Project Proposal for DS 340W

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***Abstract*—(Logan Camacho) This project intends to pinpoint road segments within the state of Pennsylvania that carry a significantly higher proportion of car accidents, with predictions based on past car crash data in conjunction with mapped out traffic volume data.**

I. Introduction (Logan Camacho)

ACROSS the 67 counties located within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania span 120,000 miles of state and locally owned roads and highways. [1] Accidents are a daily occurrence in today's car-centric infrastructure of America, so tracking and reporting crash rates is a trivial matter. In order to maximize civilian safety and protection statewide, a more in-depth analysis is necessary when considering the daily traffic volume. We are proposing that to spread awareness on road safety and accident prevention, we will be using the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) car crash data from 2024 in conjunction with PennDOT traffic and mapping data made with ArcGIS to find which areas have the worst crash rate in comparison to its daily traffic volume, what justifies the severity rate of the crashes in these areas, as well as using other factors such as speed limits and seasonal changes can reduce/increase the rate of accidents in these high-volume areas.

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II. Purpose of the project (Jacob Gavin)

The purpose of this project is to perform a comprehensive analysis of traffic accident data in the 67 counties of Pennsylvania to uncover patterns and underlying trends that contribute to road danger. Although traffic accidents are recorded and summarized by the state, these reports often lack the context of traffic volume, seasonal factors, and environmental factors that can increase risk. By integrating PennDOT crash records with traffic volume data and geospatial tools such as ArcGIS, this project aims to identify road segments and intersections that are disproportionately prone to accidents.

Beyond simple identification of high-risk areas, this project seeks to examine the contributing variables that define these zones, such as speed limits, lighting conditions, weather and seasonal fluctuations, and temporal patterns such as time of day or weekday vs. weekend. The goal is not only to highlight where crashes are most frequent, but also to determine why these areas are more hazardous, and what features they share.

Ultimately, the purpose of the project is to generate actionable insights that can inform decision-making by transportation planners, engineers, policymakers, and even the drivers themselves. By translating raw data into meaningful patterns, the project aims to provide a framework for interventions that improve safety, inform infrastructure investment, and reduce injuries and fatalities on Pennsylvania roads.

III. Beneficiaries of the project (Jacob Gavin)

This project is intended to benefit drivers in Pennsylvania. Although some of the insights gained from this project may not by themselves be usable by PA drivers, the insights may help to inform state and local policymakers to make decisions that are in the best interest of PA drivers. Ensuring the safety of drivers is a non-partisan issue that is unlikely to be subject to bias by decision makers. For example, suppose it is discovered that there are twice the number of accidents on a particular intersection in the winter months than there are in the summer months. In that case, it may suggest that additional investment needs to be made into winterizing the roads, with perhaps better rock salt coverage, better lighting, or something else.

The goal of this project will be to uncover the underlying trends in accident data, to see if there are any actions that can be taken to the benefit of Pennsylvania drivers, to ensure their safety on roads throughout the state and throughout the seasons. In addition, emergency responders and public health officials could find value in the project's results. By anticipating accident hotspots and understanding the underlying causes, emergency services can optimize their preparation, potentially reducing response times and improving outcomes for accident victims.

The broader community, including businesses and residents of areas where high accident rates are, will benefit from safer roads and fewer accidents. Reduced crash rates can lead to lower insurance premiums and decreased traffic congestion. Overall, the approach of this project ensures that its benefits extend well beyond individual drivers, supporting the safety of anyone who lives or works in Pennsylvania

IV. Anticipated Technical Challenges (Sam Adebayo)

Despite the fact that we will be working with a smaller data set, which being either all of PA or certain sections of PA, we will still face challenges in regards to the sizes of our datasets, how we would map things like road size or traffic congestion, the different variables used for different accident and vehicle types, sorting out location data, etc. Despite this, we can still look at prior papers to see how to move forward, which will be displayed here.

Looking at previous studies, we found that, while complex, solving issues and creating models related to an issue as complex as traffic and accident data is not impossible. One such example comes from [2] at Iowa University, where they took data across the state of Iowa and did the following: "We impose a spatial grid S on the study area, where each grid *s(i)* represents a $d \times d$ square region. For example, if d = *5km*, the entire state of Iowa can be partitioned into 128 × 64 grids". While this may be a bit more intensive, this is definitely something we can think of doing, considering the fact that our dataset does come with coordinates for the crashes, which we could possibly map in a similar fashion. Deciding where to go with that data should also be easier, since plotting it should give us a better representation of clusters of data and where we should focus. I believe that looking for and finding more research papers related to traffic and accident reports could help us narrow down tactics we could use to interpret and move forward with the data.

The more prominent problem comes in the form of our data and is very apparent when you take a quick glance at it. There are a multitude of variables that we are dealing with, from accident type, to the types of vehicle involved, the time of day and location, number of people injured or involved in the accident, so on, and so forth. We obviously do not plan to use the raw datasets in their entirety, but having to narrow them down for our specific needs will be a large task on its own. Besides this, we may have to edit our final data set because one variable was shown to have no significance, or maybe we missed a variable that could have drastically altered the data for the better. There is a possibility that some of the data we have could be very redundant, which could also hurt any model we decide to make. Overall, we just need to carefully look over our data sets and select which variables we believe will have the largest impact in our model and go from there.

V. Initial Solution framework and Implementation plan (Logan Camacho)

Traffic data analysis is an area that our team has not previously explored, so we aim to gain a deeper understanding of the crash data and familiarize ourselves with ArcGIS mapping software to extract traffic risks that contribute to increased crash frequency. Understanding how these crash hotspots occur is imperative to determining where they have the highest likelihood of appearing on the road.

Not only does this involve combing through the datasets for the extractable features and any formatting errors, but also reading the associated PennDOT documentation to further our contextual foundation on the subject matter. With the correlation between tables, table joins, and organizational column additions, this alludes to our team setting the definitive features and response variables for each stage of testing. Once the variables are segmented, we should be entering week 6 of this project as the beginning of model training and looping between variable-model combinations before increasing scale.

To prepare the model for statewide applications, it is in our best interest to begin training using simpler models with fewer iterations before increasing model complexity and region area. This is combined with the variable interpretation previously mentioned to maximize model performance to scale. This performance-at-scale optimization, combined with the preliminary evaluation of models, will mark a positive milestone for week nine. The more time allotted to handling visualization plans for the final presentation, the better off our team will be throughout this project.

References

[1] Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, "2024 pennsylvania crash facts & statistics," Bureau of Operations – Crash Information Systems and Analysis Unit, Harrisburg, PA, Tech. Rep., 2025, accessed: 2025-09-11. [Online]. Available: https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/penndot/documents/travelinpa/safety/documents/2024_cfb_linked.pdf

[2] Z. Yuan, X. Zhou, and T. Yang, "Hetero-convlstm: A deep learning approach to traffic accident prediction on heterogeneous spatio-temporal data," in *Proceedings of the 24th ACM SIGKDD International Conference on Knowledge Discovery & Data Mining*, ser. KDD '18. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery, 2018, p. 984–992. [Online]. Available: https://doi.org/10.1145/3219819.3219922