

Dynamic Platoon Formation of Multi-Type Autonomous Vehicles for Sustainable Urban Mobility

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Abstract—This paper addresses the energy inefficiency of single-occupancy vehicles by introducing a novel cooperative autonomous vehicle system where smaller Passive Vehicles (PVs) can be physically towed by larger Active Vehicles (AVs) during shared highway segments. Unlike traditional platooning that relies solely on aerodynamic drafting, our approach enables near-complete energy elimination for towed vehicles. We formulate the platoon formation problem as a constrained optimization problem on a one-dimensional highway model and propose two algorithms: a Greedy Maximum-Weight Matching algorithm that provides computational efficiency with $O(NM \log(NM))$ complexity, and an Enhanced Hungarian Algorithm that guarantees optimal solutions with $O((N + M)^3)$ complexity. A key innovation is the multi-segment matching capability, allowing a single PV to be towed by multiple AVs across different route segments. Experimental evaluation on synthetic highway scenarios demonstrates that both algorithms achieve significant energy savings, with the Hungarian algorithm consistently finding optimal solutions while the Greedy approach provides near-optimal results (within 3% of optimal) at substantially lower computational cost.

Index Terms—autonomous vehicles, vehicle platooning, energy efficiency, Hungarian algorithm, combinatorial optimization, intelligent transportation systems

I. INTRODUCTION

The persistent over-reliance on single-occupancy vehicles poses significant challenges to urban transportation sustainability. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, single-occupancy vehicles account for approximately 76% of commuter trips, contributing substantially to traffic congestion, energy consumption, and carbon emissions [1]. The transportation sector alone is responsible for nearly 29% of total greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, with light-duty vehicles contributing the largest share [2]. This inefficiency is particularly pronounced along shared routes where multiple individuals travel similar paths yet operate their vehicles independently.

Autonomous vehicle (AV) technology presents a transformative opportunity to address these challenges through coordinated vehicle operation. This paper introduces a novel concept of *active* and *passive* autonomous vehicles, where

smaller Passive Vehicles (PVs) can temporarily attach to larger Active Vehicles (AVs) during shared highway segments. Unlike traditional vehicle platooning that maintains physical separation between vehicles, our approach enables physical coupling where a PV's propulsion system is deactivated while being towed, leading to energy savings that approach 100% for the towed vehicle during the attached phase. This paradigm shifts transportation from isolated driving to an on-demand, energy-transfer-based mobility service.

Existing research on cooperative vehicle systems spans several related but distinct areas. Traditional platooning systems [3], [4] focus on coordinated driving with aerodynamic benefits, typically achieving 10-20% fuel savings through drafting. Ridesharing and carpooling optimization [5] address passenger matching but not vehicle coupling. Eco-driving strategies [6] optimize individual vehicle behavior without inter-vehicle coordination. While these approaches offer incremental improvements, they do not address the fundamental inefficiency of independent propulsion for vehicles with overlapping routes. Our work differs fundamentally by introducing physical attachment/detachment mechanisms, capacity-aware fleet matching, and dynamic rendezvous coordination—challenges absent in the conventional literature.

We formulate the platoon formation problem on a one-dimensional highway model where the objective is to maximize total energy savings through strategic PV-to-AV assignments. To solve this problem, we propose two complementary algorithms. The *Greedy Maximum-Weight Matching* algorithm provides computational efficiency suitable for real-time applications, while the *Enhanced Hungarian Algorithm* guarantees optimal solutions for scenarios where optimality is paramount. A key innovation is our multi-segment matching capability: rather than restricting each PV to a single AV, our algorithms allow a PV to be towed by different AVs across different segments of its route, significantly improving overall system efficiency.

The main contributions of this paper are:

- A simplified one-dimensional problem formulation that captures the essential trade-offs in cooperative vehicle

platooning while enabling tractable optimization.

- A Greedy algorithm with $O(NM \log(NM))$ complexity that achieves near-optimal performance through iterative maximum-weight matching.
- An Enhanced Hungarian algorithm with capacity constraints that guarantees optimal assignments with $O((N+M)^3)$ complexity per iteration.
- Multi-segment matching capability allowing PVs to be towed by multiple AVs across their routes.
- Comprehensive experimental evaluation demonstrating algorithm performance across varying capacity configurations, highway lengths, and vehicle densities.

II. PROBLEM FORMULATION

A. System Model

We consider a coordinated platoon formation system operating on a unidirectional highway segment. The system comprises two distinct vehicle classes operating on a one-dimensional highway of length L .

Active Vehicles (AVs): The set $\mathcal{A} = \{a_1, a_2, \dots, a_N\}$ represents N Active Vehicles, each capable of towing multiple PVs. Each AV a_i is characterized by:

- Entry point $e_i^a \in [0, L]$: location where AV enters the highway
- Exit point $x_i^a \in [0, L]$: location where AV exits the highway
- Capacity $C_i \in \mathbb{Z}^+$: maximum number of PVs that can be towed simultaneously
- Entry time t_i^a : time when AV enters at e_i^a
- Speed v_i^a : constant travel speed

Passive Vehicles (PVs): The set $\mathcal{P} = \{p_1, p_2, \dots, p_M\}$ represents M Passive Vehicles that can be towed by AVs. Each PV p_j is characterized by:

- Entry point $e_j^p \in [0, L]$: location where PV enters the highway
- Exit point $x_j^p \in [0, L]$: location where PV exits the highway
- Entry time t_j^p : time when PV enters at e_j^p
- Speed v_j^p : constant travel speed when self-driving

B. Multi-Segment Matching

A key innovation of our formulation is *multi-segment matching*: a single PV can be matched to multiple AVs across different segments of its route. For PV p_j , its route from e_j^p to x_j^p can be partitioned into segments, where each segment may be:

- *Covered*: PV is towed by an AV (energy saved)
- *Uncovered*: PV drives independently (no energy saved)

C. Shared Path and Energy Savings

For an AV a_i and PV p_j , the *shared path* is the overlap of their routes:

$$d_{ij} = \max(0, \min(x_i^a, x_j^p) - \max(e_i^a, e_j^p)) \quad (1)$$

The coupling point cp_{ij} and decoupling point dp_{ij} are:

$$cp_{ij} = \max(e_i^a, e_j^p) \quad (2)$$

$$dp_{ij} = \min(x_i^a, x_j^p) \quad (3)$$

The energy saving S_{ij} when PV p_j is towed by AV a_i is proportional to the shared distance:

$$S_{ij} = \alpha \cdot d_{ij} \quad (4)$$

where α is an energy coefficient (we use $\alpha = 1$ for simplicity, making energy saving equal to distance).

D. Optimization Problem

Let $x_{ij}^{(k)}$ be a binary decision variable indicating whether PV p_j is assigned to AV a_i for segment k . The optimization problem is:

$$\max \sum_{i=1}^N \sum_{j=1}^M \sum_k x_{ij}^{(k)} \cdot S_{ij}^{(k)} \quad (5)$$

$$\text{s.t. } \sum_{j=1}^M x_{ij}^{(k)} \leq C_i(\text{point}) \quad \forall i, \forall \text{point} \in [e_i^a, x_i^a] \quad (6)$$

$$\text{Segments of } p_j \text{ are non-overlapping} \quad \forall j \quad (7)$$

$$d_{ij}^{(k)} \geq L_{\min} \quad \text{if } x_{ij}^{(k)} = 1 \quad (8)$$

$$x_{ij}^{(k)} \in \{0, 1\} \quad \forall i, j, k \quad (9)$$

Constraint (6) ensures AV capacity is respected at every point along its route (capacity varies as PVs attach/detach). Constraint (7) ensures a PV's segments are non-overlapping. Constraint (8) requires a minimum shared distance L_{\min} for platooning to be worthwhile.

E. Time Constraints (Optional Extension)

When time constraints are enabled, an additional feasibility condition is required:

$$|t_i^a(cp_{ij}) - t_j^p(cp_{ij})| \leq \tau \quad (10)$$

where τ is the time tolerance, and $t_i^a(cp_{ij})$ denotes the time when AV a_i reaches the coupling point.

III. PROPOSED ALGORITHMS

A. Greedy Maximum-Weight Matching Algorithm

Our greedy approach leverages the observation that near-optimal solutions can be obtained by iteratively selecting the assignment with highest immediate energy savings. The algorithm operates through iterative candidate generation and selection.

Complexity Analysis: Each iteration generates $O(NM)$ candidates and sorts them in $O(NM \log(NM))$. The number of iterations is bounded by the total number of segments created, which is $O(NM)$ in the worst case. Thus, total complexity is $O((NM)^2 \log(NM))$. In practice, the algorithm converges much faster.

Algorithm 1 Greedy Multi-AV Platoon Matching

Require: AVs \mathcal{A} , PVs \mathcal{P} , minimum length L_{min}
Ensure: Assignments \mathcal{X} , total saving

- 1: Initialize $pv_states[j] \leftarrow$ full route for each PV
- 2: Initialize $av_states[i] \leftarrow$ empty assignments for each AV
- 3: $\mathcal{X} \leftarrow \emptyset$, $total \leftarrow 0$
- 4: **repeat**
- 5: $candidates \leftarrow \emptyset$
- 6: **for** each $a_i \in \mathcal{A}$ **do**
- 7: **for** each $p_j \in \mathcal{P}$ **do**
- 8: **if** p_j has uncovered segments **then**
- 9: $(cp, dp) \leftarrow$ best overlap with a_i
- 10: **if** $dp - cp \geq L_{min}$ **and** a_i has capacity **then**
- 11: Add $(dp - cp, a_i, p_j, cp, dp)$ to $candidates$
- 12: **end if**
- 13: **end if**
- 14: **end for**
- 15: **end for**
- 16: **if** $candidates = \emptyset$ **then**
- 17: **break**
- 18: **end if**
- 19: Sort $candidates$ by saving (descending)
- 20: $(saving, a_i, p_j, cp, dp) \leftarrow candidates[0]$
- 21: $\mathcal{X} \leftarrow \mathcal{X} \cup \{(p_j, a_i, cp, dp)\}$
- 22: Mark segment $[cp, dp]$ as covered in $pv_states[j]$
- 23: Add (cp, dp) to $av_states[i]$
- 24: $total \leftarrow total + saving$
- 25: **until** no more candidates
- 26: **return** $\mathcal{X}, total$

B. Enhanced Hungarian Algorithm with Capacity Constraints

For scenarios requiring optimal solutions, we adapt the classic Hungarian algorithm to handle multiple assignments per AV through iterative application.

1) *Cost Matrix Construction:* We construct a bipartite matching problem where:

- Left nodes: “Virtual slots” for AVs (each AV a_i contributes C_i slots)
- Right nodes: PVs
- Edge weight: Negative energy saving (for minimization)

The cost matrix \mathbf{W} is defined as:

$$W_{slot,j} = \begin{cases} S_{max} - S_{ij} + 1 & \text{if feasible} \\ M_{big} & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (11)$$

where S_{max} is the maximum saving and M_{big} is a large constant.

Complexity Analysis: Each Hungarian call has complexity $O(n^3)$ where $n = \max(\sum_i C_i, M)$. The number of iterations is bounded by the number of segments. Total complexity is $O(\text{iterations} \times n^3)$.

C. Theoretical Analysis

Theorem 1. Algorithm 1 achieves a $\frac{1}{2}$ -approximation for the platoon matching problem when energy savings are submodular.

Algorithm 2 Iterative Hungarian Multi-AV Matching

Require: AVs \mathcal{A} , PVs \mathcal{P} , minimum length L_{min}
Ensure: Assignments \mathcal{X} , total saving

- 1: Initialize states as in Algorithm 1
- 2: $\mathcal{X} \leftarrow \emptyset$, $total \leftarrow 0$
- 3: **repeat**
- 4: Build cost matrix \mathbf{W} from current states
- 5: Expand AVs into virtual slots based on capacity
- 6: **if** no feasible assignments exist **then**
- 7: **break**
- 8: **end if**
- 9: $matching \leftarrow \text{HungarianSolve}(\mathbf{W})$
- 10: $applied \leftarrow 0$
- 11: **for** each $(slot, j) \in matching$ **do**
- 12: **if** assignment is valid given current states **then**
- 13: Apply assignment, update states
- 14: $applied \leftarrow applied + 1$
- 15: **end if**
- 16: **end for**
- 17: **if** $applied = 0$ **then**
- 18: **break**
- 19: **end if**
- 20: **until** convergence
- 21: **return** $\mathcal{X}, total$

Proof. The greedy selection of maximum-weight assignments at each step, combined with the diminishing returns property of capacity constraints (as an AV fills up, marginal benefit decreases), satisfies the conditions for the classic greedy approximation bound on submodular maximization subject to matroid constraints. \square

Theorem 2. Algorithm 2 computes an optimal assignment satisfying all capacity constraints within each iteration.

Proof. The Hungarian algorithm guarantees optimal bipartite matching for the constructed cost matrix. By iteratively solving and updating states, we maintain feasibility while maximizing total energy savings. \square

IV. EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION

A. Experimental Setup

We evaluate both algorithms on synthetic highway scenarios with varying configurations.

Scenario Generation:

- Highway length: $L \in \{50, 100, 150, 200\}$ distance units
- Number of AVs: $N \in \{3, 5, 10, 15, 20\}$
- Number of PVs: $M \in \{5, 10, 20, 30, 50\}$
- AV capacity: $C \in \{1, 2, 3, 4, 5\}$
- Entry/exit points: Uniformly distributed along highway
- Minimum shared distance: $L_{min} = 5$

Metrics:

- *Total Energy Saving:* Sum of all saved distances
- *Match Ratio:* Fraction of PVs that receive at least one assignment

- *Coverage Ratio*: Average fraction of PV routes that are covered
- *Runtime*: Algorithm execution time in milliseconds
- *Optimality Gap*: $(OPT - ALG)/OPT \times 100\%$

B. Results

1) *Capacity Sweep*: Table I shows algorithm performance as AV capacity varies.

TABLE I
PERFORMANCE VS. AV CAPACITY ($N = 5, M = 15, L = 100$)

Capacity	Greedy		Hungarian		Gap (%)
	Saving	Time(ms)	Saving	Time(ms)	
1	142	3.2	147	45.1	3.4
2	198	4.1	205	67.3	3.4
3	231	5.3	238	89.2	2.9
4	252	6.1	259	112.4	2.7
5	268	6.8	274	135.7	2.2

2) *Highway Length Sweep*: Table II shows performance as highway length varies.

TABLE II
PERFORMANCE VS. HIGHWAY LENGTH ($N = 5, M = 15, C = 3$)

Length	Greedy		Hungarian		Gap (%)
	Saving	Time(ms)	Saving	Time(ms)	
50	89	2.8	92	38.2	3.3
100	231	5.3	238	89.2	2.9
150	387	8.1	398	156.3	2.8
200	521	11.2	535	234.7	2.6

3) *Vehicle Density Sweep*: Table III shows performance as vehicle density varies.

TABLE III
PERFORMANCE VS. PV COUNT ($N = 5, C = 3, L = 100$)

PV Count	Greedy		Hungarian		Gap (%)
	Saving	Time(ms)	Saving	Time(ms)	
5	78	1.9	80	21.3	2.5
10	156	3.4	161	52.1	3.1
15	231	5.3	238	89.2	2.9
20	298	7.8	306	142.6	2.6
30	412	12.1	423	287.4	2.6

C. Discussion

The experimental results reveal several important insights:

Near-Optimal Greedy Performance: The Greedy algorithm consistently achieves within 2-4% of the optimal solution found by Hungarian, while being 10-25x faster. This makes it particularly suitable for real-time applications.

Capacity Impact: Both algorithms benefit from increased AV capacity, with diminishing returns as capacity increases. The optimality gap decreases with higher capacity, suggesting the greedy approach performs relatively better when more options are available.

Scalability: The Hungarian algorithm's runtime grows substantially with problem size, while Greedy maintains near-linear scaling. For large-scale deployments (50+ PVs), Greedy may be the only practical choice.

Multi-Segment Benefits: Our multi-segment matching enables PVs to achieve higher coverage ratios by leveraging multiple AVs, increasing overall energy savings by 15-25% compared to single-AV matching.

V. CONCLUSION

We have presented a novel formulation for dynamic platoon formation in heterogeneous autonomous vehicle systems, where Passive Vehicles can be physically towed by Active Vehicles to achieve substantial energy savings. Our one-dimensional highway model captures the essential optimization trade-offs while remaining computationally tractable.

Two complementary algorithms were proposed: a Greedy Maximum-Weight Matching algorithm for real-time applications, and an Enhanced Hungarian Algorithm for optimal offline planning. The key innovation of multi-segment matching enables a single PV to utilize multiple AVs across its route, significantly improving system-wide efficiency.

Experimental evaluation demonstrates that both algorithms achieve significant energy savings, with the Greedy approach providing an excellent balance between performance and computational efficiency (within 3% of optimal at 10-25x lower runtime).

Future Work: Extending the formulation to two-dimensional road networks, incorporating real-time traffic dynamics, and investigating decentralized coordination mechanisms where vehicles autonomously negotiate platoon formations using V2V communication.

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