

When machines talk. A data challenge by SNCB-NMBS

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The challenge proposed here, shares some real life data and problem to students. By carefully using statistics/ML methods and carefully handcrafting algorithms, you have the opportunity to contribute to the maintenance processes of *your*¹ railway vehicles. The impact on the long term is expected to be on the reliability of our service - at nationwide scale.

¹as of today, we are still a public company



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from raw sensor data to states

Recent railway vehicles are equipped with sensors on most of their subsystems such as pantographs, traction converters, doors, heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC), European Train Control System (ETCS)², etc. which report some states via a wired network to a central on-board computer. The latter typically transmits some of these states or combinations of these states as tokens to a cloud service over a cellular network.

²the ETCS helps drivers to operate the trains safely 

from states to tokens and events

The tokenized states are often nominated as *information codes* (e.g. door 1 is open) or *fault codes* (e.g. battery temperature is too high) and represent *events* that happen on-board the vehicles.



machines talk

A loose analogy with human language can be made. Information and fault codes could be seen as the vocabulary of railway vehicles (*or any machine*) and the more there are, the more expressive the vehicle language will be. However, this language is far from being trivial and requires time for humans to learn it.



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A real life problem

On a daily basis, we receive thousands of sequences of events from thousands of vehicles. Since machines tend to degrade, sometimes technical failures appear. In this challenge, we provide a labeled dataset of sequence of events with technical incident types. The main challenges are to,

- find sub sequences of events (scenarios) that seem to be highly associated to some types of incidents
- automatically suggest incident types based on new sequences of events

Both results are useful for railway vehicles maintenance technicians!



Main columns of the dataset

The sequences-lists are synchronized,

- **incident id**: this is the ID of an incident
- **vehicle sequence**: this list contains a sequence of vehicle IDs that have reported an event. When more than one unique vehicle appears in this list, it means the vehicles were coupled together.
- **events sequence**: this list contains the sequence of events reported by each vehicle in the **vehicle sequence**.
- **seconds to incident sequence**: this list contains the time in seconds to the incident for each event in **events sequence**. Negative numbers are events that happen before the incident and positive numbers represent events that happen after and incident.

Extra columns of the dataset

Some extra context is provided. It is not mandatory to leverage this data, but interesting to see how you could use it,

- **approx lat, approx lon**: mean event sequence GPS position.
- **train kph sequence**: this list contains the train speed (in kilometers per hour) estimation for each event of **events sequence**.
- **dj dc state sequence**: this list contains the state of the DC switch (boolean) for each event of **events sequence**.
- **dj ac state sequence**: this list contains the state of the AC switch (boolean) for each event of **events sequence**.

Infrastructure power lines in Belgium are typically either 3kV DC or 25kV AC. The state of the switches tell us wheter a given vehicle is in a state that can capture a DC or an AC component. When none are active, the vehicle is powered on batteries only: some communication and light systems can be powered but no traction can be supplied.



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Insights

At SNCB-NMBS, we casted the problem as a classification task using events happening 10min after incident and up to 4 hours before an incident. Our algorithm reaches an F1-score of around 85%. Added value for us does not come only from trying to do better - we are as much interested **in the methods and approaches you imagine to solve the problem.**

