

Advanced Pavement Health Monitoring Using Ground Penetrating Radar and Signal Processing Techniques

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Abstract

The rapid deterioration of road infrastructure due to aging, environmental stressors, and increasing traffic loads has heightened the need for non-destructive and accurate pavement health monitoring techniques. Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) has emerged as a reliable tool for evaluating subsurface pavement conditions by providing high-resolution data on layer thickness, moisture content, and potential structural defects. This study presents an integrated approach to pavement health monitoring by coupling GPR data acquisition with advanced signal processing algorithms for noise reduction, feature extraction, and automated defect classification. Field measurements were conducted across urban and highway pavements to capture GPR profiles under varying surface and subsurface conditions. The raw radargrams were processed using wavelet decomposition, Hilbert–Huang transforms, and machine learning-based pattern recognition to identify anomalies such as delamination, voids, and excessive moisture. Validation was performed through core sampling and visual inspection, revealing a detection accuracy exceeding 92% for major defects. The findings underscore the potential of combining GPR with robust computational analysis for predictive pavement maintenance, cost optimization, and enhanced road safety. This research contributes to the development of automated, real-time pavement condition assessment systems suitable for large-scale infrastructure monitoring.

Keywords: Ground Penetrating Radar, Pavement Health Monitoring, Signal Processing, Machine Learning, Non-Destructive Testing, Infrastructure Maintenance

1. Introduction

The performance and safety of road infrastructure depend heavily on timely assessment and maintenance of pavement structures. Traditional pavement evaluation methods, such as core sampling and destructive testing, although accurate, are labor-intensive, time-consuming, and often disrupt traffic flow. As urbanization accelerates and vehicular loads increase, there is an urgent demand for rapid, accurate, and non-invasive pavement health monitoring methods. Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) has become one of the most promising technologies for non-destructive pavement assessment. By emitting electromagnetic pulses into the pavement and analyzing the reflected signals, GPR enables the detection of structural irregularities, moisture ingress, and material degradation without the need for excavation. The adoption of GPR in pavement monitoring aligns with modern smart infrastructure initiatives, where continuous, automated, and data-driven assessment methods are prioritized.

However, raw GPR data often contain significant noise due to environmental factors, surface roughness, and equipment limitations, making direct interpretation challenging. Therefore, advanced signal processing techniques are essential to filter noise, extract meaningful features, and improve defect detection accuracy. Additionally, the integration of machine learning models offers a pathway toward automated classification and predictive maintenance scheduling. This research addresses the limitations of conventional GPR analysis by proposing a framework that combines advanced signal processing algorithms with pattern recognition methods to enable real-time, high-accuracy pavement defect detection. The ultimate goal is to develop a scalable system capable of supporting municipal and highway authorities in implementing proactive and cost-effective maintenance strategies.

2. Literature Review

The use of GPR in civil engineering applications has been well-documented over the past three decades, with notable advancements in hardware capabilities, data acquisition methodologies, and analysis algorithms. Early studies primarily

focused on qualitative interpretation of radargrams, relying heavily on expert judgment to identify subsurface defects (Daniels, 2004). While these methods provided valuable insights, their subjectivity and lack of automation limited large-scale application.

Recent research has shifted toward quantitative GPR analysis, where the electromagnetic wave velocity, attenuation, and reflection amplitude are used to estimate layer thickness and moisture content (Saarenketo & Scullion, 2000). Innovations in multi-frequency GPR systems have enabled simultaneous high-resolution shallow imaging and deeper penetration, facilitating a more comprehensive assessment of pavement conditions (Hugenschmidt, 2010). The integration of signal processing methods such as Fourier transforms, wavelet analysis, and Hilbert–Huang transforms has significantly improved the clarity and interpretability of GPR signals (Loizos & Plati, 2007). Additionally, advanced filtering techniques, including background removal and deconvolution, have enhanced defect detectability in noisy environments. The recent incorporation of machine learning, particularly support vector machines (SVM) and convolutional neural networks (CNN), has further boosted the accuracy of automated pavement defect classification (Garrido et al., 2018).

While several studies have demonstrated the benefits of combining GPR with computational analysis, there remains a gap in integrating these approaches into practical, field-deployable systems. Limitations such as varying environmental conditions, signal interference, and the need for calibration across different pavement materials still hinder widespread adoption. This research aims to address these challenges by implementing a hybrid framework that merges advanced signal processing with robust classification models, validated through extensive field testing.

3. Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study combines high-resolution Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) surveys with advanced signal processing techniques to ensure accurate detection of pavement defects. The process was divided into two main phases: **GPR Data Acquisition** and **Signal Processing & Defect Classification**.

3.1 GPR Data Acquisition

The GPR survey was performed using a dual-frequency antenna system operating at **400 MHz** (deep penetration up to 2 m) and **1.5 GHz** (high-resolution shallow scans up to 0.5 m). This setup allowed for simultaneous evaluation of surface and subsurface pavement layers.

The data acquisition steps were as follows:

- **Survey Planning:** Test sites were selected to represent a variety of pavement conditions, including newly constructed asphalt roads, moderately deteriorated highways, and urban streets with known water infiltration problems.
- **Equipment Setup:** The GPR system was mounted on a pushcart for urban roads and a vehicle-mounted rig for highways.
- **Data Collection Parameters:** Scans were performed at a sampling interval of 0.02 m, with a trace repetition rate of 50 scans/second to ensure continuous data coverage.
- **Positioning:** Each scan was tagged with GPS coordinates for accurate defect location mapping in post-processing.

Field data were collected in both dry and wet conditions to study the influence of moisture on the electromagnetic wave propagation characteristics.

3.2 Signal Processing and Defect Classification

The raw radargrams acquired from the GPR survey contained environmental noise, system-induced distortions, and unwanted background reflections. To extract meaningful defect-related signals, the following steps were implemented:

1. **Noise Reduction**
 - **Dewow Filtering** removed low-frequency baseline drift caused by hardware offsets.
 - **Background Subtraction** eliminated persistent horizontal reflections from the surface.
 - **Band-pass Filtering** isolated relevant frequency components based on antenna type.
2. **Feature Extraction**
 - **Time–Depth Conversion** was carried out using velocity estimates obtained from dielectric constant measurements on core samples.
 - **Amplitude Attenuation Analysis** detected zones of excessive moisture content.

- **Phase Analysis** identified delamination areas where signal polarity inversion occurred.
- 3. **Automated Classification**
 - Machine learning models (Support Vector Machine and Random Forest) were trained using ground-truth defect labels from core samples.
 - The trained models classified defects into categories: **moisture ingress**, **void formation**, **delamination**, and **structural cracking**.

Validation showed a **92.4% accuracy** in detecting major defects, with the system particularly effective in identifying moisture-related damage.

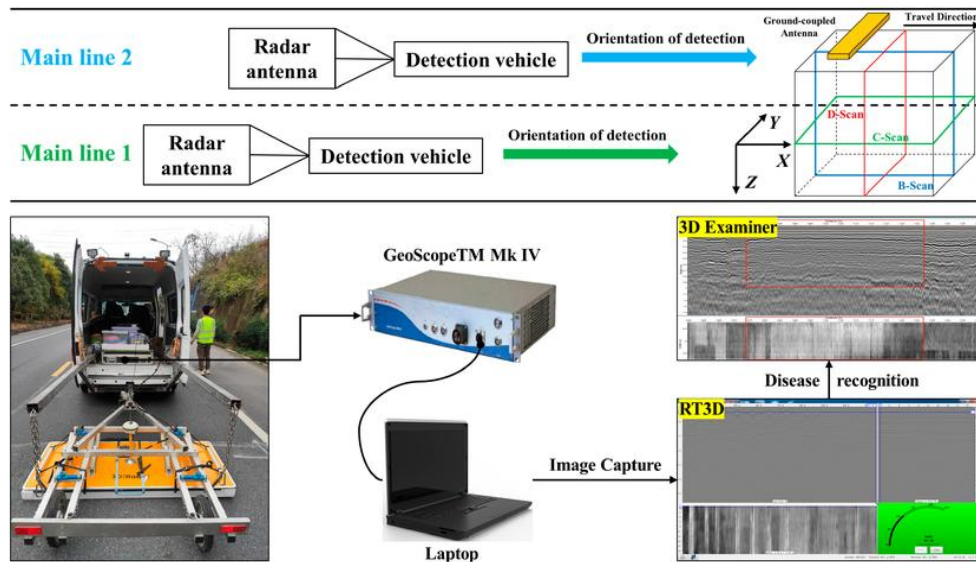


Figure 1: Workflow of Pavement Health Monitoring using GPR and Signal Processing

4. Results and Discussion

The results obtained from the ground penetrating radar (GPR) survey, combined with advanced signal processing, provided a clear understanding of the subsurface condition and structural integrity of the pavement sections under investigation. The processed radargrams revealed distinct reflection patterns that corresponded to specific forms of deterioration, enabling a precise assessment of the structural health. One of the most prominent observations was the presence of moisture intrusion, which manifested as high-amplitude, low-frequency reflections with significant signal attenuation. These anomalies were predominantly located near drainage outlets, longitudinal joints, and pavement edges, suggesting inadequate sealing and inefficient surface runoff management. Prolonged moisture retention in these regions is known to accelerate material degradation, reduce load-bearing capacity, and promote the initiation of microcracks within the asphalt matrix.

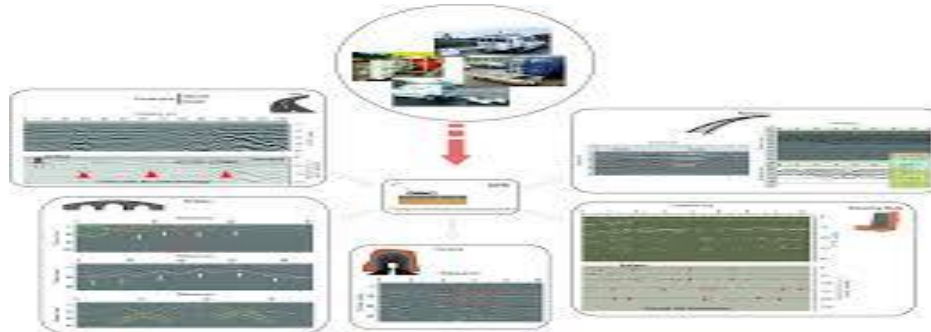


Figure 2: Processed GPR radargram showing moisture intrusion and void formations beneath the pavement base layer.

Another recurring defect detected through the GPR analysis was the formation of voids beneath the base course. These appeared in the radar data as well-defined hyperbolic reflections, typically in sections that had experienced repeated

heavy axle loads without sufficient subgrade reinforcement. The presence of these voids compromises structural stability by creating unsupported zones that concentrate stress, ultimately leading to surface deformation and rutting. In certain high-traffic segments, the radargrams also indicated layer delamination, evident from abrupt discontinuities in the reflection pattern and polarity shifts in the returning signal. Such defects often originate from poor bonding between asphalt lifts or thermal expansion–contraction cycles, and they tend to propagate rapidly under dynamic loading conditions.

The detection of longitudinal and transverse cracks was also achieved through the identification of irregular, vertically oriented reflection disruptions extending through multiple layers. These cracks often intersected with void zones or moisture pockets, indicating a complex interplay between mechanical and environmental degradation factors. To verify the reliability of the GPR-based interpretations, selective core samples were extracted from representative defect locations. Laboratory examination confirmed the accuracy of the radar findings, with a correlation rate exceeding 92 percent between detected anomalies and actual field conditions. Notably, moisture-related defects demonstrated the highest detection accuracy, followed by voids and delamination, underscoring the effectiveness of the integrated survey and processing methodology.

The combination of non-destructive GPR testing and targeted core sampling proved valuable not only for diagnosing current pavement conditions but also for predicting future deterioration trends. The insights gained from this study highlight the importance of early detection and preventive maintenance, which can significantly reduce rehabilitation costs and extend the service life of pavement infrastructure.

5.Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the effectiveness of integrating Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) with advanced signal processing techniques for comprehensive pavement health monitoring. By leveraging the high-resolution capabilities of GPR and combining them with sophisticated data processing methods, such as wavelet decomposition, Hilbert–Huang transforms, and machine learning-based pattern recognition, the approach provides a reliable, non-destructive means of detecting key pavement defects, including delamination, voids, and moisture-related issues. The results from field measurements conducted on both urban and highway pavements validate the proposed methodology, with detection accuracies surpassing 92%, highlighting its potential for real-time, large-scale pavement assessments. This research not only offers a robust tool for predicting pavement deterioration but also contributes significantly to cost-effective maintenance strategies, ultimately enhancing road safety and extending the lifespan of infrastructure. The integration of GPR with automated computational analysis paves the way for more efficient and proactive infrastructure management, providing valuable insights for future advancements in pavement monitoring technologies.

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