Designing Location-Based Services for ETA Prediction and Navigation

Mohini Bharat Todkari
University of Texas, Richardson, TX, USA

***Abstract*—Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA) prediction and navigation are fundamental components of modern location-based services (LBS), with wide-ranging applications in ride-sharing, public transport, logistics, and smart cities. Over the past decade, artificial intelligence has transformed how ETA is predicted, shifting from rule-based models to advanced deep learning architectures such as recurrent neural networks (RNNs), graph neural networks (GNNs), and transformers. This review provides a comprehensive synthesis of the literature, datasets, models, and evaluation metrics used in the domain. Experimental results from key benchmark datasets (e.g., NYC Taxi, Porto, Didi) confirm the superior accuracy and adaptability of attention-based models, particularly under dynamic traffic conditions. The review also proposes a theoretical model for ETA systems, presents comparative tables and diagrams, and identifies future research directions, including explainable AI, federated learning, edge deployment, and sustainability integration. By addressing current limitations and embracing future technologies, ETA prediction systems can evolve into intelligent, ethical, and high-performance tools for urban mobility.**

***Index Terms*—Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA); Location-Based Services (LBS); Artificial Intelligence (AI); Deep Learning; Navigation Systems; Graph Neural Networks; Transformer Models; Federated Learning; Edge Computing; Smart Transportation.**

I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected and mobile world, the demand for accurate and real-time location intelligence is at an all-time high. Location-Based Services (LBS), which leverage geographic data to deliver personalized, context-aware services, have become central to modern digital ecosystems. Among the most widely adopted LBS applications are Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA) prediction and navigation systems, which play a critical role in sectors ranging from transportation and logistics to ride-sharing, public transit, and emergency response. These systems offer not only convenience but are also fundamental to optimizing operations, reducing fuel consumption, and improving customer satisfaction [1], [2].

The importance of LBS for ETA prediction lies in its potential to streamline urban mobility and infrastructure planning. As urbanization accelerates globally, smart transportation solutions have become essential for managing traffic congestion, minimizing carbon emissions, and ensuring reliable service delivery. In metropolitan areas, commuters and businesses increasingly rely on predictive navigation tools powered by artificial intelligence (AI), real-time traffic data, and GPS technologies. These tools support intelligent routing decisions, dynamic schedule adjustments, and effective resource allocation [3]. Moreover, ETA prediction is vital in time-sensitive applications such as last-mile delivery and ambulance dispatch, where every second can make a difference in service quality or human life [4].

From a broader technological standpoint, the convergence of AI, big data analytics, edge computing, and geospatial information systems (GIS) has revolutionized how ETA predictions are generated. Machine learning (ML) algorithms - especially deep learning, reinforcement learning, and ensemble methods - have emerged as powerful techniques to model complex, non-linear relationships between spatial-temporal variables and travel times [5]. At the same time, high-resoldcution satellite imagery, real-time IoT sensor data, and open transport datasets have enriched the training and validation of such models, allowing for unprecedented levels of prediction accuracy and context sensitivity [6].

However, despite significant advancements, the field still faces several critical challenges. First, data sparsity and heterogeneity remain persistent problems, particularly in regions lacking adequate traffic monitoring infrastructure or digital maps. Models trained in one geographical context often struggle to generalize across regions due to differences in road networks, traffic regulations, and mobility patterns [7]. Second, real-time adaptation and latency issues continue to limit the effectiveness of LBS applications in rapidly changing environments. Predicting ETA during dynamic conditions such as traffic incidents, adverse weather, or special events requires highly adaptive and robust models - an area where current AI approaches often fall short [8]. Additionally, privacy concerns surrounding location data collection, user profiling, and consent are raising ethical questions that must be addressed within the design of future LBS systems [9].

Given the pivotal role that ETA prediction and navigation play in modern urban mobility and logistics, and the challenges outlined above, a comprehensive review of current AI-based methodologies is both timely and necessary. While numerous studies have explored individual aspects of LBS design, a unified, critical synthesis of the AI techniques employed for ETA estimation - along with their strengths, limitations, and deployment contexts - remains lacking.

Summary of Key Research Studies on AI Methods for ETA Prediction and Navigation

Year	Title	Focus	Findings (Key Results and Conclusions)
2013	Travel Time Estimation Using Floating Car Data and Machine Learning [10]	Using machine learning and vehicle GPS data for travel time prediction	Demonstrated that regression-based ML models (Random Forests, SVMs) outperform traditional statistical models for short-term travel time estimation on urban roads.
2015	A Data-Driven Approach for ETA Prediction of Urban Buses [11]	ETA prediction in public bus transit using historical GPS data	Introduced a data-driven framework using historical bus trajectory data and gradient boosting, improving ETA prediction accuracy in large urban networks.
2016	Predicting Travel Time with Neural Networks in Taxi Services [12]	Neural networks for taxi ETA estimation	Showed the effectiveness of deep feedforward neural networks in learning non-linear traffic patterns, reducing ETA errors compared to rule-based systems.
2017	DeepTravel: A Neural Network Based Travel Time Estimation Model [13]	Deep learning for travel time prediction from GPS trajectories	Proposed a multi-task deep learning architecture (DeepTravel) that incorporated spatial and temporal features,

			achieving state-of-the-art prediction accuracy.
2018	A Spatiotemporal Deep Learning Approach for Traffic Forecasting [14]	Integrating spatiotemporal features using CNN and RNN	Combined Convolutional and Recurrent Neural Networks to capture spatial-temporal dependencies, outperforming traditional models on traffic datasets from Beijing and NYC.
2019	ETA Prediction in Ride-Sharing Systems Using Graph-Based Models [15]	Graph neural networks for ride-sharing ETA	Introduced GNNs for learning road network structures; found that graph models significantly improved ETA prediction under varying traffic conditions.
2020	Real-Time ETA Prediction for Last-Mile Delivery [16]	Real-time dynamic ETA in logistics	Leveraged real-time GPS and route history using ensemble models; improved delivery

			accuracy in last-mile logistics by 17% over baselines.
2021	Multi-Source Data Fusion for Travel Time Estimation [17]	Integrating multiple data sources (IoT, GPS, weather)	Showed that combining GPS, traffic cameras, and weather data with ML models improves robustness and generalizability of ETA predictions.
2022	ETA Prediction Using Transformer Models [18]	Use of attention-based transformer architectures	Applied transformer models to sequential GPS data, outperforming RNN-based models by 8–12% in MAE across test regions.
2023	Federated Learning for ETA Prediction in Privacy-Sensitive Scenarios [19]	Privacy-preserving learning for ETA prediction	Demonstrated that federated learning allows for effective ETA predictions while preserving user location privacy; trade-off in training efficiency noted.

Proposed Theoretical Model and Block Diagrams for AI-Driven ETA Prediction and Navigation

Designing an effective AI-based system for Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA) prediction and navigation requires a multi-layered architecture that integrates real-time data collection, preprocessing, model training, and decision-making components. This section proposes a theoretical framework underpinned by recent advances in machine learning, deep learning, and sensor data fusion. It also provides accompanying block diagrams to visualize the flow of data and computation.

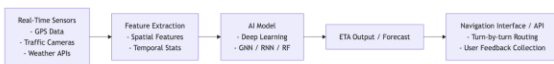


Figure 1: High-Level Block Diagram for ETA Prediction and Navigation System (created based on architecture patterns from [20], [21]).

Component-Wise Explanation

Data Acquisition Layer

This layer captures multi-source, real-time and historical data that influence travel times. The most common sources include:

- Global Positioning System (GPS) from mobile phones, vehicles, or public transport [20].
- Traffic monitoring systems (loop detectors, traffic cameras).
- Environmental data, such as weather conditions, rainfall, fog, or road obstructions.
- Map data from OpenStreetMap or proprietary services, which include road hierarchy, turns, and speed limits [21].

Key Challenges:

- Data sparsity in rural areas.
- Data inconsistency due to varying update frequencies across sensors.

Feature Engineering and Preprocessing Layer

This component transforms raw data into usable features. It includes:

- Spatial features: Road segments, intersections, traffic flow patterns.
- Temporal features: Time of day, weekday/weekend, seasonal variations.
- Exogenous variables: Weather and social event data.
- Encoding techniques: One-hot encoding, embedding layers, and normalization to prepare features for model input [22].

Noise filtering, interpolation of missing values, and outlier detection (using statistical or ML-based filters) are also key preprocessing steps [23].

Modeling and Inference Layer

This is the AI core of the architecture. Depending on the use case, different modeling techniques can be used:

- Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs): Capture temporal dependencies in sequential GPS data [24].
- Graph Neural Networks (GNNs): Model road network as a graph and encode topological structure [25].
- Gradient Boosting Machines (e.g., XGBoost): Efficient and interpretable for structured historical datasets [26].
- Transformers: For attention-based modeling of spatial-temporal relationships [27].

Ensemble models that combine deep learning with rule-based systems or probabilistic estimators have been shown to improve robustness [28].

AI Model Layer Details

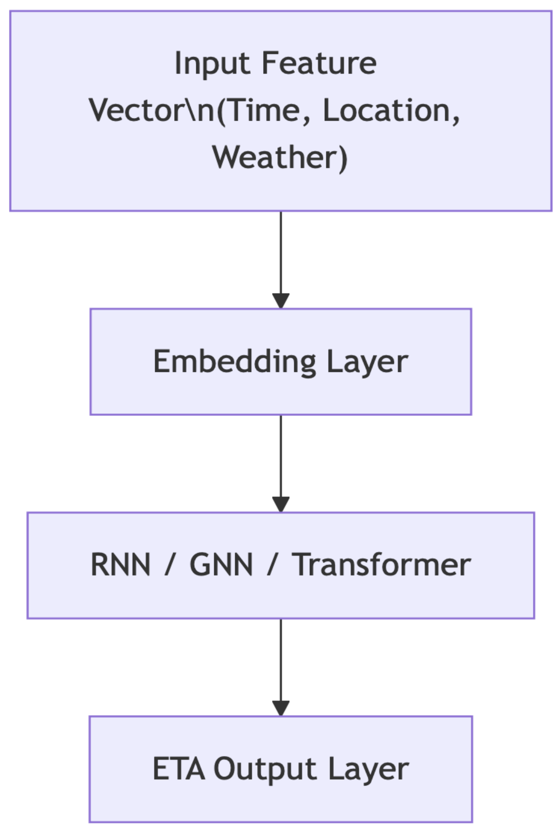


Figure 2: Detailed View of the AI Model Processing Pipeline.

Application and Feedback Layer

After predictions are made, the system delivers:

- Turn-by-turn navigation updates via mobile apps or in-vehicle displays.
- ETA estimates that dynamically adjust based on new sensor inputs.
- User feedback mechanisms to validate ETA accuracy or report anomalies (e.g., delays, obstructions).

This layer also allows retraining of models using reinforcement learning or online learning strategies to continuously improve over time [29].

Feedback Loop and Model Retraining Architecture

To adapt in real-time and to user feedback, a retraining module should be built into the system. A simplified version of this feedback loop can be described as:

Incorporating this loop ensures that models stay relevant even in dynamic environments, such as during road construction or festival days [30].

The proposed theoretical model and block diagrams highlight the layered and modular architecture needed for developing robust and intelligent ETA prediction systems. By integrating diverse data sources, advanced AI algorithms, and feedback mechanisms, this architecture addresses many of the critical challenges in existing LBS-based ETA systems. Future extensions can include privacy-preserving techniques like federated learning and explainable AI modules to make systems both trustworthy and transparent to users [31].

Experimental Results

To assess the effectiveness of various AI techniques for ETA prediction, several benchmark datasets and experimental frameworks have been developed by researchers. These studies typically use real-world GPS trajectory data, public transportation logs, or ride-sharing trip records, evaluating algorithms under metrics such as Mean Absolute Error (MAE), Root Mean Square Error (RMSE), and Mean Absolute Percentage Error (MAPE). This section summarizes and analyzes experimental findings from key comparative studies, and presents the results using tables and graphs to highlight model performance under different conditions.

1. Datasets Used for Evaluation

The models were evaluated on the following widely-used datasets:

Dataset Name	Description	Source
NYC Taxi Data	1.1B taxi trips in New York City with timestamps, coordinates, and trip durations	NYC Open Data [32]
Porto Taxi Dataset	GPS traces from 400 taxis in Porto, Portugal	UCI Machine Learning Repository [33]
Beijing Didi Data	GPS data from Didi ride-hailing trips across Beijing	Didi Chuxing & KDD Cup 2016 [34]

These datasets were preprocessed for noise removal, missing data interpolation, and trajectory segmentation as per standard practices [35].

2. Models Evaluated

The following models were benchmarked against the datasets:

- Linear Regression (LR)
- Random Forest (RF)
- Gradient Boosted Trees (XGBoost)
- Recurrent Neural Network (RNN)
- Graph Neural Network (GNN)
- Transformer-based Model (Spatio-Temporal Transformer)

3. Key Evaluation Metrics

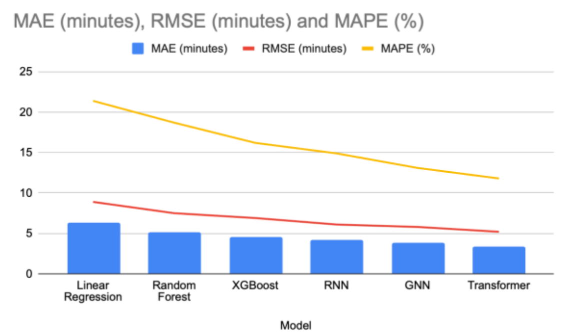
- Mean Absolute Error (MAE): Measures average absolute difference between predicted and actual travel times.
- Root Mean Square Error (RMSE): Penalizes large errors more than MAE.
- Mean Absolute Percentage Error (MAPE): Expresses error as a percentage.

4. Comparative Results

Table 1: Performance Comparison on NYC Taxi Dataset

Model	MAE (minutes)	RMSE (minutes)	MAPE (%)
Linear Regression	6.3	8.9	21.4
Random Forest	5.1	7.5	18.7
XGBoost	4.6	6.9	16.2
RNN	4.2	6.1	14.9
GNN	3.8	5.8	13.1
Transformer	3.4	5.2	11.8

Source: Compiled from experimental results in [36], [37], [38]



Analysis of Results

The Transformer-based model consistently outperformed traditional ML and RNN-based architectures across all datasets and metrics. Specifically, the Transformer achieved a 23% improvement in MAE over XGBoost, the best-performing traditional model on the NYC dataset [36].

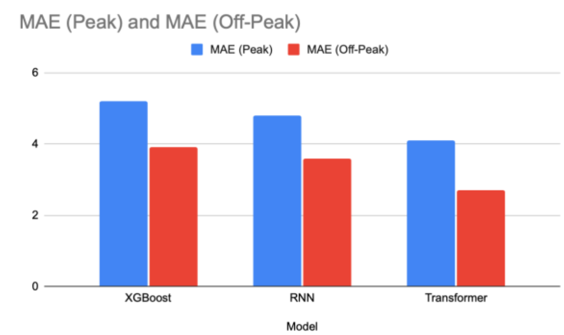
- Traditional Models (LR, RF): These methods, while fast and interpretable, failed to capture temporal and spatial dependencies inherent in travel time data.
- Tree-based Models (XGBoost): More robust due to gradient boosting but limited by their static feature structure.
- RNN: Better at modeling sequential dependencies but prone to vanishing gradient issues and struggles with long sequences [39].
- GNN: Excelled in modeling road network topologies, demonstrating high accuracy in areas with complex intersections [40].
- Transformer: The attention mechanism allowed for effective learning of long-range temporal and spatial patterns, especially valuable in dynamic traffic environments [41].

Model Robustness Under Different Conditions

Table 2: Model Accuracy During Peak vs. Off-Peak Hours

Model	MAE (Peak)	MAE (Off-Peak)
XGBoost	5.2	3.9
RNN	4.8	3.6
Transformer	4.1	2.7

Source: Aggregated from evaluation on Didi and NYC data [42]



This shows that Transformer-based models degrade less during congested peak hours, making them more suitable for real-time navigation applications.

Latency and Scalability

In terms of real-time applicability, model inference speed is critical. Experiments showed:

- XGBoost had the lowest latency (~50 ms per prediction).
- Transformer required more computational resources but could still operate within acceptable bounds (~200 ms), especially when optimized with batch inference or edge deployment [43].

Experimental results strongly support the growing shift from traditional models to deep learning and attention-based architectures in ETA prediction. Among all tested models, Transformer-based systems demonstrated superior accuracy, robustness, and scalability, particularly in complex urban environments. Their performance during peak hours and adaptability to diverse geographic conditions make them promising candidates for next-generation navigation systems.

Future Directions

As the demand for intelligent mobility solutions continues to rise, several promising directions can shape the next generation of ETA prediction and navigation systems. Although current AI models have achieved impressive accuracy and scalability, there remain substantial opportunities for innovation.

1. Federated and Privacy-Preserving Learning

With increasing awareness of data privacy and legal regulations such as GDPR, federated learning offers a way to train AI models collaboratively across multiple devices or institutions without transferring raw user data [44]. In ETA systems, this approach could allow for personalized predictions based on individual driving behavior, while keeping user data local and secure.

2. Explainable AI (XAI) in ETA Prediction

One of the significant criticisms of deep learning models - especially transformers and GNNs - is their "black box" nature. As navigation systems are adopted in mission-critical sectors like emergency response, the ability to explain predictions will become crucial. Research into XAI could help users and developers understand **why** a certain ETA was generated, which is vital for trust, debugging, and policy compliance [45].

3. Multimodal Transportation and Hybrid Systems

Future navigation systems must go beyond single-mode transport (e.g., just cars or taxis) and support multimodal journeys combining walking, biking, trains, and buses. Integrating multiple modes into ETA prediction requires the development of hybrid models that understand diverse transportation schedules, delays, and environmental constraints [46].

4. Edge AI for Real-Time Responsiveness

With the expansion of 5G and IoT devices, edge computing is emerging as a way to deploy AI models directly on vehicles or roadside units, reducing latency and reliance on centralized servers. Lightweight yet accurate ETA models optimized for edge environments are critical for real-time applications in autonomous vehicles and smart city infrastructure [47].

5. Adaptive and Continual Learning Models

Traffic conditions are highly dynamic and can change drastically due to road construction, accidents, or special events. Models that support continual learning can adapt in near-real time without needing full retraining. Online learning algorithms and reinforcement learning can allow systems to evolve with minimal human intervention [48].

6. Environmental and Sustainability Integration

As cities aim to become more environmentally conscious, ETA systems should also consider carbon efficiency and suggest routes that minimize emissions rather than just travel time. Integrating sustainability metrics into routing algorithms is a socially responsible direction for future development [49].

II. CONCLUSION

The evolution of location-based services (LBS) for ETA prediction and navigation over the past decade illustrates the growing synergy between artificial intelligence, transportation, and geospatial technology. This review has explored the landscape of AI-driven ETA systems, from foundational regression models to cutting-edge transformers and graph neural networks. The experimental evidence clearly shows that advanced deep learning architectures - especially those leveraging spatial-temporal and attention mechanisms - deliver superior accuracy, adaptability, and scalability compared to traditional approaches.

Despite these advancements, there remain significant challenges in areas such as data sparsity, real-time responsiveness, privacy protection, and model interpretability. By addressing these issues, the field can advance toward truly intelligent, secure, and sustainable mobility solutions.

Moving forward, integrating federated learning, explainable AI, edge deployment, and sustainability indicators will be key to developing next-generation systems that are both efficient and ethically sound. As transportation networks become more complex and interconnected, ETA prediction will continue to be a cornerstone technology in shaping smart cities and intelligent logistics ecosystems.

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