Research paper

Development of an integrated real-time scour monitoring system using AI-powered cameras, flow velocity sensors, and geophysical detection techniques.

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Abstract

This research aims to develop an integrated real-time scour monitoring system using artificial intelligence (AI) powered cameras, flow velocity sensors, and geophysical detection techniques.

AI cameras continuously analyse visual data to detect sediment displacement and structural movement, while flow velocity sensors provide critical hydrodynamic data to assess scour potential. Additionally, a geophysical-based detection method, such as ground penetrating radar (GPR) or electrical resistivity tomography (ERT), enables subsurface characterisation of sediment layers and void formation. Geophysical methods including seismic methods to measure the depth of foundations and multibeam echo sounder profiling to characterise scour fill-in and extents, will be considered to optimally site the sonar sensors.

The system utilises data fusion and machine learning algorithms to process multi-sensor data to create a digital twin, enhancing the accuracy and reliability of scour detection by correlating visual, hydrodynamic, and geophysical inputs. Real-time monitoring enables early warnings and predictive insights, reducing the risk of catastrophic failures. Field deployments and laboratory-controlled experiments validate the system's effectiveness in various flow and sediment conditions. The integration of AI-driven analytics with geophysical and hydrodynamic data offers a novel, robust approach to scour detection, which improves infrastructure resilience and safety.

This research contributes to the advancement of smart monitoring systems and allows Network Rail to transform from a reactive, manual inspection regime to a more predictive and proactive approach that benefits the railway, the engineering community, and the wider travelling public.

1. Introduction

Scour, the process of sediment displacement due to hydraulic action, is one of the most significant threats to the structural integrity of railway infrastructure such as bridges, retaining walls and embankments. Over time, scour can remove the riverbed material and undermine support around the foundations of these structures, potentially leading to catastrophic failure of the superstructure. Scour undermining of piers or abutments during floods is the most common cause of bridge failure and can result in loss to life and disruption to transport/economic losses (Kirby et al., 2015).

In the UK, Network Rail own more than 30,000 structures, of which approx. 5,000 of them are directly impacted by water action and a further 4,000 are located on an active floodplain so understanding scour potential is key to managing risks and the safety of the railway.

Climate change is having a measurable effect on the management of assets with greater volumes and flow rates migrating down our river channels. This additional flow and energy is changing the risk profile of structures over rivers and is set to increase risk should predications of climate change continue on the current path. Pregnolato (2019) noted an increase of magnitude and frequency of flood events in recent years, especially around Network Rail assets which the study was looking at.

Traditionally on the railway, scour assessment and monitoring relies on a 1D hydraulic model which gives a channel averaged velocity profile to determine a water level at which the risk of scour to the structure becomes high. Once this level is breached, a structure is either operated at a reduced speed known as a temporary speed restriction (TSR) or it is closed to traffic and is only reopened once an inspection of the riverbed around the individual elements have been inspected. These inspections are dependent on weather conditions and flow rates as well as availability of qualified personnel and often happen too late to see the full extent of any scour around the structure. As climate change and more extreme weather events increase the risk of flooding and erosion, it is becoming increasingly urgent to develop more proactive, real-time monitoring systems for scour detection.

This paper presents a novel approach to scour monitoring that integrates advanced artificial intelligence (AI) technology, flow velocity sensors and sonar scour profiling coupled with geophysical baseline surveys to create an intelligent, data fused, real-time scour monitoring system that can not only detect scour in real-time but also aims to predict scour based on real world data.

The proposed system uses AI-powered cameras to continuously analyse visual data for signs of sediment displacement and structural movement, while flow velocity sensors provide real-time hydrodynamic data that contribute to an assessment of the scour potential. By combining these inputs, the system is able to create a digital twin of the monitored structure, allowing for a highly accurate and real-time assessment of scour risk which can be passed on to engineers and asset owners to better control risk.

Field trials are being conducted on three structures around the network: NDN 197 79 in Devon, WIN 20.56 in Windsor and BRL 0 65 in Bristol. These structures were chosen to represent a range of construction types, flow conditions and varying geomorphological attributes thereby allowing for the validation of the monitoring system under different environmental scenarios.

2. Background and literature review

Scour monitoring has traditionally been carried out through manual inspections, which typically include visual assessments, hydraulic modelling, geotechnical and intrusive investigations such as coring of the structure. These methods are time-consuming, costly, and often insufficient in detecting early-stage scour. Recent advancements in sensor technology, data analytics and generative AI have led to the development of more effective monitoring systems.

Network Rail has a standard for scour management, NR-L2-CIV-295. This standard is based around the 1992 HR Wallingford EX2502 method for a stage 1 assessment and a bespoke stage 2 assessment was created by JBA Consulting in early 2000's to better understand risk. This stage 2 assessment looks more heavily at hydraulic modelling, coring of the foundations to understand foundation depth relative to the bed profile and allows for a more accurate model of up and down stream hydraulics to be understood using a 1D backwater model. The advancement of CFD (Computational Fluid Dynamic) modelling adds a further option which allows more accurate modelling of the scour depth and locations to the structure in 3D, given some inputs such as river bed geology, a three dimensional computer aided design (CAD) model of the structure and predicted hydrology inputs to estimate rainfall and river flow to a set return period, typically 1 in 200 year event.

Of note is the fact that these calculations do not account for climate allowances as the assessment is looking at the risk today, rather than the risk in 20- or 30-years' time. The updated CIV 295 standard does now have a requirement for a second risk score to be given based on climate allowance predictions to allow for the long-term planning and management of a structure.

A 2017 study by US Geological Survey (Mark F. Henneberg) looking at real time streambed scour monitoring across two bridges in the Gunnison River, Colorado, utilised a 2no. echo sounders located on the upstream nose of the assets to monitor river bed levels, however, issues with floating debris and the echo sounders not being able to look "under" the asset meant that the results were inconclusive as traditional surveys confirmed scour had taken place when the echo sounder did not detect large movements.

A previous project undertaken by Network Rail and Bristol university, Scour Monitoring for Railway Assets (UK), Pregnolato, Fox et al, 2022, trialled a number of different sensor types following a detailed review of "off the shelf" products that could be used to detect riverbed erosion. This research took forward an electromagnetic probe/ Time Domain Reflectometry (TDR), ultrasonics and Fiber Bragg Grating sensors and installed them at 3no. structures. Results from this trial were encouraging, however, a number of limitations were found:

- Placement of the embedded sensors in the riverbed was a key factor as the sensors had a limited range of view and so would not detect scour unless it happened in the exact location of the sensor
- Installation of embedded sensors was expensive and time consuming to get the required permits, especially in navigable water
- Tidal structures were difficult to monitor as the saline water give inaccurate readings.

Flow velocity sensors have proven to be valuable tools for assessing hydrodynamic conditions and predicting the potential for scour. These sensors work by emitting high frequency sound waves that travel through the water, and by measuring the time taken for the waves to return, they calculate flow velocity. When integrated into this scour monitoring system, ultrasonics help detect changes in flow patterns which are often indicative of erosion. The non-invasive nature of these sensors make them ideal for continuous monitoring in challenging environments without causing disruption. (XU et al, 2020)

These sensors can be installed on structures or in the surrounding watercourse to capture real-time data on flow patterns and "at the bed" velocities, which are critical for understanding sediment transport and potential erosion processes. Calculations for shear stress and shields values are typically undertaken to determine critical velocities depending on the bed material. These sensors are used widely in the water industry in places such as gauging stations and river monitoring points, pipelines for industry and other critical infrastructure where water velocity is a key constraint.

Geophysical techniques provide valuable insights into subsurface conditions. Methods include seismic refraction (SR), electrical resistivity imaging (ERI) or ground penetrating radar (GPR) to map bedrock and characterise river sediments, surface wave seismics to map load bearing horizons, and parallel seismics to map foundation depths.

Recent research has explored the integration of these technologies into a unified monitoring system; however, a gap exists in real-time, multi-sensor data fusion, particularly in the application of AI for scour detection. By combining AI algorithms with flow velocity sensors and geophysical techniques, this proposed system seeks to enhance the reliability and accuracy of scour monitoring, providing proactive insights and early warning capabilities.

3. System design and methodology

3.1 Aims and objectives

This research set out with 2 primary goals:

Demonstrate that the pilot solution for the real-time monitoring of scour is technically viable and reliable

- Show the solution can detect and monitor scour above and below the waterline in a reliable manner
- Measure – solution detects scour in real-time in a consistent (model integrity) and reliable (low number of outages) manner
- Benefit – Potential to avoid closures through holistic view of scour, assisted decision making & prediction of time to close.

Demonstrate the cost benefit of real-time scour as a contribution to the CP7 National Efficiency plans

- Qualify and quantify the potential savings of real-time scour monitoring to support CP7 cost-efficiency goals
- Measure – Build the business case for potential savings that could be realised through real-time scour monitoring at a national level
- Benefit – Improved passenger safety, reduced disruption and direct contribution to National Efficiency plans.

Along with these two primary goals, a number of secondary targets were agreed:

Build end to end workflow to manage scour

- Show how an integrated approach to visualising and managing scour could be achieved through end to end workflow
- Measure – Scour can be monitored for emergencies, increased risk and escalations through "one window" from inception to resolution
- Benefit – Improve safety for contractors and passengers.

Create holistic view (digital twin) of each bridge and scour risk by collating sensor and data inputs

- Build a digital twin of each pilot bridge as a 3D view with all sensors and data points overlaid to create a collated view of scour risk
- Measure – Each bridge viewable as a navigable 3D object with all scour data points represented collectively.
- Benefit – Gain new insights into scour risk through ease of visualisation and data-driven decision making.

Define pathway to scale pilot to UK wide

- Show how real-time solution for 3no. structures representative of national portfolio that can be scaled nationally
- Measure – Pathway/Roadmap defined for UK-wide deployment
- Benefit – Passenger safety and disruption improved nationally.

3.2 AI-powered camera system

The AI-powered cameras offer a significant advancement by enabling real-time visual monitoring and automated detection directly at the site of the bridge. Unlike traditional surveillance systems, these cameras integrate machine learning algorithms on the device itself (at the "edge"), reducing the need to send large volumes of video data to centralised servers. This setup allows for instantaneous image processing and pattern recognition, such as detecting water level fluctuations, debris accumulation, or changes in riverbed exposure. Edge cameras can be trained using datasets of known scour conditions, enabling them to identify potential scour threats and trigger alerts autonomously, even in remote or bandwidth-limited locations.

The system is designed to continuously monitor the structural integrity of the infrastructure and detect early signs of scour. High-definition cameras capture real-time images which are processed using computer vision algorithms to detect sediment displacement, changes in water flow patterns, or structural movement. The AI model is trained on a large dataset of visual images to recognize patterns associated with scour. These algorithms can identify subtle changes that may not be immediately apparent to the human eye, providing a more accurate and continuous assessment of scour risk.

The AI camera system developed in partnership with CGI employs an NVIDIA Jetson-based edge computing platform, enabling onboard image processing using convolutional neural networks (CNNs) trained on a curated dataset of known scour scenarios. The system is capable of segmenting the scene into dynamic classes such as flowing water, static infrastructure, and vegetation, and can highlight anomalies such as emerging scour holes or displaced sediment zones.

A continuous image inference loop enables the system to flag progressive changes by comparing current visuals against a historical baseline and environmental inputs such as water level or flow rate. This anomaly detection approach supports pre-scour event identification, making it possible to issue early warnings to asset owners or maintenance teams.

Furthermore, camera deployments can be solar-powered and utilise 4G/5G uplinks for cloud synchronisation, enabling remote site monitoring even in off-grid locations. The edge-processing approach minimises latency and removes the need to transmit full video feeds — a crucial consideration for bandwidth-constrained rural or tidal locations.

3.3 Flow velocity sensors

Accurate flow velocity measurement is crucial for assessing the hydrodynamic forces contributing to scour. This study employs the Nivus CS2 wedge velocity sensor, which utilises an ultrasonic cross-correlation technique to provide high-precision velocity measurements. The patented cross-correlation method enhances data accuracy by directly analysing velocity variance within the flow profile. Nivus flow velocity sensors, specifically the CS2, are deployed to generate velocity profiles around the base of the structure and riverbed by analysing a column of water and applying cross-correlation techniques to achieve high-accuracy measurements—an essential factor in understanding the erosion process.

Ultrasonic Profiling

Ultrasonic profiling is based on the use of high frequency sound waves to measure water flow at varying depths or points in a water column. This method is often utilised in systems like Acoustic Doppler devices or Ultrasonic Flow meters to provide detailed and non-invasive velocity measurements, especially in aquatic research and can come in three main methods.

- **Doppler Effect** – When sound waves are emitted into water, they reflect off particles or water molecules. If the water is moving, the reflected sound waves undergo a frequency shift, either increasing or decreasing depending on the direction of flow. This frequency shift is used to calculate the water velocity. The Doppler shift is proportional to the flow velocity, and the relationship typically expressed as:

$$\Delta f = 2 \cdot f_0 \cdot \frac{v}{c}$$

  Where:

  Δf is the Doppler shift (change in frequency)

  f_0 is the transmitted frequency

  v is the velocity of water

  c is the speed of sound I water (Simpson & Oltmann, 1993)

- **Transit time method** – This involves two ultrasonic transducers placed on opposite sides of a flow path which send signals through the fluid and the time difference between the upstream and downstream pulses is used to calculate the flow velocity (Barton & Chapman, 2001). This method is often used in pipelines or narrow channels where precise flow measurement is required.

- **Multi-channel profiling** – The system used in this research has multiple ultrasonic sensors measurements taken vertically in the water column which provides a detailed profile given varying depths. This technique is valuable for both shallow and deeper water environments where variations in velocity with depth need to be captured (Simpson & Oltmann, 1993).

Cross-correlation technique
The cross-correlation technique operates by transmitting continuous ultrasonic signal capturing all velocity variance within the signal path, measuring the displacement of flow particulate between them. This approach offers several key advantages:

- **Superior accuracy in complex flow conditions** – The cross-correlation multi point method maintains high measurement fidelity even in low-flow or highly dynamic environments, where Doppler sensors typically struggle with turbulence and varying sediment loads.
- **Enhanced stability and reduced drift** – Unlike traditional methods that may suffer from signal degradation due to sensor drift or sediment concentration variations, this technique ensures long-term reliability with consistent performance.
- **Minimal calibration requirements** – Conventional velocity sensors often require frequent recalibration due to environmental changes. In contrast, the Nivus CS2 sensor maintains accuracy with minimal maintenance.
- **Optimised for scour monitoring** – The system provides high-resolution, real-time velocity profiling, enabling precise identification of hydrodynamic conditions that contribute to sediment displacement and structural undermining.

The real-time hydrodynamic data collected by the sensors is instrumental in calculating sediment displacement potential. When combined with AI-powered visual monitoring and geophysical detection techniques, the system provides a more comprehensive and predictive understanding of scour conditions. This integration significantly enhances scour detection capabilities, enabling early-warning systems and proactive intervention strategies.

Additionally, the velocity data from the Nivus CS2 sensor integrates seamlessly into a digital twin framework, where machine learning algorithms correlate hydrodynamic conditions with visual AI and geophysical data. This fusion of multi-sensor data enhances predictive modelling, improving the system's ability to detect early scour development before it reaches critical levels.

Deployment and Durability
The Nivus CS2 sensor is designed for robustness, allowing deployment in extreme environmental conditions. Its robust construction ensures continuous monitoring even in high-turbidity or high-velocity flow environments. The compact form factor and flexible installation options make it ideal for both temporary and permanent monitoring setups, ensuring versatile application across different sites and scenarios.

By leveraging the precision of cross-correlation technology within a multi-sensor monitoring framework, this approach sets a new standard for scour assessment, offering unparalleled accuracy and reliability in safeguarding critical infrastructure.

Combined with the visual data from the AI cameras, this information provides a more comprehensive understanding of the scour conditions.

3.4. Geophysical detection techniques
Geophysical techniques, particularly GPR and ERT, are employed to investigate subsurface conditions and detect changes in sediment composition. GPR is used to identify voids beneath the structure or detect changes in the sediment layers, which may indicate scour. ERT, on the other hand, is used to map resistivity changes that may indicate variations in sediment moisture or the presence of cavities.

The envisaged sonar scour profiling system will monitor scour depths around bridge piers using sonar scanning technology. This non-invasive system will seek to deliver real-time data on changes in scour depth enabling engineers to assess potential risks to structural integrity incorporating evidence of foundation depths and sediment characteristics.

The fitment location of sonar scanners will be decided based on incorporating the results of multibeam echo sounder surveys to provide accurate measurements of the riverbed's elevation profile during periods of low and high water. Geophysical survey inputs may also be incorporated to establish the depth to foundations and bedrock.

The integration of these technologies - edge computing, flow sensing, and sonar imaging - forms a robust, multi-sensor system for scour monitoring. When combined, they create a cross-validated dataset that increases reliability and reduces false positives. Real-time alerts can be generated through a central platform or cloud-based dashboard, giving engineers immediate insights into the health of the bridge and enabling timely interventions. This holistic approach marks a step forward in the intelligent infrastructure space, where AI and sensor fusion provide a continuous, adaptive defence against one of the most dangerous and costly natural threats to bridges.

Methods of geophysical investigation include:

- Multibeam Bathymetry Survey (MBES) - Multibeam bathymetry surveys operate by emitting acoustic signals from a transducer mounted on a vessel. These sound waves travel through the water column, reflect off the sediment bed, and return to the receiver, allowing the system to calculate water depth based on travel time. By sweeping a wide swath beneath the vessel, multibeam systems provide high-resolution, three-dimensional representations of underwater terrain allowing for the identification of debris and potential scour features.
- Seismic Refraction (SR) - Seismic energy generated from a source travels through sediment layers and refracts along interfaces, such as between unconsolidated sediments and underlying bedrock. Geophones placed on the surface record the arrival times of these waves, which are then used to model the subsurface structure. In riverine environments, this method is particularly effective for estimating sediment thickness and identifying additional lithological boundaries beneath the riverbed.
- Electrical Resistivity Imaging (ERI) - ERI determines the electrical resistivity of the subsurface by injecting an electrical current into the ground and recording potential differences through an array of electrodes. In riverine environments, ERI is particularly effective for delineating sediment thickness, as variations in resistivity correspond to differences in sediment composition, moisture content, and the interface between sediments and underlying bedrock. ERI models can assist in understanding depositional processes and wider riverbed structure and can also be used to determine the depth of foundations.

- Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) - GPR transmits high-frequency electromagnetic signals into the subsurface and records the reflected arrivals from interfaces between materials with contrasting dielectric properties. In riverine settings, GPR can be effective in mapping depth to the riverbed and shallow sediment thickness depending on material type. GPR can also be used to scan the vertical face of bridge support piers to map hidden defects.
- Parallel Seismic (PS) - Parallel seismic testing can be used to determine the depth of existing bridge foundations. A hammer generates seismic waves at the surface above the foundation, while a geophone or hydrophone is lowered into a nearby borehole to record the wave arrivals. The methods also provide an estimate of the seismic velocity of the structure and underlying materials. Other seismic methods may also be feasible to infer the depth of foundations.

3.5 Data fusion and machine learning

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning has significantly transformed the way in which data is processed, analysed and utilised across various industries. At the heart of this transformation is data fusion and integration which involves the merging of data from multiple sources to create a comprehensive, unified dataset. This integration not only enhances the quality and richness of information, but also enables more accurate predictions, better decision making and the uncovering of patterns and trends. (Jain et al, 2020)

At the core of this system lies a data fusion pipeline, where each sensor (AI camera, flow velocity, and sonar/geophysical) transmits structured data to a local processing unit. Using a combination of feature extraction and signal correlation techniques, the system aligns timestamped sensor inputs to establish a holistic picture of environmental and structural conditions.

Machine learning framework

The fusion process is driven by supervised and semi-supervised machine learning models trained on labelled data from controlled experiments and historical scour events. These models are developed using scikit-learn and TensorFlow-based pipelines and focus on:

- Anomaly detection: Identifying deviations from baseline patterns in velocity, bed morphology, or visual appearance.
- Predictive modelling: Estimating scour onset and progression using real-time flow and structural data.
- Risk classification: Assigning a severity score to each event based on multi-sensor convergence and predefined engineering thresholds.

A hybrid approach using decision trees and recurrent neural networks (RNNs) allows the system to detect not only abrupt changes but also time-based trends (e.g., increasing erosion rates over hours or days). As new data is collected from field sites, these models are retrained continuously to improve accuracy and adapt to site-specific behaviours.

Digital twin integration - All sensor outputs are visualised within a digital twin platform, providing a 3D virtual replica of each bridge. The twin aggregates real-time sensor inputs, overlays historical performance, and provides predictive simulations using live hydrological and meteorological forecasts. This allows asset managers to interactively explore risk zones, track sensor status, and simulate responses under various scenarios (e.g. a 1-in-200-year flood).

Scalable cloud architecture - The system architecture is built for national deployment and leverages cloud-based compute and storage to ensure scalability. Edge-processed summaries from remote sites are securely transmitted to a cloud platform for aggregation and analysis. Alerts are issued through a tiered dashboard with custom roles for engineers, control rooms, and asset managers.

AI plays a pivotal role in automating the fusion process by employing sophisticated algorithms that can handle heterogenous data from diverse domains, such as sensor networks, social media and enterprise systems (Zhao et al, 2021) This is particularly crucial in applications such as autonomous systems, healthcare and smart cities, where data comes from multiple, often inconsistent sources (Amin et al, 2019). Data fusion involves processes such as data preprocessing, feature extraction and alignment to ensure the merged dataset is coherent and valuable for analysis (Chong & Heravi, 2017).

In the context of AI, data fusion techniques help to overcome the challenges of data inconsistency, missing values and noise which are inherent in real world data. By applying AI-driven models to these integrated datasets, researchers and practitioners can derive more meaningful insights and make informed decisions that would be difficult or impossible using just the individual data sources. (Nair et al, 2022). Furthermore, as the volume, variety and velocity of data increase exponentially, the demand for effective AI-based fusion methods continue to rise, emphasising the need for ongoing research and development in this field (Nguyen & Shyu, 2020).

This research aims to utilise machine learning algorithms to process and fuse data from the AI cameras, flow velocity sensors and geophysical methods and present it in an easy-to-use format to enable quick and accurate decision making. The fused data is used to create a digital twin of the structure, a virtual representation that simulates real-time conditions, and provides an insight into structure performance at any given moment. The digital twin also allows for predictive analysis, where the system can forecast potential scour events by correlating historic events to the current data and provide an estimate of likely performance. This will allow Network Rail to not only better manage our own assets but also provide prior warning to the passenger train and freight train operating companies (TOC's and FOC's) that disruption, speed restrictions or closures are likely. The system's machine learning model is continuously trained to improve its predictions as new data is collected, allowing it to adapt to changing environmental conditions and structural characteristics.

One of the future uses of machine learning on this project is the possibility of predictive analysis and using real time weather forecasts to better understand and predict the response of the asset before the inclement weather hits the area. With the increase in climate change predictions, this future part of the project is an area of real invention.

4.Field trials and laboratory experiments

4.1 Site selection and conditions

When developing and testing real-time scour monitoring systems, it is crucial to evaluate it's performance across a variety of bridge types. Scour and erosion vary significantly depending on factors such as bridge design, location and environmental conditions (Ferro et al, 2019) Different bridge structures ranging from simple, single span assets to complex multi-span bridges with varying foundation types, can experience distinct scour behaviours due to differences in flow dynamics, sediment transport and foundation configuration (Neto et al, 2020).

Including a variety of asset types within this research ensures that the monitoring system is robust, adaptable and capable of detecting scour under diverse conditions. For instance, the hydrodynamic forces acting on the foundations of a bridge with large piers may differ considerably from those acting on smaller, slab-based foundations, leading to a different scour pattern (Liu & Cheng, 2018). Varying riverbed compositions and flow dynamics across different bridge assets can also influence scour rates, making it essential for the monitoring system to handle the variations effectively (Ashraf et al, 2021).

Testing across multiple bridge types also helps identify potential limitations or failures within the technology in specific scenarios, ensuring the systems accuracy and reliability across diverse infrastructure. This approach not only enhances the universal capability of the technology but also increases its practical applicability in real-world monitoring where bridges are often heterogeneous in design (Kumar et al, 2020).

The field trials in this research are being conducted at three locations in the UK: Devon, Windsor, and Bristol. Each of these locations was selected based on its unique flow and sediment characteristics, providing a diverse range of conditions for testing the system's effectiveness.

NDN 197 79, North Devon – This multi-span structure is located across the River Taw. High flow velocities and sandy sediment make for a very mobile riverbed at this location and a confluence immediately downstream alters the flow dynamics during high flows and provides a difficult environment in which to place monitoring. Under normal flow conditions, this water is shallow and fast flowing, and with a largely rural catchment, waterborne debris is a given meaning there is a high risk of damage to sensors and blockage to flow which alters the way in which the watercourse behaves. Under flood conditions, water almost reaches the soffit of the bridge and increases in velocity meaning scour risk is high.

WIN 20.56, Windsor – This large, single-span structure crosses the River Thames in the upper catchment and is a site that features a more controlled flow environment with clay-based sediments. The river here is deep and navigable which complicates any instruments located in the river and also lends itself to difficult installation methods. Although the site is not tidal due to having a control structure approx. 1km downstream, the flow dynamics are altered due to the propellor wash and other factors which make the site complex for scour monitoring.

BRL 0 65, Bristol – This structure is a very large single span viaduct which crosses the River Avon. At this location, the river is tidally influenced meaning river levels are constantly changing and moving. The catchment includes a mix of urban and rural elements, with varying levels of sediment transport due to industrial activity and natural sediment deposition. The tidal range exposes the bed around the pier twice per day meaning the camera's view of the base is blocked by water under high tide. This also introduces saline water as a medium in which the velocity sensors need to work which requires calibration. Due to the size and scale of this bridge, as well as the tidal waters, installation and maintenance of any installed assets is a challenge.

4.2 Monitoring and data collection

A variation of the system is deployed at each site to collect real-time data over a period of several months. AI cameras are installed at all sites and continuously monitor the infrastructure, while flow velocity sensors capture water dynamics and flow rates at NDN. Geophysical surveys will be autonomously conducted periodically to assess the subsurface conditions. The collected data is processed through the AI algorithms, which analyse changes in visual, hydrodynamic, and geophysical data to detect and predict scour events.

The data captured at each site is processed at site using edge technology built into the camera and therefore the bandwidth required to transmit this to the cloud is reduced. The data from all 3 sensors are fed into a control box and then fused into one bespoke user interface (UI) which has been designed and built to have multiple levels of access and be "instantly readable" on the initial page to allow for swift and accurate decisions.

4.3 Computational Fluid Dynamic modelling (CFD)

Computational Fluid Dynamic modelling has become a powerful tool to help understand and manage the scour process at bridges at structures due to its ability to simulate the complex interaction between the water, the riverbed sediment layers and the infrastructure itself.

CFD models allow for accurate modelling of the flow characteristics, such as velocity profiles, turbulence, shear stress and other hydrodynamic and hydrostatic properties. CFD can predict where and how sediment will be displaced around the structure which is particularly important where physical measurements may be difficult, expensive or impossible to obtain, such as deep or fast flowing water (Deng et al, 2013).

This allows us to understand how the structure or asset performs under flood conditions and will allow for accurate placement of sensors and measurement tools within this project.

Additionally, CFD can assist in the optimization of bridge and scour protection design by being able to simulate different pier shapes, the effects of cut waters on flow dynamics, the effects of any scour mitigation design and its impact on the surrounding bathymetric levels, as well as understanding to forces acting on an asset under flood conditions.

5.Results and discussion

The results from the field trials aim to demonstrate the effectiveness of the integrated monitoring system in detecting scour in real-time. The AI-powered cameras have already proved able to detect early signs of sediment displacement, even in environments with high turbulence and complex sediment characteristics, as well as alert for blockage and debris. The flow velocity sensors are providing valuable insights into hydrodynamic conditions, which are crucial for predicting scour potential, and the geophysical techniques should allow for accurate detection of voids and changes in sediment layers beneath the structures.

The data fusion process, which combines visual, hydrodynamic, and geophysical inputs, is starting to provide a highly accurate and reliable assessment of scour risk, and, when combined with the UI, means the management of that risk is based on real-world, real-time information, allowing the engineers and asset owners within Network Rail to make better decisions.

The digital twin model is aiming to provide real-time predictive analysis, offering early warning capabilities that could potentially prevent catastrophic failures and offer the TOC's and FOC's some time to ensure minimum disruption to passengers.

6. Conclusion

This research aims to demonstrate the potential of integrating AI-powered cameras, flow velocity sensors, and geophysical techniques for real-time scour monitoring. The system's ability to detect early signs of scour and predict potential risks offers significant improvements over traditional monitoring methods, enabling a shift from reactive to proactive management of infrastructure. The field trials are aiming to validate the system's effectiveness in various flow and sediment conditions, providing a robust solution for enhancing the resilience and safety of critical infrastructure and are ongoing at the time or writing.

By incorporating machine learning algorithms and multi-sensor data fusion, the system provides a novel approach to scour detection that can be implemented across a range of infrastructure types. This research contributes to the advancement of smart monitoring systems, helping to ensure the long-term safety and sustainability of railway networks and other critical infrastructure.

7. Future work

Future work will focus on refining the machine learning algorithms to improve the system's predictive capabilities. Additionally, further field deployments in more diverse environments will help to validate the system's robustness in different geographical and hydrodynamic conditions. Expanding the system's capabilities to monitor other forms of structural degradation, such as corrosion and fatigue, could further enhance its utility and contribute to the overall health monitoring of critical infrastructure.

This paper outlines the development and implementation of a cutting-edge scour monitoring system that could revolutionise how we protect infrastructure from the risks posed by sediment displacement and structural failure.

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