6.5 Static Obstacles and Constraints

Introduction: The static obstacles were used in original concept [1], the Avoidance Grid and Movement Automaton were repurposed to enable finite time deterministic avoidance. An Constraint based path search and obstacle modeling is summarized in [2].

This section is handling basic problems of *static obstacle* detection and its focused on following real-world fixed position threats:

- 1. Static Obstacles detected by LiDAR sensor or fused from Obstacle Map information source.
- 2. Geo-fencing Areas defined by offline/online information source as permanent flight restriction zones. There is usually no physical obstacle. The space is considered as hard/soft constraint.
- 3. Long-term bad weather Areas the weather is changing often (hour period), there are weather events which lasts for hours or days.

Changing Scanning Density of LiDAR: A LiDAR sensor is scanning in conic section given by distanceRange, horizontalRange, verticalRange, where distance range is in interval [0, maxDistance], horizontal offset range is in [-pi, pi], and vertical offset range is in $[\varphi_s, \varphi_e]$.

Let say that $\partial horizontal^{\circ}$, $\partial vertical^{\circ}$ is unitary angle offset in which one LiDAR send and return is executed. That means the LiDAR ray is sent every $\partial horizontal^{\circ}$, $\partial vertical^{\circ}$ offset movement. The LiDAR ray density is decreasing with distance offset. The same amount of LiDAR rays passes trough $cell_{i,j,k}$ in Avoidance Grid.

The surface of area given by some distance d, and unitary offsets $\partial horizontal^{\circ}$, $\partial vertical^{\circ}$ is changing with distance. The minimal triggering area of object surface is not changing. This fact has an impact on count of the hits on object surface.

The example is given in (fig. 6.1) where we have two identical objects (red circle) in distances 5 and 10 meters. The closer object consumes 5 LiDAR beam hits and the farther object consumes only 3 LiDAR beam hits. The probability of obstacle encounter is remaining the same for closer and farther object. The *detected obstacle rate* assessment should return the same detected obstacle collision rate for objects with same scanned surface (with different LiDAR ray hit count).

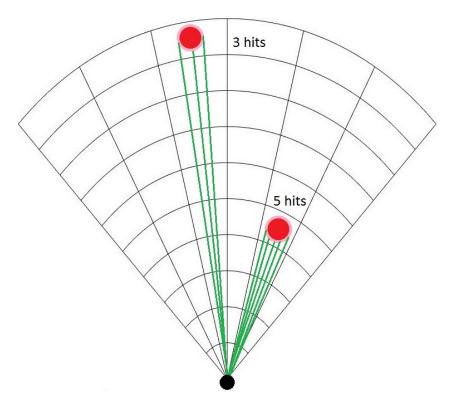


Figure 6.1: Different count of LiDAR hits with different distance from UAS.

Map and Detected Obstacles Fusion: The concept of offline/online obstacle map is mandatory in modern obstacle avoidance systems and increases the safety of navigation/avoidance path. The older concept was considering only LiDAR reading or real-time sensor readings in general [1].

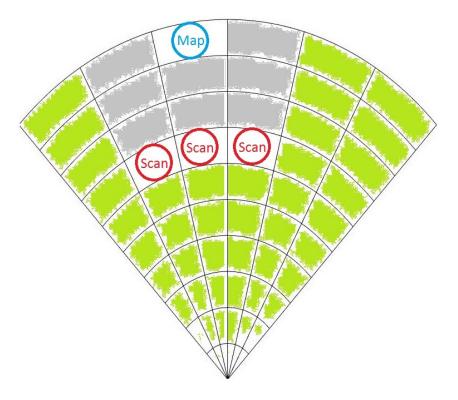


Figure 6.2: Overshadowed map obstacle by detected obstacles.

The fusion of real time sensor readings and obstacle map (prior knowledge) is required. Data fusion of these two sources is strongly depending on visibility property, because there are three basic scenarios:

- 1. Dual detection the obstacle is marked on the map and detected by sensory system at some point of the time (older concept works).
- 2. *Hindered vision* the detected obstacles are hindering vision to map obstacle therefore map obstacle uncertainty arises (older concept fails).
- 3. False-positive map map obstacle occupied space is visible by sensory system, but negative detection is returned. Therefore the map is giving false-positive information.

The second case is given in fig. 6.2, where map obstacle (blue circle) is overshadowed by three scanned obstacles (red circle). The visible space is denoted by green fill, the invisible space is denoted by gray fill.

6.5.1 Detected Obstacles

Idea: The *visibility* inside avoidance grid and *obstacle* probability are interconnected for most ranging sensors (ex. LiDAR). The goal of this section is to introduce *visibility hindrance* concept which includes space uncertainty assessment and detected obstacle processing.

Detected Obstacle Rating: The detected obstacle rating defines UAS chances to encounter detected obstacle in avoidance grid $cell_{i,j,k}$. Final detected obstacle rating is merged information (eq. ??). The sensor field can contain multiple static obstacle sensors.

Detected Obstacle Rate for LiDAR: ,Lets have only one sensor set as homogeneous two axis rotary LiDAR. For one $cell_{i,j,k}$ there exists set of passing LiDAR beams:

$$lidarRays(cell_{i,j,k}) = \begin{cases} \begin{bmatrix} horizontal^{\circ} \in horizontalOffsets, \\ vertical^{\circ} \in verticalOffsets \end{bmatrix} \in \mathbb{R}^{2} : \\ horizontal^{\circ} \in cell_{i,j,k}.horizontalRange, \\ vertical^{\circ} \in cell_{i,j,k}.verticalRange \end{cases}$$
 (6.1)

The horizontal and vertical offset of LiDAR ray is homogeneous. Meaning the horizontal/vertical distances between each two neighbouring LiDAR beams are equal.

The set $lidarRays(cell_{i,j,k})$ (eq. 6.1) is finite countable and nonempty for any $c_{i,j,k}$, otherwise it will contradict the definition of avoidance grid (def. ??).

The hit function lidarScan() returns a distance of single beam return for beam with dislocation $[horizontal^{\circ}, vertical^{\circ}] \in lidarRays(cell_{i,j,k})$ angle offsets. The set of LiDAR hits (eq. 6.2) in cell $cell_{i,j,k}$ is defined like follow:

$$lidarHits(cell_{i,j,k}) = \begin{cases} distance = lidarScan(), \\ horizontal^{\circ} \in horizontalOffsets, \\ vertical^{\circ} \in verticalOffsets \end{cases} \in \mathbb{R}^{2} : \\ distance \in cell_{i,j,k}.distanceRange, \\ horizontal^{\circ} \in cell_{i,j,k}.horizontalRange, \\ vertical^{\circ} \in cell_{i,j,k}.verticalRange \end{cases}$$
 (6.2)

The *naive* obstacle rate in case of LiDAR sensor defined as ratio between landed hits and possible hits:

$$obstacle_{cell_{i,j,k}}^{LiDAR} = \frac{lidarHits(cell_{i,j,k})}{lidarRays(cell_{i,j,k})}$$

$$(6.3)$$

Note. The naive obstacle rate (eq. 6.3) ignores that LiDAR rays are getting more far apart from each other. The cell surface is increasing with cell distance from UAS.

The hindrance (eq. 6.4) rate is naturally defined as supplement to naive obstacle rate. This definition is sufficient, because its reflecting the *remaining sensing capability* of LiDAR.

$$hindrance_{cell_{i,j,k}}^{LiDAR} = 1 - \frac{lidarHits(cell_{i,j,k})}{lidarRays(cell_{i,j,k})}$$
(6.4)

Cell Density Function: Let's start with differential form of cell surface (eq. ??). The target object have several hits in *Avoidance Grid*. Target $cell_{i,j,k}$ has following properties which are used in surface calculation:

- 1. Horizontal span defines range of horizontal scanner partition.
- 2. Vertical span defines range of vertical scanner partition.

By rewriting (eq. ??) and using horizontal range parameter and inverted vertical range parameter following surface integral is obtained (eq. 6.5).

$$Area(cell_{i,j,k}) = \int_{horizontal_{end}^{\circ}}^{horizontal_{end}^{\circ}} \int_{vertical_{end}^{\circ}}^{vertical_{start}^{\circ}} radius^{2} \cos(vertical^{\circ}) \quad dvertical^{\circ} dhorizontal^{\circ} \quad (6.5)$$

Note. The radius parameter is average distance of hits landed in $cell_{i,j,k}$. This helps to reflect real scanned surface.

Numerically stable integration exist for boundaries horizontal $in[-\pi,\pi]$, vertical \in $\left[-\frac{\pi}{2},\frac{\pi}{2}\right]$ given as follow:

 $Area(radius, horizontalRange, vertical_{start}^{\circ}, vertical_{end}^{\circ}) = \dots$

$$rea(raaias, norizontal Range, vertical_{start}, vertical_{end}) = \dots$$

$$= \begin{cases} vertical_{start}^{\circ} < 0, vertical_{end}^{\circ} \leq 0 : \\ radius^{2}(\sin|vertical_{start}^{\circ}| - \sin|vertical_{end}^{\circ}|) \times horizontal Range) \\ vertical_{start}^{\circ} < 0, vertical_{end}^{\circ} > 0 : \\ r^{2}(\sin|vertical_{start}^{\circ}| + \sin|vertical_{end}^{\circ}|) \times horizontal Range) \\ vertical_{start}^{\circ} \geq 0 vertical_{end}^{\circ} < 0 : \\ r^{2}(\sin|vertical_{end}^{\circ}| - \sin|vertical_{start}^{\circ}|) \times horizontal Range) \end{cases}$$

$$(6.6)$$

An intersection surface for cell is defined in (eq. 6.6). Area covered by LiDAR hits (eq. 6.7) is defined as LiDAR hit rate (hits to passing rays ratio) multiplied by Average cell intersection surface (eq. 6.6).

$$lidarHitArea(cell_{i,j,k}) = \frac{lidarHits(cell_{i,j,k})}{lidarRays(cell_{i,j,k})} \times Area \begin{pmatrix} radius, horizontalRange, \\ vertical_{start}^{\circ}, vertical_{end}^{\circ} \end{pmatrix}$$
(6.7)

There is user defined parameter for LiDAR treshold area, which represents minimal considerable surface area for obstacle to be threat. The detected obstacle rate considering surface is defined in (eq. 6.8) and it removes bias of naive approach (eq.6.3).

$$obstacle(LiDAR, cell_{i,j,k}) = \min \left\{ \frac{lidarHitArea(cell_{i,j,k})}{UAS.lidarThresholdArea}, 1 \right\}$$
(6.8)

Visibility Rate for LiDAR: For each $cell_{i,j,k}$ and each sensor in sensor field there exist hindrance rate, which defines how much vision is clouded in single cell. Example of hindrance calculation for LiDAR has been given by (eq. 6.4). Let us consider cell row $cellRow(j_{fix}, k_{fix})$ with fixed horizontal index j_fix and vertical index k_{fix} is given as series of cells (eq. 6.9).

$$cellRow(j_{fix}, k_{fix}) = \left\{ cell_{i,j,k} \in AvoidanceGrid : i \in \{1, .., layersCount\}, \atop j = j_{fix}, k = k_{fix} \right\}$$
(6.9)

For each $cell_{i,j,k}$ there exists a function which calculates final visibility hindrance rate. Then for ordered cell row:

$$cellRow(j_{fix}, k_{fix}) = \{cell_{1, j_{fix}, k_{fix}}, cell_{2, j_{fix}, k_{fix}}, \dots, cell_{layersCount, j_{fix}, k_{fix}}\}$$

and for one selected $cell_{i,j,k}$ the visibility rate is naturally defined as a supplement to

hindrance from previous cells. The visibility is defined in (eq. 6.10).

$$visibility(cell_{i_c,j_c,k_c}) = \dots$$

$$\dots = 1 - \sum_{index \in \mathbb{N}^+}^{index < i_c} hindrance(cell_{a,j_c,k_c} : cell_{a,j_c,k_c} \in cellRow(j_c,k_c) \quad (6.10)$$

Example: Let be $cell_{4,j_{fix},k_{fix}}$ is selected for visibility rate assessment, then $cell_{1,j_{fix},k_{fix}}$, $cell_{2,j_{fix},k_{fix}}$, and $cell_{3,j_{fix},k_{fix}}$, are used as a base of cumulative hindrance rate.

The cumulative hindrance rate for any $cellRow(j_{fix},k_{fix})$ is bounded:

$$0 \le \sum_{cell \in cellRow(j_{fix}, k_{fix})} visibility(cell) \le 1$$
(6.11)

Note. A cumulative hindrance rate does not always reach 1 in case of LiDAR sensor, because some rays may pass or hit after leaving avoidance grid range.

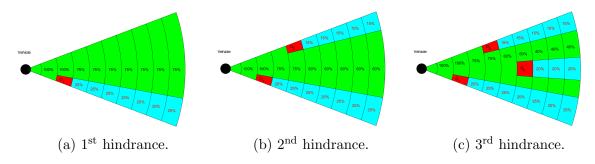


Figure 6.3: Obstacle hindrance impact on visibility in *Avoidance Grid Slice*.

For one cell row $cellRow(j_{fix}, k_{fix})$, where count of layers is equal to 10, and layers have equal spacing. There is LiDAR sensor

During consequent LiDAR scans $s(t_0)$, $s(t_1)$, $s(t_2)$, and $s(t_3)$ the obstacle sets $\mathcal{O}_1(t_1) = \{o_1\}$, $\mathcal{O}_2(t_2) = \{o_1, o_2\}$, and $\mathcal{O}_3(t_3) = \{o_1, o_2, o_3\}$ are discovered. Assigned hindrance rates are like follow:

- 1. Time t_0 there is no obstacle nor hindrance, all cells are fully visible.
- 2. Time t_1 (fig. 6.3a) $\mathcal{O}_1(t_1) = \{o_1\}$ was detected, the hindrance rate for $cell_{3,j_{fix},k_{fix}}$) is equal to 0.25. The visibility rate in cells $cells_{4-10,j_{fix},k_{fix}}$ is 0.75.
- 3. Time t_2 (fig. 6.3b) $\mathcal{O}_2(t_2) = \{o_1, o_2\}$ was detected, the additional hindrance rate for $cell_{5,j_{fix},k_{fix}}$ is 0.15. The visibility rate in $cells_{6-10,j_{fix},k_{fix}}$ is lowered by additional 0.15 and its set to 0.60 now.
- 4. Time t_3 (fig. 6.3c) $\mathcal{O}_3(t_3) = \{o_1, o_2, o_3\}$ was detected the additional hindrance rate for $cell_{7,j_{fix},k_{fix}}$ is 0.20. The visibility rate in $cells_{8-10,j_{fix},k_{fix}}$ is lowered by additional 0.20 and its set to 0.40 now.

6.5.2 Map Obstacles

Idea: Use *stored LiDAR readings* from previous mission to build an compact obstacle map [3]. Then use *this map* as a additional information source.

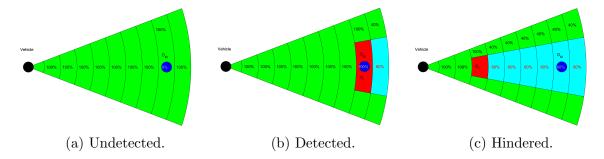


Figure 6.4: Map obstacle states after *Data fusion*.

Concept: A map obstacle state has very simple logic, there are three possible cases:

- 1. Undetected Map obstacle O_M is charted on map (fig. 6.4a), but is undetected by any sensor in sensor field, therefore the probability of map obstacle occurrence is equal to 0.
- 2. Detected Map obstacle O_M is charted on map and detected by any sensor in sensor field (fig. 6.4b). The map obstacle rate is equal to detected obstacle rate, usually its equal to 1.
- 3. Hindered Map obstacle O_M is hindered behind other detected obstacle O_1 (fig. 6.4c). The detected obstacle O_1 is in $cell_{i,j,k}$ and is reducing visibility in follow up $cellRow_{i_f>i,j,k}$ by 60 percent.

Implementation: The formulation of final map obstacle rate $map(cell_{i,j,k})$ was outlined in previous examples. These examples are showing the *desired behaviour* and its solved by *data fusion* (sec. ??).

First we start with obstacle map definition. The obstacle map (eq. 6.12) defines an map obstacle set of information vectors with position in global coordinate frame, orientation bounded to global coordinate reference frame, safety margin and additional parameters.

$$obstacleMap = \left\{ \begin{bmatrix} position, \\ orientation, \\ safetyMargin, \\ parameters \end{bmatrix} \begin{array}{l} position \in \mathbb{R}^{3}(GCF), \\ orientation \in \mathbb{R}^{3}(GCF), \\ safetyMargin \in \mathbb{R}^{+}(m), \\ parameters \in \{...\} \end{array} \right\}$$

$$(6.12)$$

The Map Obstacle concept is taken from my master student work [3], implementing compact representation of point-cloud obstacle map. Te example of cuboid obstacles with safe zone is given in (fig. 6.5).

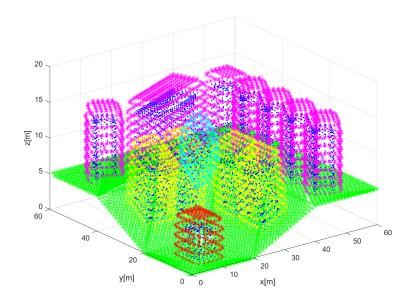


Figure 6.5: Example of Extracted Map Obstacle [3].

The space covered by any obstacle is non-empty by definition. There are following types of map charted obstacles which are implemented in framework:

- 1. Ball obstacle parameters = \varnothing simple ball with center at position, with offset safety margin.
- 2. Line obstacle parameters = [length] simple line bounded by length $\in]0, \infty[$ with center at position and given orientation with respect to main axis in global coordinate frame, with safety margin < 0.
- 3. Plane obstacle parameters = [length, width] bounded rectangle plane partition defined by length $\in]0, \infty[$, and width $w \in]0, \infty[$ with center at \vec{p} and given orientation \vec{o} with respect to main axis in global coordinate frame, with safety margin.
- 4. Cuboid obstacle parameters = [length, width, depth] bounded cuboid space partition defined by length $\in]0, \infty[$, width $\in]0, \infty[$, and depth $d \in]0, \infty[$ with center at position and rotated in orientation with respect to main axis in global coordinate frame, with safety margin.

The map obstacles are stored in clustered database. The selection criterion is given in (eq. 6.13).

 $avoidanceGrid.radius \ge distance(UAS.position, mapObstacle) - totalMargin~~(6.13)$

The total margin is combination of safety margin and body margin (in case of line, plane, cuboid obstacle). The selection was implemented as standard cluster select, selecting 26 surrounding clusters around UAS + own UAS cluster.

The *compact obstacle representation* is transformed into homogeneous point-cloud representations:

1. Body Point-cloud - representing obstacle body approximation by geometrical shape (eq. 6.14). This point cloud is considered as hard constraints.

$$bodyPointCloud = \{point \in \mathbb{R}^3(GCF) : point \in mapObstacleBody\}$$
 (6.14)

2. Safety Margin Point Cloud - representing safety coating around mapped obstacle body approximation (eq. 6.15). This point cloud is considered as soft constraint.

$$marginPointCloud = \{point \in \mathbb{R}^3(GCF) : point \in mapSafetyMargin\}$$
 (6.15)

Note. The safety margin point cloud is hollow in relationship to an body point cloud, therefore:

$$bodyPointCloud \cap marginPointCloud = \varnothing$$

The map obstacle discretization to point cloud leads to problem how to calculate impact rate. The theoretical impact rate for obstacle is given as:

$$impactRate = \frac{volume(mapObstacle \cap cell_{i,j,k})}{volume(cell_{i,j,k})} \in [0, 1]$$

The map obstacle related point clouds (eq. 6.14, 6.15) are homogeneous [3]. That means each point in point clouds covers similar portion of object volume. There is threshold volume (eq. 6.16) which represents minimal object volume to be considered as an obstacle.

$$0 < thresholdVolume \le \frac{volume(pointCloud)}{|pointCloud|}$$
(6.16)

The *impact rate* of one point when intersecting a $cell_{i,j,k}$ is given as count of threshold obstacle bodies in point cloud covered mass multiplied by inverted point count (eq. 6.17).

$$point.rate = \frac{pointCloudVolume}{thresholdVolume} \times \frac{1}{|pointCloud|}$$
(6.17)

The intersection set between point cloud and $cell_{i,j,k}$ is defined in (eq. 6.17). The cell intersection with points is defined in (eq. ??).

$$intersection(map, cell_{i,j,k}) = \dots$$

 $\dots \{points \in \mathbb{R}^3 : (point \to AvoidanceGridFrame) \in cell_{i,j,k}\}$ (6.18)

The map obstacle rating for $cell_{i,j,k}$ and obstacle for our information source is defined in (eq. 6.19).

$$map(cell_{i,j,k}, obstacle) = \max \left\{ \sum_{\forall point \in intersection(map, cell_{i,j,k})} point.rate, 1 \right\}$$
 (6.19)

The map obstacle rating for $cell_{i,j,k}$ and our information source is given as maximum of all possible cumulative ratings form each obstacle in active map obstacles set (eq. 6.20).

$$map(cell_{i,j,k} = \max \{ map(cell_{i,j,k}, obstacle) : \forall obstacle \in Active MapObstacles \}$$
 (6.20)

Note. The body point clouds (eq. 6.14) never intersects, because they are created for inclusive obstacles. The safety margin point clouds (eq. 6.15) can intersects, because they represents protection zones around physical obstacles. Therefore the maximum obstacle rating (eq. 6.20) needs to be selected.

6.5.3 Static Constraints

Idea: The *constraints* (ex. weather, airspace) usually covers large portion of the *operation airspace*.

Converting constraints into valued point-cloud is not feasible, due the huge amount of created points and low intersection rate. The polygon intersection or circular boundary of 2D polygon is simple and effective solution [4, 5].

The key idea is to create *constraint barrels* around dangerous areas. Each *constraint barrel* is defined by circle on *horizontal plane* and *vertical limit range*.

Representation: The *minimal representation* is based on (sec. ??, ??) and geo-fencing principle. The *horizontal-vertical separation* is ensured by *projecting boundary* as 2D polygon oh horizontal plane and *vertical boundary* (barrel height) as *altitude limit*.

The static constraint (eq. 6.21) is defined as structure vector including:

- 1. Position the center position in global coordinates 2D horizontal plane.
- 2. Boundary the ordered set of boundary points forming edges in global coordinates 2D horizontal plane.
- 3. Altitude Range the barometric altitude range [altitude $_{start}$, altitude $_{end}$].
- 4. Safety Margin the protection zone (soft constraint) around constraint body (hard constraints) in meters.

$$constraint = \{position, boundary, altitude_{start}, altitude_{end}, safetyMargin\}$$
 (6.21)

Active constraints selection: The active constraints are constraints which are impacting UAS active avoidance range.

The active constraints set (eq. 6.22) is defined as set of constraints from all reliable Information Sources where the the distance between UAS and constraint body (including safety margin) is lesser than the avoidance grid range. The horizontal altitude range of avoidance grid musts also intersect with constraint altitude range.

 $ActiveConstraints = \dots$

$$\cdots = \begin{cases} constraint \in InformationSource : \\ distance(constraint, UAS) \leq AvoidanceGrid.distance, \\ constraint.altitudeRange \cap UAS.altitudeRange \neq \varnothing \end{cases}$$
 (6.22)

Cell Intersection: The importance of constraints is on their impact on avoidance grid cells. The most of the constraints (weather, ATC) are represented as 2D convex polygons. Even the irregularly shaped constraints are usually split into smaller convex 2D polygons.

The idea is to represent convex polygon boundary as sufficiently large circle to cover polygon. The Welzl algorithm to find minimal polygon cover circle [5] is used.

First the set of contraint edges (eq. 6.23) is a enclosed set of 2D edges between neighboring points defined as follow:

$$edges(constraint) = \left\{ \begin{bmatrix} point \in boundary, \\ [point_i, point_j] : i \in \{1, \dots, |boundary|\}, \\ j \in \{2, \dots, |boundary|, 1\} \end{bmatrix} \right\}$$
(6.23)

The *constraint circle boundary* with calculated center on 2D horizontal plane and radius (representing body margin) is defined in (eq. 6.24).

$$circle(constraint) = \begin{bmatrix} center = \frac{\sum boundary.point}{|boundary.point|} + correction \\ radius = smallestCircle(edges(constraints)) \end{bmatrix}$$
(6.24)

The $(cell_{i,j,k})$ and constraint intersection (eq. 6.25) is classification function. The classification is necessary, because one constraint induce:

- 1. Body Constraint (hard constraint) the distance between $cell_{i,j,k}$ closest border and circular boundary center is in interval [0, radius].
- 2. Protection Zone Constraint (soft constraint) the distance between $cell_{i,j,k}$ closest border and *circular boundary* center is in interval [radius, radius + safetyMargin].

intersection, constraint) =

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{thersection, constraint}) = \dots \\ & \text{hard} \quad : \begin{bmatrix} distance(cell_{i,j,k}, circle(constraint)) \leq \dots \\ & \dots \leq circle(constraint).radius, \\ & constraint.altitudeRange \cap cell_{i,j,k}.altitudeRange \neq \varnothing, \end{bmatrix} \\ & \dots = \begin{cases} distance(cell_{i,j,k}, circle(constraint)) > \dots \\ & \dots > circle(constraint).radius, \\ & distance(cell_{i,j,k}, circle(constraint)) \leq \dots \\ & \dots \leq circle(constraint).radius + safetyMargin, \\ & constraint.altitudeRange \cap cell_{i,j,k}.altitudeRange \neq \varnothing, \end{bmatrix} \end{aligned}$$

The intersection impact of constraint is handled separately for soft and hard constraints. The avoidance of hard constraints is mandatory, the avoidance of soft constraints is voluntary.

The constraints which have an soft intersection with cell are added to cells impacting constraints set:

$$cell_{i,j,k}.softConstraints = \begin{cases} constraint \in ActiveConstraints : \\ intersection(cell_{i,j,k}, constraint) = soft \end{cases}$$
 (6.26)

The constraints which have an hard intersection with cell are added to cells impacting constraints set:

$$cell_{i,j,k}.hardConstraints = \begin{cases} constraint \in ActiveConstraints : \\ intersection(cell_{i,j,k}, constraint) = hard \end{cases}$$
 (6.27)

Note. The final constraint rate value (eq. ??) is determined based on mission control run feed to avoidance grid (fig. ??) defined in 7th to 10th step.

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