. By keeping data processing close to where it's collected, edge computing dramatically reduces lag and enables split-second decision-making, which is crucial for managing urban traffic [16]. For instance, if sudden congestion forms at a busy intersection, nearby edge nodes can immediately process sensor data and adjust the traffic signals within milliseconds to ease the bottleneck. This immediate response capability is essential to keep traffic moving smoothly in real time.

3.2 | Applications in Traffic Systems

Edge computing shines in applications like adaptive traffic signal control, which relies on real-time traffic analysis rather than pre-set timings. In traditional systems, traffic lights follow fixed schedules that can't adapt to real-time changes, often leading to unnecessary wait times or congestion. With edge computing, traffic

lights become responsive to actual conditions: they see traffic build-up and adjust timing dynamically, improving the flow of vehicles through intersections.

Beyond signal control, edge computing supports efficient vehicle rerouting. Navigation systems equipped with edge capabilities can analyze local traffic data, quickly suggest alternative routes, and prevent central servers from getting overwhelmed with data. This localized decision-making keeps traffic smoother, reduces travel times, and minimizes the need for constant communication with a distant cloud server, making urban mobility more efficient and responsive.

4 | Artificial Intelligence Integration in Internet of Things-Based Traffic Management

Integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into IoT-based traffic management brings a new level of intelligence to urban mobility solutions. AI algorithms help IoT systems move beyond simple data collection to real-time analysis, pattern recognition, and decision-making [17]. This section explores how AI optimizes traffic flow, predicting and mitigating congestion before it disrupts city life.

4.1 | Artificial Intelligence-Driven Traffic Optimization Algorithms

AI transforms traditional traffic management by using sophisticated algorithms to understand, anticipate, and adjust traffic dynamics in real time. Through machine learning, AI algorithms are trained on extensive datasets, including historical traffic patterns, road conditions, weather fluctuations, and peak congestion times [18]. This training enables the system to recognize patterns and accurately predict future traffic conditions.

For example, machine learning models can identify patterns that signal approaching congestion and respond by adjusting traffic signal timings across affected intersections. Reinforcement learning, a subset of AI, uses real-time feedback from traffic flow. These models adapt continuously, optimizing traffic lights and lane usage based on immediate traffic responses, learning and improving over time. AI-driven algorithms enable systems to handle various traffic conditions, from daily rush hours to unexpected surges caused by accidents or events, improving flow and minimizing congestion delays across urban networks.

5 | Proposed Internet of Things-Based Framework for Traffic Congestion Reduction

To effectively address urban traffic congestion, a multi-layered IoT-based framework can be implemented, integrating IoT devices, edge computing, and cloud infrastructure. Each layer of this architecture plays a unique role, allowing the system to collect, process, and analyze traffic data in real time. This tiered approach ensures quick responses to immediate congestion issues while enabling the long-term analysis and planning necessary for sustainable urban mobility.

5.1 | Layered Architecture of Internet of Things, Edge Computing, and Cloud

The proposed framework includes three interconnected layers—each responsible for specific aspects of traffic data management. By separating data collection, processing, and analysis across these layers, the system can efficiently handle the high data volume generated in urban traffic environments and make rapid and strategic traffic management decisions.

5.1.1 | Internet of things layer

The IoT layer serves as the foundational layer in this architecture. It includes a network of sensors, cameras, and connected vehicles positioned throughout the city to capture real-time data on traffic conditions. These devices continuously monitor key indicators such as vehicle speeds, congestion density, and road surface conditions.

For instance, street road sensors measure vehicle counts and speed at different intervals, while cameras visually confirm traffic flow and detect incidents like accidents or sudden roadblocks. Connected vehicles, equipped with GPS and communication modules, also contribute by sharing real-time location data, which helps the system track vehicle movement across the city.

This layer is designed for constant monitoring, ensuring that the system always has up-to-date traffic information. The collected data is then transmitted to nearby edge nodes for immediate processing, facilitating quick decisions to adjust traffic signals or reroute vehicles if necessary.

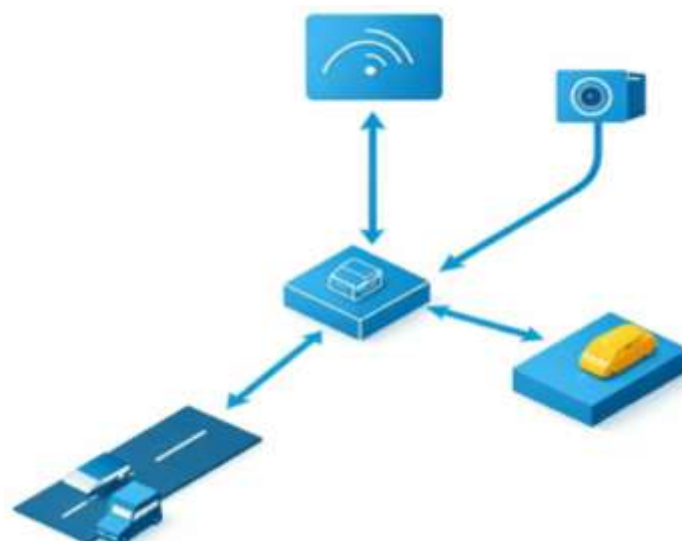


Fig. 3. Internet of things layer in traffic management.

5.1.2 | Edge layer

The edge layer is the framework's processing core, where data is analyzed locally at the point of collection. Edge nodes, strategically positioned at high-traffic locations such as intersections and busy junctions, receive data from the IoT layer. These edge nodes can make rapid decisions based on real-time conditions by processing data on-site.

For example, if congestion starts to build up at an intersection, the edge node can immediately adjust the timing of the traffic lights to help reduce wait times. Additionally, edge nodes can detect critical incidents such as accidents and notify the central cloud system and local drivers to avoid the area.

The edge layer reduces latency by keeping processing local, which is essential for responsive traffic management. The reduced cloud dependency for every decision minimizes bandwidth usage and ensures that only significant events or larger datasets are sent to the cloud for deeper analysis. This decentralization helps prevent data overload on the network while supporting real-time traffic interventions.

5.1.3 | Cloud layer

The cloud layer is the central repository for long-term data storage and large-scale traffic analysis. While the IoT and edge layers handle real-time processing and immediate decision-making, the cloud layer focuses on comprehensive analysis, data aggregation, and predictive modeling. Data collected over time is sent to the cloud, which undergoes more complex processing to identify patterns, assess city-wide traffic trends, and forecast future congestion hotspots.

One of the primary functions of the cloud layer is to support AI model training and updates. Machine learning algorithms are trained on historical and current data, allowing the system to improve its predictive capabilities continuously. The cloud also facilitates periodic synchronization of IoT and edge devices, ensuring they are updated with the latest algorithms and traffic management protocols. By performing these high-level tasks, the cloud enables the system to evolve and adapt to changing traffic patterns across the city.

6 | Use Cases of Internet of Things in Urban Mobility

The IoT offers numerous applications in urban mobility, transforming how cities manage traffic flow, reduce congestion, and optimize public transportation.

Using real-time data from IoT-enabled devices, cities can implement responsive solutions that adapt to traffic conditions, reduce delays, and improve the commuter experience. Several impactful use cases showcase how IoT is reshaping urban mobility.

6.1 | Smart Traffic Signals and Intersection Management

Smart traffic signals equipped with IoT sensors are a cornerstone of modern traffic management. Unlike traditional traffic lights that operate on fixed schedules, smart signals can adjust in real time based on current traffic flow, helping to ease congestion and prevent long wait times at intersections.

These smart-systems detect vehicle queues, traffic density, and the speed of approaching vehicles. For instance, if a particular lane at an intersection has a higher volume of vehicles, the system can extend the green light duration for that lane while shortening it for less crowded lanes. This dynamic adjustment reduces drivers' idle time, improves vehicle flow, and prevents unnecessary build-up at critical intersections.

By making intersection management adaptive, smart traffic signals help cities reduce travel time and fuel consumption, ultimately contributing to a smoother, more efficient urban traffic system.

6.2 | Congestion Mitigation Using Internet of Things Devices

Cities like Singapore and Los Angeles have adopted IoT-based traffic management systems to address congestion more effectively. These systems use IoT devices to collect real-time data on vehicle density, speed, and road conditions. This information is then used to adjust traffic signals dynamically, distribute vehicles more evenly across the road network, and prevent localized congestion.

For example, if a specific route becomes crowded, the system can instantly adjust nearby traffic lights or suggest alternative routes to drivers through mobile applications. In Singapore, this IoT-driven approach helps maintain smoother traffic flow during peak hours and special events, minimizing the impact of high traffic volumes.

Drivers also benefit directly from these systems, as they can receive real-time updates via mobile apps or GPS systems, enabling them to choose less congested routes. This information helps reduce travel times and contributes to lower emissions and reduced fuel consumption as vehicles spend less time idling or navigating stop-and-go traffic.

6.3 | Public Transit Optimization

IoT technology is also revolutionizing public transportation by making it more responsive and efficient. Through IoT-enabled systems, real-time data on bus, tram, and train locations can be collected and analyzed to improve scheduling, route planning, and passenger wait times. By tracking the position and speed of public transit vehicles, the system can monitor delays, reroute vehicles as needed, and adjust schedules dynamically to maintain regular service.

For example, if a bus is running behind schedule due to traffic, nearby traffic signals could be adjusted to prioritize its movement, reducing commuter delays. In addition, transit authorities can notify passengers of arrival times, delays, or route changes through mobile apps, providing them with up-to-date information to help them plan their journeys more effectively.

Smart transit systems reduce waiting times and improve the reliability of public transportation, making it a more attractive option for commuters. By encouraging public transit use, cities can reduce the number of vehicles on the road, helping to further ease congestion and decrease overall emissions.

7 | Challenges in Internet of Things-Based Traffic Solutions

As promising as IoT-based traffic management solutions are, several challenges must be addressed to realize their full potential. From data security to the integration of legacy infrastructure, these hurdles affect IoT systems' scalability, reliability, and adaptability in urban settings [19].

7.1 | Data Privacy and Security Concerns

One of the most pressing challenges in deploying IoT-based traffic solutions is ensuring the privacy and security of data. These systems collect vast information, including vehicle locations, travel patterns, and personal data from connected vehicles. Although this data is invaluable for optimizing traffic flow, it is also sensitive and can be a target for cyberattacks. Unauthorized access to this data could lead to privacy violations, misuse, or even compromised public safety.

To mitigate these risks, robust security measures, such as encryption and secure communication protocols, must be implemented to protect data throughout its collection, transmission, and storage. Additionally, cybersecurity standards and policies must be updated continually to keep pace with evolving threats. Protecting users' privacy while enabling efficient traffic management will be key to gaining public trust and widespread acceptance of IoT-based solutions.

7.2 | Scalability and Network Limitations

As cities grow and more IoT devices are deployed, the data generated will increase exponentially. Ensuring that IoT traffic systems are scalable is crucial for handling these high data volumes and maintaining system responsiveness. Bandwidth constraints, network congestion, and data latency are common challenges, especially as IoT devices generate a constant stream of data that must be processed and acted upon quickly.

IoT-based traffic systems require highly efficient data transmission and processing infrastructures to address these limitations. Solutions like 5G and edge computing can help alleviate some of these issues by increasing network capacity and reducing data travel times. However, implementing these technologies city-wide remains costly and complex, making it challenging for many cities to expand their IoT networks without risking service slowdowns or outages.

7.3 | Integration with Existing Traffic Infrastructure

Many cities still rely on legacy traffic management systems that are not designed to integrate with advanced IoT technologies. Upgrading or retrofitting these older systems to work with IoT-based solutions can be costly and technically complex, often requiring customized adaptations to meet each city's unique infrastructure. This challenge is compounded by the diversity in traffic systems from one city to another, making a standardized approach to IoT integration nearly impossible.

Cities must carefully evaluate their infrastructure, determining which systems can be upgraded and where new installations are needed. While the initial costs may be high, these upgrades pave the way for more responsive and effective traffic management. Partnerships with technology providers, investments in long-term planning, and phased rollouts of IoT infrastructure can help cities overcome these integration challenges and transition to smart traffic systems more smoothly.

8 | Future Trends and Research Directions

The future of IoT in traffic management is full of possibilities, with emerging technologies like Autonomous Vehicles (AVs), 5G, and integrated smart city systems offering unprecedented opportunities to improve urban mobility. Continued research and development in these areas will be essential for creating resilient and adaptive IoT-based traffic management systems.

8.1 | Autonomous Vehicles and Internet of Things Integration

AVs represent a transformative leap in urban mobility. Using IoT for communication, AVs are designed to exchange real-time information with other vehicles (Vehicle-to-Vehicle (V2V)) and road infrastructure (Vehicle-to-Infrastructure (V2I)) [20]. This integration with IoT allows AVs to navigate complex traffic environments, avoid collisions, and improve road safety by sharing their location, speed, and route data.

As AVs become more prevalent, they will seamlessly integrate into IoT-based traffic management systems, offering a proactive approach to congestion reduction. AVs' ability to adapt their routes dynamically based on real-time data will optimize traffic flow, especially during peak hours. In the long term, the collaboration between IoT systems and autonomous driving technology could revolutionize how cities manage traffic, creating a coordinated, automated mobility network that significantly reduces congestion and improves safety.

8.2 | Use of 5G for Enhanced Connectivity

The implementation of 5G networks is set to enhance the capabilities of IoT-based traffic systems dramatically. With faster data transfer speeds, higher bandwidth, and reduced latency, 5G enables reliable, real-time communication between IoT devices, vehicles, and traffic infrastructure. This improvement is particularly beneficial for applications requiring immediate data processing, such as real-time traffic signal adjustments and congestion forecasting.

5G technology will also allow for better coordination of AVs, enabling them to communicate seamlessly with each other and with traffic management systems. By facilitating high-speed, low-latency communication, 5G will enhance the scalability of IoT networks, allowing cities to deploy more IoT devices without compromising performance. The reduced latency provided by 5G will ensure that real-time data can be processed fast enough to prevent congestion, reroute traffic, and improve incident response times.

8.3 | Smart City-Wide Traffic Management Systems

As it advances, IoT technology will become a foundational element in fully integrated smart city systems. Future smart city traffic management systems will manage vehicle traffic and incorporate public transportation, pedestrians, and cyclists into the urban mobility ecosystem. By gathering and analyzing data from various sources, these city-wide systems can predict and prevent congestion, optimize energy use, and ensure that all aspects of transportation infrastructure are utilized as efficiently as possible.

Such integrated systems will likely blend IoT, edge computing, AI, and high-speed communication technologies like 5G to deliver a holistic, adaptive urban mobility solution. For example, a smart city system could automatically prioritize public transit vehicles during peak hours or adjust street lighting and crosswalk timings based on pedestrian density. This city-wide approach to traffic management will help reduce emissions, save energy, and create a more sustainable urban environment.

9 | Conclusion

In Conclusion, IoT-based urban mobility solutions present a transformative approach to addressing the complex challenge of traffic congestion. By leveraging technologies like real-time data collection, edge computing, and AI-driven optimization, IoT systems empower cities to enhance traffic flow, reduce delays, and improve the overall efficiency of transportation. The potential integration of AVs and the deployment of

5G networks promise to expand the capabilities of IoT further, making urban mobility smarter, safer, and more efficient.

However, significant challenges remain, particularly around data privacy, scalability, and the integration of legacy systems. Addressing these issues will be critical as cities seek to build resilient, adaptable traffic systems that meet the demands of modern urban life. Continued research, innovation, and collaboration between governments, industry leaders, and technology providers will be essential for unlocking the full potential of IoT in urban traffic management.

Data Availability

All data are included in the text.

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