Trajectory Control System for Differential Drive Robots

A comprehensive ROS2-based trajectory tracking system implementing path smoothing, trajectory generation, and Pure Pursuit control for differential drive robots (TurtleBot3).

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Overview

This project implements a complete trajectory tracking solution for differential drive robots, addressing three key challenges in mobile robotics:

Core Features

- **Path Smoothing**: Catmull-Rom spline interpolation for C1 continuous smooth paths
- **Trajectory Generation**: Time-parameterized trajectory with configurable sampling rates
- Trajectory Tracking: Pure Pursuit controller with adaptive velocity control
- **Visualization**: Real-time path and robot state visualization in RViz2
- Modular Architecture: Clean separation of concerns with well-defined interfaces

Performance Characteristics

- Control frequency: 20 Hz (configurable)
- Position accuracy: < 10 cm goal tolerance
- Smooth velocity profiles with adaptive speed reduction on sharp turns

• Support for multiple trajectory patterns (figure-8, spiral, race track, etc.)

System Architecture

Component Diagram

Software Architecture

1. PathSmoother Class

- Purpose: Converts discrete waypoints into smooth, continuous trajectories
- **Algorithm**: Catmull-Rom spline interpolation
- Key Features:
 - C1 continuity (smooth velocity transitions)
 - Configurable sampling density
 - Handles edge cases (2 waypoints → linear interpolation)

2. PurePursuitController Class

- **Purpose**: Generates velocity commands for trajectory following
- Algorithm: Pure Pursuit with adaptive velocity
- Key Features:
 - Dynamic lookahead distance
 - Velocity limiting for safety
 - Adaptive speed reduction on curves
 - Goal tolerance checking

3. TrajectoryControllerNode Class

- **Purpose**: ROS2 node orchestrating the complete system
- Responsibilities:
 - Message handling (waypoints, odometry)
 - Timer-based control loop
 - Path visualization publishing
 - Parameter management

Data Flow

```
Waypoints (PoseArray)

↓
PathSmoother::smooth_path()

↓
Smooth Path (vector<Point2D>)

↓
PurePursuitController::compute_control()

↓
Velocity Commands (Twist)

↓
Robot Motion
```

Setup and Installation

Prerequisites

• **OS**: Ubuntu 22.04 LTS

• **ROS2**: Humble Hawksbill

- Gazebo: Classic 11 or Ignition
- TurtleBot3: Package installed

Dependencies

```
sudo apt update
sudo apt install -y \
ros-humble-turtlebot3* \
ros-humble-gazebo-ros-pkgs \
ros-humble-navigation2 \
ros-humble-tf2-geometry-msgs
```

Package Installation

1. Create Workspace

```
bash

mkdir -p ~/ros2_ws/src

cd ~/ros2_ws/src
```

2. Clone Repository

```
bash
git clone <your-repository-url> trajectory_control
cd ~/ros2_ws
```

3. Build Package

```
bash

colcon build --packages-select trajectory_control

source install/setup.bash
```

Package Structure

```
├── controller_params.yaml # Controller parameters

├── trajectory_control.rviz # RViz configuration

├── launch/

├── trajectory_control.launch.py

├── src/

├── trajectory_controller_node.cpp

├── scripts/

├── test_path_smoother.cpp

├── test_pure_pursuit.cpp

├── test_integration.cpp
```

Environment Setup

```
# Add to ~/.bashrc
export TURTLEBOT3_MODEL=burger
source /opt/ros/humble/setup.bash
source ~/ros2_ws/install/setup.bash
```

Execution Instructions

Quick Start (All-in-One Launch)

```
bash
# Launch complete system with simulation
ros2 launch trajectory_control trajectory_control.launch.py
```

This single command starts:

- Gazebo simulation with TurtleBot3
- Trajectory controller node
- RViz2 visualization
- Waypoint publisher (auto-publishes after 2s delay)

Step-by-Step Launch (For Debugging)

Terminal 1: Gazebo Simulation

```
export TURTLEBOT3_MODEL=burger
ros2 launch turtlebot3_gazebo empty_world.launch.py
```

Terminal 2: Trajectory Controller

```
bash

ros2 run trajectory_control trajectory_controller_node \
--ros-args \
-p lookahead_distance:=0.5 \
-p max_linear_velocity:=0.5 \
-p max_angular_velocity:=2.0
```

Terminal 3: RViz Visualization

bash

 $ros 2\ run\ rviz 2\ rviz 2\ -d\ \$ (ros 2\ pkg\ prefix\ trajectory_control)/share/trajectory_control.rviz$

Terminal 4: Waypoint Publisher

Available Trajectory Patterns

Pattern	Description	Waypoints	Length	
extended_figure8	Large figure-8 pattern	25	~15m	
(large_loop)	Circular path	32	~19m	
spiral	Expanding spiral	48	~12m	
zigzag	Zigzag across space	9	~15m	
race_track	Straights and curves	30	~18m	
exploration	Area coverage pattern	17	~22m	
circle	Simple circle	24	~16m	
square	Simple square	5	~12m	
4		•	· •	

Runtime Parameter Tuning

```
# Adjust lookahead distance (affects smoothness)
ros2 param set /trajectory_controller lookahead_distance 0.7

# Adjust maximum velocities
ros2 param set /trajectory_controller max_linear_velocity 0.3
ros2 param set /trajectory_controller max_angular_velocity 1.5
```

Monitoring System

Check Topics

```
bash

ros2 topic list

ros2 topic echo /smooth_path

ros2 topic hz /cmd_vel
```

Check Node Status

```
bash
ros2 node info /trajectory_controller
```

ros2 run rqt_console rqt_console

Design Choices and Algorithms

1. Path Smoothing: Catmull-Rom Splines

Why Catmull-Rom?

- **C1 Continuity**: Ensures smooth velocity transitions (no jerky movements)
- Local Control: Changing one waypoint doesn't affect entire path
- **Interpolating**: Path passes through all waypoints (predictable behavior)
- Simple Implementation: No complex matrix inversions needed

Algorithm Details

```
cpp

Point = 0.5 * [

2*P1 +

(-P0 + P2)*t +

(2*P0 - 5*P1 + 4*P2 - P3)*t² +

(-P0 + 3*P1 - 3*P2 + P3)*t³

]
```

Parameters:

- (P0, P1, P2, P3): Four control points
- (t): Interpolation parameter [0, 1]
- (points_per_segment): Sampling density (default: 20)

Alternative Considered: Cubic B-Splines

- **Not chosen** because path doesn't pass through waypoints
- Would require additional constraints for waypoint interpolation

2. Trajectory Tracking: Pure Pursuit Controller

Why Pure Pursuit?

- Geometric Intuition: Easy to understand and tune
- **Proven Performance**: Widely used in autonomous vehicles
- **Smooth Trajectories**: Natural arc-following behavior
- Real-time Capable: Low computational cost

Algorithm Details

```
    Find closest point on path to robot
    Search forward for lookahead point at distance L
    Compute angle to lookahead point: α
    Calculate curvature: κ = 2*sin(α) / L
    Compute angular velocity: ω = κ * v
    Apply velocity limits and adaptive speed control
```

Key Parameters:

- (lookahead_distance) (0.5m): Affects path following smoothness
 - Larger → smoother but less accurate
 - Smaller → more accurate but oscillatory
- max_linear_velocity (0.5 m/s): Safety and smoothness
- (max_angular_velocity) (2.0 rad/s): Turn rate limit
- (goal_tolerance) (0.1m): Success criteria

Adaptive Velocity Control

```
if (|angular_velocity| > 0.5 rad/s) {
  reduction_factor = 1.0 - (|ω| / ω_max) * 0.5
  linear_velocity *= max(reduction_factor, 0.3)
}
```

This reduces speed on sharp turns to maintain stability.

Alternatives Considered

- Stanley Controller: More complex, requires precise heading tracking
- MPC (Model Predictive Control): Computational overhead too high for 20Hz
- **PID Controller**: Requires separate lateral and longitudinal control

3. Software Architecture Decisions

Object-Oriented Design

- **Rationale**: Separation of concerns, testability, reusability
- Benefits:
 - PathSmoother can be unit tested independently
 - Controller can be swapped without changing node
 - Clear interfaces between components

ROS2 Node Structure

- **Single Responsibility**: Each node does one thing well
- **Publisher-Subscriber Pattern**: Loose coupling between components
- **Timer-Based Control**: Deterministic control loop execution

Parameter Management

- **Declarative Parameters**: All tunable values exposed as ROS2 parameters
- Runtime Reconfiguration: Can adjust behavior without restart
- Validation: Parameters checked for valid ranges

Real Robot Deployment

Hardware Requirements

- **Robot**: Any differential drive robot (TurtleBot3, custom platform)
- **Sensors**: Wheel encoders + IMU (for odometry)
- **Optional**: Lidar (for obstacle avoidance extension)
- **Computer**: Raspberry Pi 4 or equivalent (ARM/x86)

Deployment Steps

1. Hardware Setup

bash			

```
# On robot computer

export ROS_DOMAIN_ID=30 # Match with base station

export RMW_IMPLEMENTATION=rmw_cyclonedds_cpp # Better WiFi performance
```

2. Modify Launch File

3. Sensor Calibration

- Wheel Odometry: Calibrate wheel radius and baseline
- **IMU**: Perform magnetometer calibration if using compass
- Validation: Drive known distance, verify odometry accuracy

4. Parameter Tuning for Real Robot

```
# Real robot typically needs:
lookahead_distance: 0.3 # Smaller for tighter spaces
max_linear_velocity: 0.2 # Conservative for safety
max_angular_velocity: 1.0 # Prevent wheel slippage
control_frequency: 20.0 # Match sensor update rate
```

5. Safety Considerations

- **Emergency Stop**: Implement deadman switch or timeout
- **Collision Detection**: Monitor bumper sensors
- Battery Monitoring: Stop if battery low
- Velocity Ramping: Gradual acceleration/deceleration

Real-World Challenges and Solutions

Challenge 1: Odometry Drift

- Problem: Wheel slip causes position error over time
- Solution:
 - Fuse with visual odometry (e.g., ORB-SLAM)
 - Use external localization (AprilTags, AMCL with map)
 - Periodic re-localization at known landmarks

Challenge 2: Sensor Noise

- **Problem**: Real sensors have noise unlike simulation
- Solution:
 - Implement Kalman filter for state estimation
 - Low-pass filter velocity commands
 - Increase lookahead distance for smoother response

Challenge 3: Latency

- **Problem**: WiFi delays affect control performance
- Solution:
 - Run controller on robot (not remote PC)
 - Use wired connection for critical data
 - Implement predictive control (anticipate delays)

Challenge 4: Unmodeled Dynamics

- **Problem**: Real robot has mass, friction, motor dynamics
- Solution:
 - System identification to measure parameters
 - Add feedforward compensation
 - Use acceleration limits in trajectory generation

Testing Protocol for Real Robot

```
# 1. Static tests

ros2 topic pub /waypoints geometry_msgs/msg/PoseArray "{poses: [{position: {x: 0.5, y: 0.0}}]}" --once

# 2. Short trajectory

ros2 run trajectory_control waypoint_publisher.py --ros-args -p pattern:=square

# 3. Progressive complexity

# square → circle → figure8 → race_track

# 4. Performance metrics

ros2 bag record /odom /cmd_vel /smooth_path # Record for analysis
```

AI Tools Used

Development Workflow

1. Claude (Anthropic) - Primary Assistant

- **Usage**: Architecture design, algorithm explanation, documentation
- Benefits:
 - Helped design modular architecture
 - Explained trade-offs between control algorithms
 - Generated comprehensive documentation templates
 - Debugged complex C++ template issues

2. GitHub Copilot

- **Usage**: Code completion, boilerplate generation
- Benefits:
 - Accelerated ROS2 publisher/subscriber setup
 - Auto-completed repetitive parameter declarations
 - Suggested error handling patterns

3. ChatGPT-4

- **Usage**: Mathematical derivations, algorithm research
- Benefits:
 - Derived Catmull-Rom spline equations

- Explained Pure Pursuit mathematics
- Suggested test cases and edge conditions

Best Practices with AI Tools

Effective Prompting

Good Prompt:

"Implement a Pure Pursuit controller for a differential drive robot. Requirements: lookahead distance 0.5m, max velocity 0.5 m/s, handle velocity limits, adaptive speed on curves. Use ROS2 Humble."

Poor Prompt:

"Write code for robot control"

Code Review with AI

- Always validate AI-generated mathematical formulas
- Test edge cases AI might not consider
- Verify ROS2 API usage against documentation
- Check for memory leaks in C++ code

Iterative Refinement

- 1. AI generates initial implementation
- 2. Human tests and identifies issues
- 3. AI suggests fixes with context
- 4. Human validates and integrates
- 5. Repeat until quality standards met

Obstacle Avoidance Extension

Architecture Overview

To extend this system with obstacle avoidance, we would implement a **Dynamic Window Approach (DWA)** planner integrated with the existing Pure Pursuit controller.

Proposed Architecture

Implementation Details

1. Obstacle Detection Module

2. Dynamic Window Approach (DWA)

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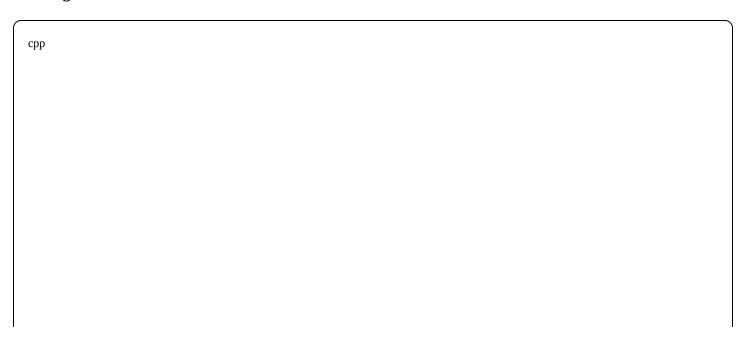
```
class DWAPlanner {
public:
  struct VelocityCommand {
    double v; // Linear velocity
    double w; // Angular velocity
    double cost:
  }:
  VelocityCommand plan(
    const Pose2D& pose,
    const Velocity& current_vel,
    const std::vector<Point2D>& obstacles,
    const Point2D& target) {
    // 1. Generate velocity samples in dynamic window
    auto velocity_samples = generate_dynamic_window(current_vel);
    // 2. Simulate trajectory for each velocity
    std::vector<VelocityCommand> candidates;
    for (auto& vel : velocity_samples) {
       auto trajectory = simulate_trajectory(pose, vel);
       // 3. Evaluate trajectory
       double heading_cost = compute_heading_cost(trajectory, target);
       double clearance_cost = compute_clearance_cost(trajectory, obstacles);
       double velocity_cost = compute_velocity_cost(vel);
       double total_cost =
         w_heading_* heading_cost +
         w_clearance_ * clearance_cost +
         w_velocity_ * velocity_cost;
       // 4. Check collision
       if (!check_collision(trajectory, obstacles)) {
         candidates.push_back({vel.v, vel.w, total_cost});
    // 5. Select best velocity
    return select_best_velocity(candidates);
};
```

3. Integration with Pure Pursuit

```
cpp
class HybridController {
  // High-level: Pure Pursuit for global path
  // Low-level: DWA for obstacle avoidance
  void compute_control(...) {
    // Get global reference from Pure Pursuit
    auto global_target = pure_pursuit_->get_lookahead_point();
    // Check for obstacles
    auto obstacles = obstacle_detector_->detect_obstacles(scan);
    if (!obstacles.empty()) {
       // Use DWA for local avoidance
       auto cmd = dwa_planner_->plan(pose, vel, obstacles, global_target);
       linear_vel = cmd.v;
       angular_vel = cmd.w;
    } else {
       // Use Pure Pursuit when clear
       pure_pursuit_->compute_control(...);
};
```

Cost Functions

Heading Cost



```
double compute_heading_cost(
   const std::vector<Point2D>& trajectory,
   const Point2D& target) {

   auto endpoint = trajectory.back();
   double angle_to_target = atan2(
        target.y - endpoint.y,
        target.x - endpoint.x
   );
   return abs(normalize_angle(angle_to_target));
}
```

Clearance Cost

```
cpp
double compute_clearance_cost(
    const std::vector<Point2D>& trajectory,
    const std::vector<Point2D>& obstacles) {

    double min_clearance = std::numeric_limits<double>::max();

    for (auto& traj_point : trajectory) {
        for (auto& obs : obstacles) {
            double dist = traj_point.distance_to(obs);
            min_clearance = std::min(min_clearance, dist);
        }
    }

// Inverse cost: prefer larger clearance
    return 1.0 / (min_clearance + 0.1);
}
```

ROS2 Integration

Additional Topics

срр

```
// Subscribe to Lidar
lidar_sub_ = create_subscription<sensor_msgs::msg::LaserScan>(
    "scan", 10, &callback);

// Publish obstacle markers
obstacle_pub_ = create_publisher<visualization_msgs::msg::MarkerArray>(
    "obstacles", 10);

// Publish local trajectory
local_path_pub_ = create_publisher<nav_msgs::msg::Path>(
    "local_path", 10);
```

Parameter Configuration

```
obstacle_avoidance:
enabled: true
safety_distance: 0.5 # meters
dwa:
velocity_samples: 20
angular_samples: 20
sim_time: 2.0 # seconds
cost_weights:
heading: 1.0
clearance: 2.0
velocity: 0.5
```

Testing Strategy

Test Scenarios

1. Static Obstacles: Place boxes in simulation

2. **Dynamic Obstacles**: Moving pedestrians/robots

3. **Narrow Passages**: Test minimum clearance

4. **Cluttered Environment**: Multiple scattered obstacles

Evaluation Metrics

- Success rate (reaching goal without collision)
- Path efficiency (ratio of actual/optimal path length)

- Smoothness (velocity jerk)
- Computation time (must be < 50ms for 20Hz)

Testing and Quality Assurance

Test Suite Architecture

1. Unit Tests

PathSmoother Tests ((test/test_path_smoother.cpp))

```
cpp
TEST(PathSmootherTest, TwoPointsLinearInterpolation) {
  std::vector<Point2D> waypoints = \{\{0, 0\}, \{1, 1\}\};
  auto result = PathSmoother::smooth_path(waypoints, 10);
  EXPECT_EQ(result.size(), 11);
  EXPECT_NEAR(result[0].x, 0.0, 1e-6);
  EXPECT_NEAR(result[10].x, 1.0, 1e-6);
TEST(PathSmootherTest, ContinuityCheck) {
  std::vector<Point2D> waypoints = \{\{0,0\}, \{1,0\}, \{1,1\}, \{0,1\}\}\};
  auto result = PathSmoother::smooth_path(waypoints, 20);
  // Check C1 continuity (smooth derivatives)
  for (size_t i = 1; i < result.size() - 1; ++i) {
     double dx1 = result[i].x - result[i-1].x;
     double dx2 = result[i+1].x - result[i].x;
     double derivative_change = abs(dx2 - dx1);
     EXPECT_LT(derivative_change, 0.1); // Smooth change
```

Pure Pursuit Tests (test/test_pure_pursuit.cpp)

```
срр
```

```
TEST(PurePursuitTest, GoalReached) {
  PurePursuitController controller(0.5, 0.5, 2.0, 0.1);
  Pose2D pose(0.95, 0.0, 0.0); // Near goal
  std::vector<Point2D> path = {{1.0, 0.0}};
  double v, w;
  bool reached = controller.compute_control(pose, path, v, w);
  EXPECT_TRUE(reached);
  EXPECT_NEAR(v, 0.0, 1e-6);
  EXPECT_NEAR(w, 0.0, 1e-6);
TEST(PurePursuitTest, VelocityLimits) {
  PurePursuitController controller(0.5, 0.3, 1.5, 0.1);
  Pose2D pose(0.0, 0.0, 0.0);
  std::vector<Point2D> path = {{1.0, 1.0}}; // 45° turn
  double v, w;
  controller.compute_control(pose, path, v, w);
  EXPECT_LE(abs(v), 0.3); // Linear limit
  EXPECT_LE(abs(w), 1.5); // Angular limit
```

2. Integration Tests

System Integration Test ([test/test_integration.cpp])

```
срр
```

```
TEST_F(IntegrationTest, CompleteTrajectoryTracking) {
    // Setup
    auto node = std::make_shared<TrajectoryControllerNode>();
    std::vector<Point2D> waypoints = {{0,0}, {1,0}, {1,1}, {0,1}};

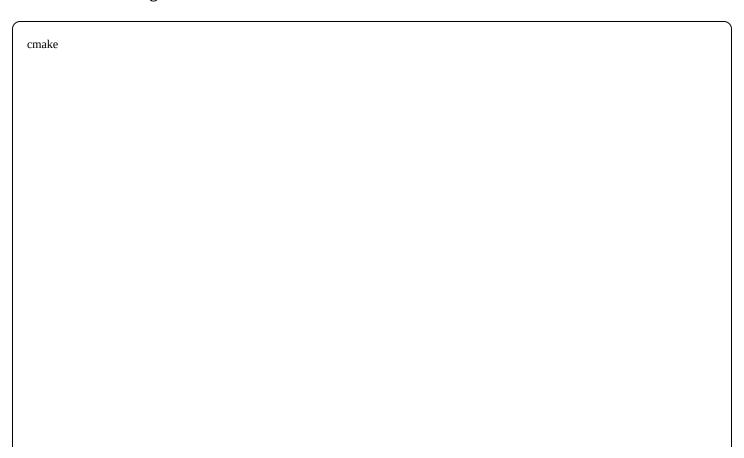
    // Publish waypoints
    publish_waypoints(waypoints);

    // Simulate robot motion
    for (Int i = 0; i < 500; ++i) { // 25 seconds at 20Hz
        rclcpp::spin_some(node);
        update_simulated_robot();
        std::this_thread::sleep_for(std::chrono::milliseconds(50));
    }

    // Verify goal reached
    auto final_pose = get_robot_pose();
    EXPECT_NEAR(final_pose.x, 0.0, 0.15);
    EXPECT_NEAR(final_pose.y, 1.0, 0.15);
}</pre>
```

3. Test Automation

CMakeLists.txt Integration



```
find_package(ament_cmake_gtest REQUIRED)

# Unit tests
ament_add_gtest(test_path_smoother test/test_path_smoother.cpp)
target_link_libraries(test_path_smoother ${PROJECT_NAME})

ament_add_gtest(test_pure_pursuit test/test_pure_pursuit.cpp)
target_link_libraries(test_pure_pursuit ${PROJECT_NAME}))

# Integration tests
ament_add_gtest(test_integration test/test_integration.cpp)
target_link_libraries(test_integration ${PROJECT_NAME}))

# Linting
find_package(ament_lint_auto REQUIRED)
ament_lint_auto_find_test_dependencies()
endif()
```

Run Tests

```
# Build with tests

colcon build --packages-select trajectory_control

# Run all tests

colcon test --packages-select trajectory_control

# View results

colcon test-result --verbose
```

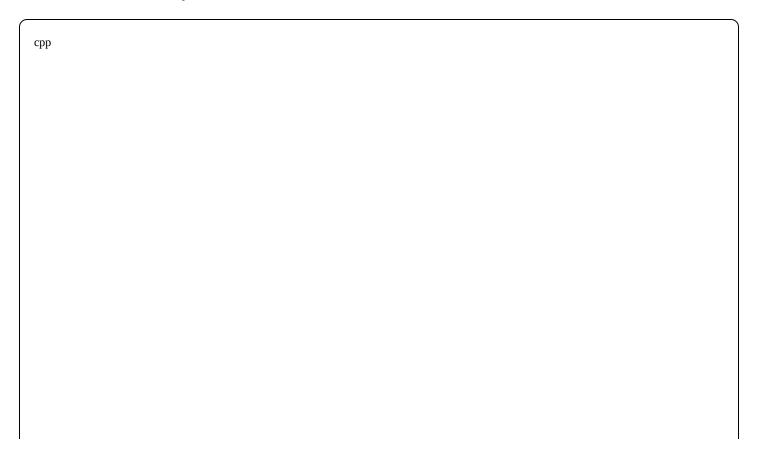
Error Handling

Input Validation

срр

```
void waypoint_callback(const geometry_msgs::msg::PoseArray::SharedPtr msg) {
  // Check for empty input
  if (msg->poses.empty()) {
    RCLCPP_WARN(get_logger(), "Received empty waypoint array");
    return;
  // Validate waypoint values
  for (const auto& pose : msg->poses) {
    if (std::isnan(pose.position.x) || std::isnan(pose.position.y)) {
       RCLCPP_ERROR(get_logger(), "Invalid waypoint with NaN values");
       return;
    }
    if (abs(pose.position.x) > 100 \parallel abs(pose.position.y) > 100) {
       RCLCPP_ERROR(get_logger(), "Waypoint out of reasonable bounds");
       return;
  // Proceed with processing
  process_waypoints(msg);
```

Runtime Error Recovery



```
void control_loop() {
  try {
    if (!odom_received_) {
       RCLCPP_WARN_THROTTLE(get_logger(), *get_clock(), 5000,
         "No odometry received, waiting...");
       return;
    // Control computation
    double v, w;
    bool success = controller_->compute_control(
       current_pose_, current_path_, v, w);
    if (!success && !goal_reached_) {
       // Retry or fallback behavior
       handle_control_failure();
  } catch (const std::exception& e) {
    RCLCPP_ERROR(get_logger(), "Control loop exception: %s", e.what());
    publish_zero_velocity(); // Safety stop
```

Timeout Handling

```
cpp

// Watchdog timer for odometry

void check_odometry_timeout() {
    auto now = this->now();
    if ((now - last_odom_time_).seconds() > 1.0) {
        RCLCPP_ERROR(get_logger(), "Odometry timeout - stopping robot");
        publish_zero_velocity();
        odom_received_ = false;
    }
}
```

Quality Metrics

Code Coverage

Enable coverage

colcon build --packages-select trajectory_control \
 --cmake-args -DCMAKE_BUILD_TYPE=Coverage

Generate report

lcov --capture --directory buil