

MATH 371 Fall Quarter MCM 2019 Problem B

This is the abstract. This is the thing we're going to spend a LOT of time writing, it's very important. We still need to write the abstract and the introduction

1 Introduction

In the aftermath of natural disasters such as Hurricane Maria which swept through Puerto Rico in 2017, many non-governmental organizations will be tasked with providing relief to strained health-care facilities and damaged infrastructure. The need for systems that can provide efficient and effective distribution of medical supplies and surveillance of damaged areas has been evident in many past natural disasters. In response to this growing need, many companies, including HELP, Inc. have begun investigating a method of supply dispersal and surveillance utilizing a fleet of unmanned drones. HELP, Inc. have selected eight drone candidates for a drone system designed to respond to natural disasters in Puerto Rico called "DroneGo." DroneGo will be deployed in the disaster area, with the required drones and medical packages that will be delivered to local hospitals fitting within standard ISO cargo containers. The drones will carry out delivery of medical packages and survey damaged terrain areas to inform responders of potential hazards. Drones are advantageous for surveillance as they can navigate through collapsed buildings and other infrastructure which would be otherwise inaccessible by ground vehicle. Additionally, aerial drones are typically chosen to deliver urgent materials for countries in which a large portion of the population does not live close enough to a road for a ground delivery system to be effective (need citation).

Technology involving drone cargo delivery, with research in landing and dropping cargo and effective navigation of variable environments has been advanced by the parcel delivery industry. However, there are several considerations unique to the problem of medical supply delivery and reconnaissance, specifically the careful handling and urgent delivery of precious cargo, and navigating damaged infrastructure. Drones have been used for healthcare relief in the past, specifically in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and New Guinea (need citation) but these have not been large scale, coordinated fleets.

The use of unmanned aerial drones for surveillance has been widely investigated and effectively used for various specific military and civilian applications (need citation). Our particular problem closely mirrors the requirements for military use, prioritizing quick action and detection of major terrain features without major stresses to optimizing mon-

etary costs. Optimization of aerial drone path algorithms have also been investigated (need citation) with many different algorithms being found for road tracking (need citation) flight path efficiency (need citation) and using instrumentation to adapt to a changing environment. Similar algorithms have been widely used for development in self-driving cars (need citation) where dynamic path allocation and navigation is necessary.

The long term storage of these drones is a major consideration to have an effective disaster relief system. International cargo transportation has driven widespread research in bin packing problems to both pack containers as densely as possible, and to pack a set amount of materials in as few containers as possible. Focusing on the relevant base dimensions, maximizing cargo density often becomes equivalent to mathematically packing shapes as densely as possible into a lattice in infinite euclidean space. From there, cargo can be stacked up utilizing best-fit algorithms or by other means. (need citation)

Both static and dynamic methods for drone deployment are often utilized, with dynamic methods adding an additional level choice and ideally allowing for a more optimized system. Dynamic methods investigated include using moving vehicles to deploy drones anywhere along a working road (need citation). Static methods involve deploying drones from one starting location, negating the need for direct human involvement.

2 Ideation

We identified two significant problems to focus on in our model: packaging the drones and medi-packs to be deployed in the disaster area, and routing the drones to deliver necessary supplies according to the requirements from the delivery locations in attachment 4. We generalized a solution early on that involved algorithmically optimizing the packing space in each cargo container and modeling many routes to choose an ideal route based on a cost function, thereby eliminating two degrees of freedom. The remaining freedom is in choosing which drone type to use, which we determined could be implemented in the flight-path algorithm.

In this problem, there is already a lot of information established: the dimensions of all interacting products are fully defined, the performance capabilities of the drones are known, and the exact locations of delivery locations in the form of latitude and longitude points are provided. We used all this information to our advantage to narrow the scope of the problem and allow us more time to model the specific op-

erational flow of our disaster response system. Despite this, however, several assumptions and simplifications were made in our model to reduce complexity which are outlined below.

3 Assumptions

Scheduling

- Only the minimum supplies required daily are delivered to delivery locations, i.e. no rotating schedules and stockpiling of supplies to avoid needing to deliver to each daily
- Additional time for operations is not considered: no time is needed to be spent in between flights for loading supplies or recharging the drones, and no time is needed to land and deliver supplies at delivery locations

Packing

- Elements can be stacked in any configuration without structural limitations

Flight path routing

- Paths are perfectly straight
- Every path only has either the delivery location or storage container as origin and destination
- Paths are modeled in two dimensions i.e. no altitude changes are considered
- Not considering effects of having multiple drones flying at once

Environmental effects

- Influences from wind are neglected
- The drones are assumed to be unobstructed by terrain
- The drones do not experience any malfunctions
- The earth's curve is neglected

4 Overview of Algorithms

4.1 Flight Path Algorithm

The small number of requirements for hospitals (each requiring no more than 5 medipacks a day) was reason to implement a discrete model, where each individual drone and its paths are taken into account separately. Also due to the small number of drones that would likely be used, an assumption of perfect sequential ordering for the drone flights, where each drone makes its next flight after the previous drone has completed its flight was reasonable.

This lead us to a sub-model which generates a list of all possible combinations of simple drone flights (simple being straight line paths between the storage container and the desired hospital) of a given number of drones and a given number of drone movements. For the paths flown by drones, an perfectly obstruction-free 2D plane was used, ignoring any complications that may arise due to altitude changes for drones, and navigation around obstacles. Each drone may fly to any hospital as many times as necessary. Using provided longitude and latitude for hospital locations and longitude

and latitude for storage bin configurations, the distance of any given drones flight could be calculated.

A desired set of absolute minimum requirements for a given flight plan was devised which includes: minimum hospital medipack requirements, and possibility of successful packing in the ISO containers. Any configurations that do not meet these criteria are eliminated before optimization.

The algorithm does not apply any calculation to determine how many medi-packs can fit in each drone configuration: analysis was done by hand to evaluate this for each drone type, and the estimated maximum number of medi-packs that each drone can carry is taken into account in the model. The effects of the added weight on the drone and its max speed (as used in the cost function, see section 2.3) is assumed to be negligible.

The model's approach to the drone flights does not allow for a single drone to visit multiple hospitals before returning to the storage container but given the fact that no drone can hold more than 2 medipacks, this situation would likely have little effect on the most optimized flight plan.

The model also fails to account for variations in the straight line paths used as to survey more area of the ground. A method for improving this aspect of the flight plan after optimization involving breaking up a previously straight path into several curved paths, each curve with varying degrees of curvature. Breaking up the path into smaller curved segments could eventually yield a desired flight given surveying requirements. For a further discussion of the limitation of this method see 'Limitations/ Further Work'.

4.2 Packing Algorithm

A packing algorithm is used to determine whether the materials necessitated by each flight configuration can be spatially packed into the dimensions of a standard ISO dry cargo container. The algorithm inputs the dimensions of each drone type and each medipack, and outputs a simple boolean expressing whether the configuration will fit or not. The algorithm inputs the items into the cargo area by creating columns with base dimensions defined by the packages, and checks whether each new package can be stacked in an existing column before resorting to making a new column. Each package is only considered for one optimal orientation which is hardcoded prior. If the algorithm still has packages left to pack, but cannot create any more columns, it will return a 0.

4.3 Cost Function

Our cost function is described by the following formula, evaluating for a via flight plan and drone configuration.

$$C = \alpha \frac{P}{\sum t} - \beta \frac{S}{100000}$$

Where P represents the total medipacks delivered, $\sum t$ is an estimate of the time for all the flights to occur, and S represents the space left after packing all the drones (computed via the packing algorithm). Also, C is our cost function output,

the cost. The factor of 100000 dividing S is there to adjust the units of S (it being on the order of 10^5 while $\frac{P}{\sum t}$ is on the order of 10^0). The time estimates are computed via the basic kinematic equation assuming constant speed, $\sum t = \sum \frac{d}{v_d}$ summed over all drone flights in the given plan. Here d is distance traveled in a specified flight and v_d is the max speed of the drone flying. This estimate of the time taken for a flight is assuming the drone is flying at max speed the whole way, and assuming equality of the time taken to fly to the hospital, and the time to fly back. The assumption of perfectly sequential ordering of the flights allows us to sum the times of individual flights to get the total time.

5 Results and Analysis

5.1 Model output

The typical model output expected to be used by the customer specifies several drone movements and a drone configuration. Each movement is a possible opportunity for a single drone to make one flight. A configuration specifies how many drones and of what types the drone are. In our simplified drone path algorithm, each movement is a straight line path from the starting location to the hospital specified, performed by a specified drone. Our final output is thus a single series of movements and a single configuration, corresponding to the most optimized plan, as determined by our cost function. In figure 1, an example of an optimized model output is shown.

Although it is not depicted in the figure, a model run will product viable flight plans such as the one below, each with its own cost value. In the course of using our model, it may become necessary to select a sub-optimal flight plan due to limiting factors not taken into account with our model. Therefore it is necessary to statistically analyze all the cost function outputs for a given model run near the minimum (representing the most optimal flight plan). This analysis was done for studies of parameter sensitivity as well as for directly comparing model outputs.

5.2 Parameter sensitivity

The model output, specifically the outputs of the cost function were analyzed after varying different parameters to find reasonable values for further analysis. The metric used for comparing the effectiveness of our model outputs is a measure of how many viable flight paths are produced with a cost function value near the minimum. The parameters we varied were the different valid storage bin configurations, the number of allowed movements in a flight plan and the number of drones in a fleet.

As the output of our storage location sub-model, we had 15 possible configurations for storage bin locations (which we limited to 2 storage bins). This limit was imposed as to be the minimum number of storage bins needed to understand the effects of having multiple storage bins and the effect that changing those configurations would have on the model output. The results of this study are shown in figure 2. From the figure we see that configurations 15,14,13 and

5 had considerably high numbers of paths being close to optimal. Also, in the outputs for these storage configurations, we see that configurations 5,13,14, and 15 have the 4 lowest minimum costs of all configurations with 15 having the overall minimum. Based on this evidence, it is reasonable to select configuration 15 as the most optimized configuration with 14,5, and 13 also being acceptable.

The number of allowed movements in the flight plan was limited by our hospital requirements. For example, the sum of all required medipacks for a day was 13, so no configuration of only drone B (which can hold only 1 medipack) can have less than 13 movements. Thus, because our max drone capacity was 2 medipacks, our minimum number of allowed movements in a flight plan was 7. Our model mostly did not consider the interaction between the number of allowed movements and the number of drones in the fleet due to our assumption that every drone can make as many or as little trips as possible in a day. However, there may be an additional interaction between these quantities in terms of the optimized flight plan but our parameter sensitivity was limited to studying sensitivity of individual parameters and not their interactions.

Due to fundamental limitations of our models implementation we cannot investigate the outputs of infinitely many allowed movements. But this is a realistic view of the problem because in a single day, you cannot have infinitely many drone movements without infinitely many drones. Our selected parameter range and outputs are shown in figure 3.

The curves depicted show no general deviation from their common shape and all rise to roughly the same maximum (between 0.5 and 0.6). However, in looking at the minimum value outputted by the cost function for each of the number of allowed trips, the values get continually lower as the number of allowed trips increases (min of 2.6975 for 7 allowed trips, min of 2.3951 for 8 allowed trips and min of 2.2015 for 9 allowed trips). Because our cost function equally values number of medipacks delivered and the estimated time total for that delivery, these results would suggest that increasing the number of allowed movements increases the number of delivered medipacks faster than it increases the amount of time to deliver these medipacks. However, further investigation may well reveal that below a certain number of allowed movements, the most optimized flight plan is not further improved.

5.3 Limitations/ Further Work

The cost function developed is limited in that it favors solution with fewer drones even when the combined effort of those many drones may be more effective than the combined effort of fewer drones. This arises from our assumption of sequential drone paths. A fleet of many drones may be monetarily expensive but could lead to extremely efficient in delivering medipacks due to all the drones delivering at once. This limitation would be further amplified in larger-scale drone fleet models, and for that use, an more complex metric for medipack delivery efficiency is recommended.

Furthermore, our cost function did not take into account

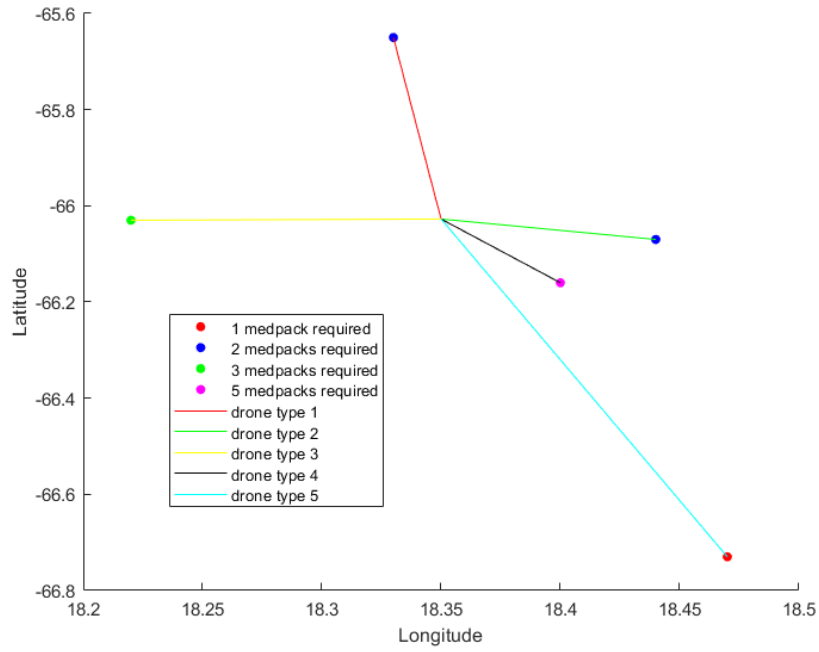


Fig. 1. Example optimized flight plan, ran with drone fleet size of 5, starting configuration 1, 5 allowed movements, and $\gamma = 2$

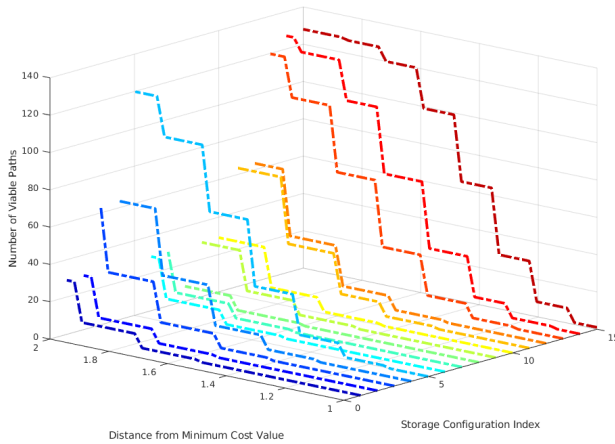


Fig. 2. Model sensitivity to storage container configuration. The different storage configuration indices each correspond to starting and storage locations for drones as outputed by our storage location sub-model. Distance from the minimum was found for each of the several thousand viable flight plans for a certain storage configuration and the number that are within a certain value is reported in each line. Model ran with $\gamma = 2$ and 7 allowed movements.

mapping of disaster terrain. This can be reconciled by adjusting our optimized model output after it has been optimized to the current cost function. It can then be adjusted to add curvature, surveying different areas of land according to a certain metric, representing how far it may deviate from the most simple path (a straight line). The main limitation of performing this adjustment after the main optimization is that adding this curvature will increase $\sum t$ as defined in

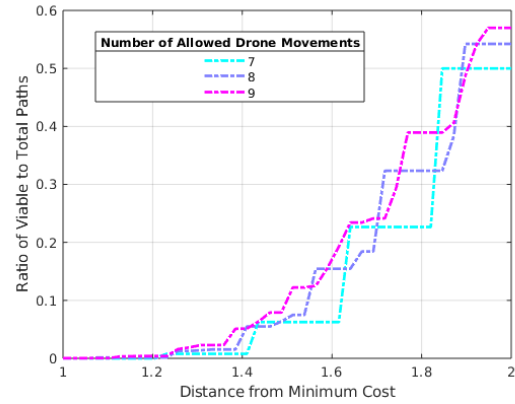


Fig. 3. Number of viable flight plans with a cost value close to the minimum (optimized) value. Each color is a different model run varying the number of allowed drone movements. The number of flight plans with a cost close to the minimum was normalized by total number of viable flight plans given by the run thus the y-axis is a ratio of how many of the total flight paths are within that range.

the cost function and may increase $\sum t$ unevenly across different viable flight paths. This could lead to a different optimized flight plan after the curvature would have been added. Thus, by adding the curvature after optimized by our cost function we lose the guarantee that our output is the most optimized under our cost function.

Our assumption of perfectly flat 2D terrain without any need to alter the drone path due to obstructions causes us to lose the fundamental aspect of navigation in our drones. Due to the nature of natural disasters, it would be impossible to

predict the conditions in which the drones must navigate through after a natural disaster and therefore a stochastic method of modeling terrain obstructions and required alternate routes. This would also be an effective measure of the DroneGo system's ability to operate in any condition that comes up. Whether the implementation of a stochastic terrain model would on average alter the optimized outputs of the model would be an interesting investigation.