

# **Bottleneck Calibration in Micro-Simulation for Corridor Management Using Data from Single Loop Detectors**

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## **Abstract**

Corridor mobility improvements require new approaches to corridor management planning and operations, for which micro-simulation is usually applied to assess corridor performance and evaluate traffic improvement strategies. Bottleneck calibration in micro-simulation plays an important role in developing these corridor-level micro-simulation models. This paper extends a recently developed method for conducting corridor-level bottleneck calibration by using data from single loop detectors. We show that, instead of using speeds which are usually obtained from double loop detectors, similar calibration results can be achieved by using occupancy data that is available from single loop detectors. Our results thus extend the practicality of the previous method so that it can be applied to all areas with loop detectors (single or double) deployed.

## 1. Introduction and Motivation

To address various traffic congestion and safety issues, concepts for more effective Corridor Management (CM) have been proposed recently. These include the Corridor Management Plan Demonstration (CMPD) by Caltrans (1) and the Integrated Corridor Management (ICM) program by FHWA (2). For example, CMPD integrates advanced operational analysis techniques such as micro-simulation into the traditional planning process. It begins by defining how the system is performing, understanding why it is performing that way, and then evaluating different strategies, especially operations centric ones, to address deficiencies. The strategies are then tested using simulation modeling to allow for more accurate estimation of benefits.

In CM, bottleneck calibration in micro-simulation plays an important role. Bottlenecks are sections of the freeway that either have capacities less than or demand greater than other sections. These locations will probably experience traffic congestion earlier than other locations as traffic grows (3). Bottlenecks have crucial impacts on the performance of traffic corridors and thus micro-simulation models need to be calibrated to account for bottlenecks.

As a result, CM calls for solid and practical methodologies for corridor bottleneck calibration in simulation. Nevertheless, practical methods for bottleneck analysis are sparse in the literature. The micro-simulation modeling guideline by Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) of the United States summarizes the model calibration to be a three step process, including capacity calibration, route choice calibration, and system performance calibration (3). The calibration targets, developed by Wisconsin Department of Transportation, are the minimum performance requirements recommended by the guideline (3). However, the guideline only provided calibration targets for flow and travel time data, while speed and bottleneck calibrations were all based on visual audits. Gomes et al (4) proposed to use three speed contours, corresponding to a heavy, a typical, and a light day of traffic, to identify and calibrate real-world bottlenecks. The calibration was conducted to match bottlenecks' start times, queue lengths, and time durations. However, for highly congested and incident-prone corridors, identifying a typical day is difficult. Also, no quantitative measures were developed in Gomes et al (4).

The authors of this paper previously proposed a set of bottleneck identification and calibration methods based on percentile speed data (5). The methods identify bottlenecks using binary speed contour maps and calibrate bottlenecks by three steps: visual assessment, bottleneck area matching, and detailed speed matching. These methods include both qualitative and quantitative measures and are hence more practical and effective than previous methods and guidelines.

The methods in Ban et al. (5), however, rely on speed data. Many areas in the United States and across the world are equipped with only single loop detectors for which speeds are not directly measurable. Although algorithms have been developed to estimate speeds from single loop data, they are either not reliable (6) or requires extensive archived data to conduct the estimation (7).

In this paper, we show that the occupancy data obtained from either single or double loops can also be used for bottleneck calibration by using the methods developed in Ban et al. (5). Through a real world corridor simulation study in the San Francisco Bay Area in California, we show that the bottleneck calibration results obtained via occupancy data are similar to those using speed data. Our results thus extend the practicality of the methods we previously developed so that it may be applied to all areas with loop detectors (single or double) deployed. The remaining of the paper will describe the three-step process of bottleneck calibration in Sections 2, 3 and 4. The proposed process represents three levels of details while calibrating bottlenecks. An example is given in Section 5 to demonstrate the proposed method, followed by conclusions and future study directions in Section 6.

## 2. Visual Assessment

The bottleneck calibration method consists of three steps starting with visual assessment to make sure the number of bottlenecks and their locations generally match. This step is similar to what was recommended in the current guideline for micro-simulation calibration by FHWA. No quantitative criteria can be easily defined for this step since it highly depends on experience and engineering judgment.

In this paper, 5-min occupancy data from both loop detectors (i.e., the observed data) and simulation will be used to construct occupancy contour maps (OCM) for visual assessment. In particular, the 50-th percentile occupancy generated from multiple days' observed data will be used to represent the real world condition. The detailed descriptions on how to use the percentile data, one can refer to Ban et al. (5).

To illustrate the methods, Figure 1(a) and 1(b) depict, respectively, the OCMs constructed using observed (50-th percentile) and simulated occupancy data.

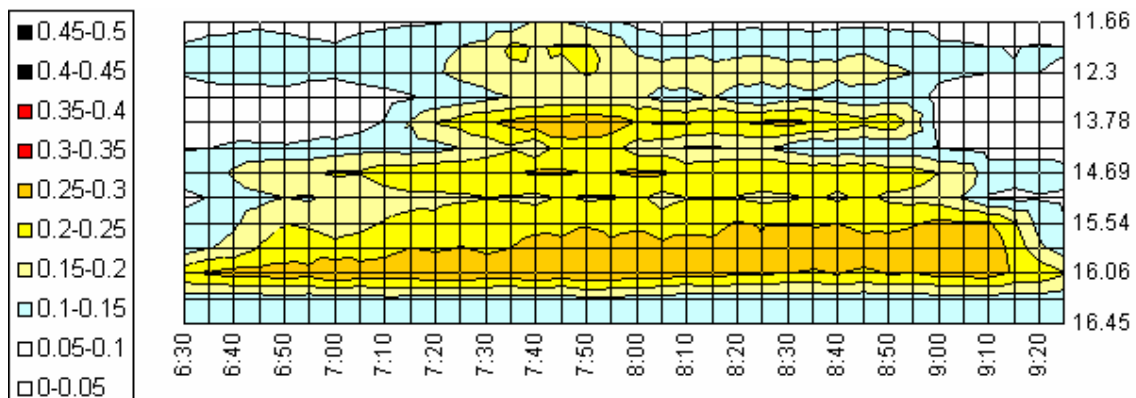


Figure 1(a) OCM Constructed Using Loop Data

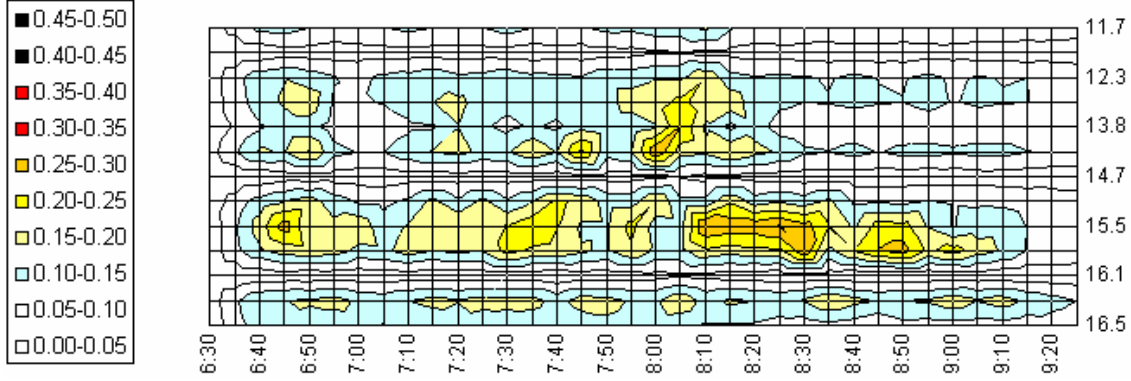


Figure 1(b) OCM Constructed Using Simulation Data

From these two figures, we can roughly observe that there is only one bottleneck for this segment of freeway using either simulated or observed data.

An OCM can be represented by a matrix  $O(i, t)$  where  $i$  and  $t$  denote the detector and time instant that the occupancy was measured.

### 3. Bottleneck Area Matching

The second step is to match bottleneck areas using the so-called binary occupancy contour map (BOCM) generated by simulation data and observed data. To construct a BOCM, we first set a threshold speed, called critical occupancy. Then occupancies in the original OCM are converted into either 1 or 0 depending on whether the occupancy is higher than (or equal to) the critical occupancy or lower. We denote this critical occupancy as  $CRI OCC$ . In this paper, we set  $CRI OCC = 0.2^1$ . For example, the BOCM of the OCM in Figure 1(a) and 1(b) is given in Figure 2(a) and 2(b) below. The matrix corresponding to a BOCM is denoted as  $BO$ . Therefore, we have either

$$BO(i, t) = \begin{cases} 0, & \text{if the occupancy at } I \text{ at time } t \text{ is less than } CRI OCC \\ 1, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Clearly, this matrix can be easily obtained from a BOCM, e.g., the one in Figure 2.

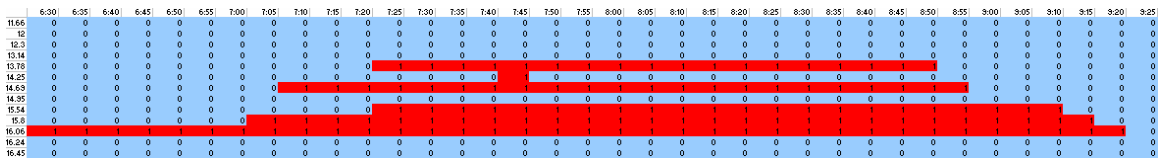


Figure 2(a) BOCM Constructed Using Loop Data

<sup>1</sup> In some districts in California, 0.2 is used as the critical occupancy for their ramp metering control algorithms.

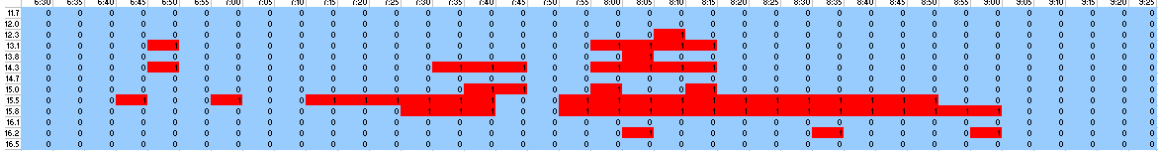


Figure 2(b) BOCM Constructed Using Simulation Data

Similar as in Ban et al. (5), the following measure can be defined to indicate how well the bottleneck areas are matched between simulated and observed data:

$$C_1 = \frac{2 \sum_{i=1}^N \left\{ \left( \sum_{t=1}^T [BO_s(i,t) \wedge BO_r(i,t)] \right) \cdot |x_{i^+} - x_i| \right\}}{\sum_{i=1}^N \left\{ \left( \sum_{t=1}^T [BO_s(i,t) + BO_r(i,t)] \right) \cdot |x_{i^+} - x_i| \right\}}, \quad (1)$$

where  $i^+$  is the nearest downstream detector of  $i$ ,  $x_i$  is the postmile of detector  $i$ , and  $|a|$  denotes the absolute value of  $a$ . Also in Equation (1), “ $\wedge$ ” denotes the “and” operator and we have  $0 \wedge 0 = 0$ ,  $0 \wedge 1 = 0$ ,  $1 \wedge 0 = 0$ , and  $1 \wedge 1 = 1$ . For more discussions about (1), the reader can refer to Ban et al. (5).

One can then calculate  $C_1 = 35.0\%$  from Equation (1) based on the postmile information shown in Figure 2. The calibration criteria for bottleneck area matching can be set as

$$C_1 \geq \delta_1. \quad (2)$$

Here  $\delta_1$  is the threshold.

#### 4. Detailed Occupancy Matching

The third step is to match detailed occupancies between simulated and observed data. In particular, we define another measure, denoted as  $C_2$ , as the objective function for the calibration in this step:

$$C_2 = 1 - \frac{2 \sum_{i=1}^N \left\{ \left( \sum_{t=1}^T [BO_s(i,t) \vee BO_r(i,t)] \right) \cdot |O_s(i,t) - O_r(i,t)| \cdot |x_{i^+} - x_i| \right\}}{\sum_{i=1}^N \left\{ \left( \sum_{t=1}^T [BO_s(i,t) \vee BO_r(i,t)] \right) \cdot [O_s(i,t) + O_r(i,t)] \cdot |x_{i^+} - x_i| \right\}}. \quad (3)$$

Here  $N$  and  $T$  are the total number of detectors and time instants, respectively. “ $\vee$ ” is the “or” operator and we have  $0 \vee 0 = 0$ ,  $0 \vee 1 = 1$ ,  $1 \vee 0 = 1$ , and  $1 \vee 1 = 1$ .  $C_2$  ranges from 0 to 1 as well with a larger value representing a better match. In particular, the bottlenecks in the two OCMs will exactly match, in terms of both areas and actual speeds, if  $C_2$  is equal to 1. For more discussions on equation (3), one can refer to Ban et al. (5).

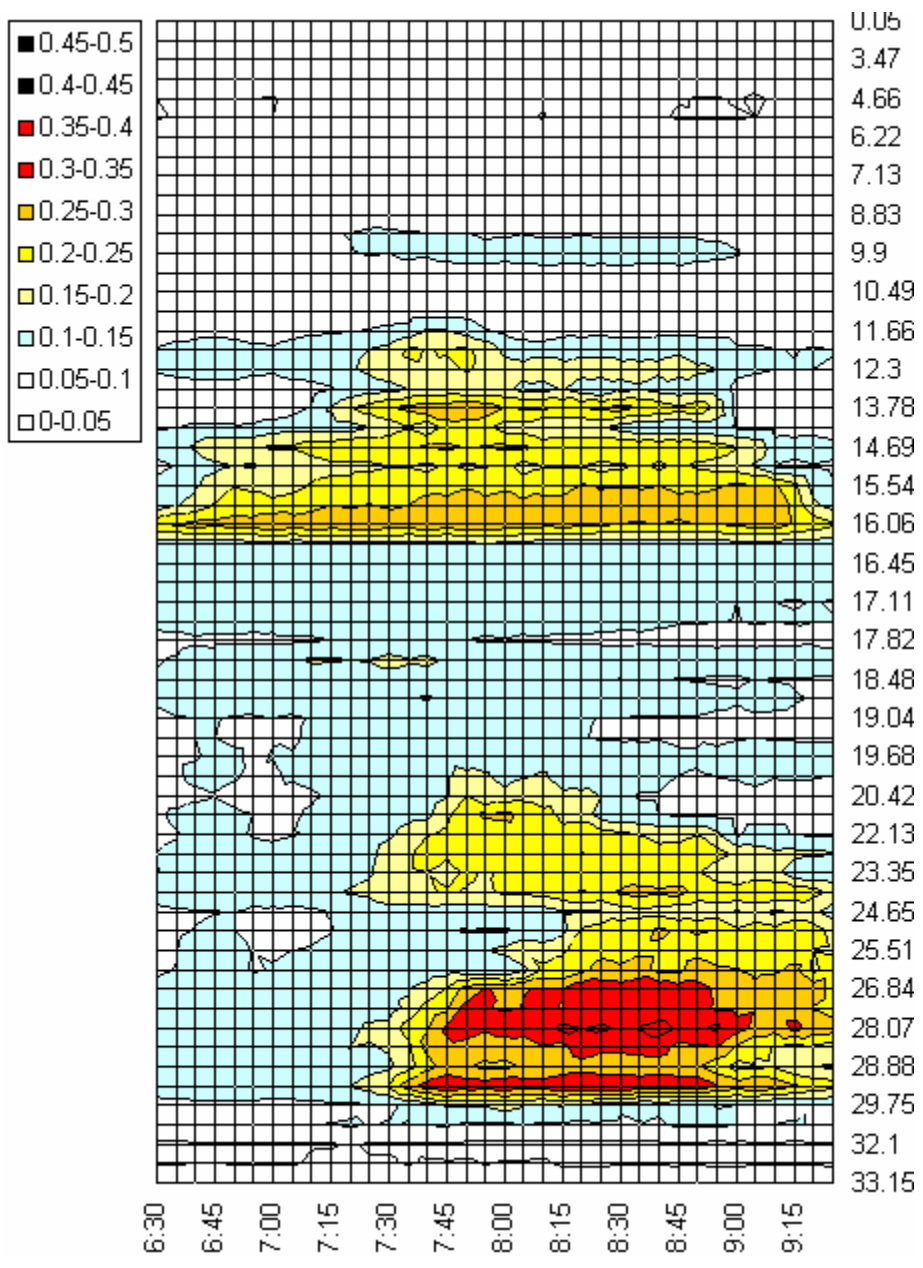
For the above example, one can obtain  $C_2 = 53.3\%$  by considering the actual occupancies of OCMs in Figure 1(a) and 1(b). Similarly as for area matching, a calibration criterion can be set up by introducing another threshold  $\delta_2$  such that:

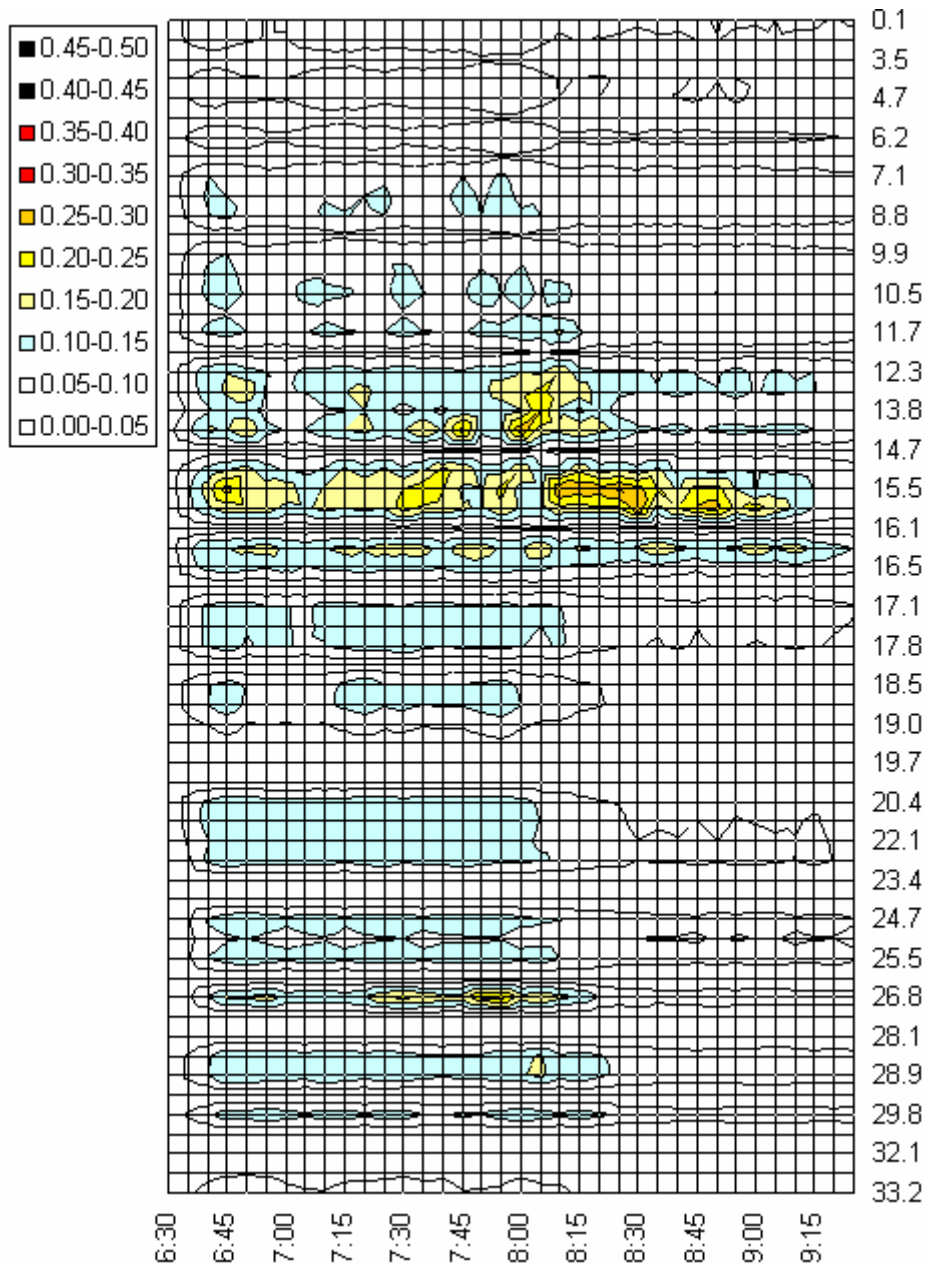
$$C_2 \geq \delta_2. \tag{4}$$

## 5. An Example

In this section, we provide a real world example using the northbound I-880 corridor in the San Francisco Bay Area in order to demonstrate the bottleneck analysis methods proposed in this paper. The detection system of I-880 is a double-loop system and thus speed data provided by PeMS are measured speeds. Also, its detector spacing is sufficient since most of its freeway segments have detection coverage at intervals of  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile or less. Twenty days of northbound I-880 data were collected from January to February of 2006 for only Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. The simulation was conducted for AM peak period from 6:30 to 9:30. The simulation data used in this section is an interim result, not necessarily the final results from the simulation model.

Figure 3 and 4 firstly depict the OCMs constructed by the observed occupancy data from loops and simulated occupancies. Figure 3 shows that there are two bottlenecks in this corridor. The simulated OCM in Figure 4 also shows two bottlenecks whose locations roughly match those in Figure 3. Figure 5 and Figure 6 further provide the BOCMs for the OCMs in Figure 3 and 4, respectively. Using Equation (1) and (3), we can compute that  $C_1 = 13.3\%$  and  $C_2 = 26.4\%$ . Clearly the bottleneck calibration is not satisfactory based on the measures developed in this study. Further, the method we developed can capture quantitatively how well the bottlenecks are matched with each other. The same results were obtained using speed data previously by a previous study of the authors (5).









## 6. Conclusion Remarks

We presented a method in this paper by using occupancy data to conduct bottleneck calibration in corridor-level micro-simulation model development. The method is a three-step process, including visual assessment, area matching, and detailed occupancy matching, which represents three levels of details to calibrate bottlenecks. It extends the bottleneck analysis methodologies recently developed by the same authors. In particular, the method proposed in this paper can be used in corridor management studies so long as loop detector data (either single or double loops) is available.

Using a real-world corridor management planning study, we showed that the bottleneck calibration method proposed in this paper can properly capture how well bottlenecks generated in simulation and real world can match with each other. It therefore may be used to improve the current state of practice of simulation calibration.

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