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# Catch Me If You Can: Predicting Mobility Patterns of Public Transport Users

Stefan Foell, Santi Phithakkitnukoon, Gerd Kortuem, Marco Veloso and Carlos Bento

**Abstract**—Direct and easy access to public transport information is an important factor for improving the satisfaction and experience of transport users. In the future, public transport information systems could be turned into personalized recommender systems which can help riders save time, make more effective decisions and avoid frustrating situations. In this paper, we present a predictive study of the mobility patterns of public transport users to lay the foundation for transport information systems with proactive capabilities. By making use of travel card data from a large population of bus riders, we describe algorithms that can anticipate bus stops accessed by individual riders to generate knowledge about future transport access patterns. To this end, we investigate and compare different prediction algorithms that can incorporate various influential factors on mobility in public transport networks, e.g., travel distance or travel hot spots. In our evaluation, we demonstrate that by combining personal and population-wide mobility patterns we can improve prediction accuracy, even with little knowledge of past behavior of transport users.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In an era of rapid urbanization, public transport plays a key role in managing the balance between increasing demand for mobility and the environmental impact of mass transport. Nevertheless, in order to ensure that public transport is a viable option for many travelers, there is a constant need to stimulate its use. In particular, cars are still the most widely used mode of transportation valued for their comfort, ownership and controllability [12]. Therefore, identifying and overcoming barriers of transport use are key priorities of many public transport providers [23].

Information technology has great potential to improve the visibility and accessibility of public transport services [5]. Over the recent years, the wide-spread adoption of smart phones has provided transport providers new channels to engage with travelers [9]. As a result, transport users are able to request journey information regardless of their current location. In a survey with bus riders, various positive effects are attributed to enhanced information availability, e.g., better satisfaction and increased ridership [10]. Easy access to relevant travel information is therefore a decisive factor for the success and adoption of public transport systems.

In the future, public transport information systems could be turned into personalized recommender systems to provide even better support and guidance. For instance, in order to alert travelers about incidents or changes affecting their journeys, suggestions for better routes could be sent to them prior to their departures. Similarly, public transport users could receive recommendations about events and offers near by the transport stops that they visit. However, a main prerequisite for the development of such intelligent services is accurate knowledge of individual travel patterns. With the deployment of automatic fare collection systems, large-scale data becomes available about real-world transport usage [18]. However, studies of individual travel patterns are sparse in public transport research. In the past, research has mainly focused on aggregate demand forecast [7].

In order to fill this gap, we describe in this paper algorithms to extract and predict mobility patterns of public transport users with a specific focus on bus ridership. Bus networks in urban areas create complex mobility systems with a large number of stops and routes. Identifying and ranking the stops used by individual bus riders provides useful knowledge for information personalization. However, given the large variety of users with different mobility needs, ranging from frequent to occasional riders, an approach is required which can guarantee effective predictions for all rider types. To find a suitable approach that exhibits these characteristics, we explore in this work a range of algorithms that can incorporate various influential factors on mobility decisions in public transport networks including a) personal travel habits and popular travel hot spots, b) geography and structure of the transport network and c) collective information of transport use from other travelers.

In our evaluation, we use large-scale bus ride data from Lisbon, Portugal to analyze the predictability of different riders. As our analysis shows, the ability to adapt to varying degrees of knowledge of a user’s past rides is essential to achieve high prediction accuracies. While knowledge from personal ride histories is valuable especially for more habitual riders, information from collective transport usage patterns of other riders is important to new or infrequent bus users for which data histories are limited. By showing that both beneficial features can be combined into a single approach, we provide a powerful tool that can be applied to foresee mobility behaviors of any rider type. As a result, this work contributes important methods and insights for the design and development of more intelligent public transport information systems that can incorporate accurate knowledge of mobility patterns of public transport users.

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The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In Section II, we report on prior studies of travel card data patterns. Then, in Section III, we introduce the datasets analyzed in our work. The problem addressed in this paper is formally described in Section IV. In Section V, we present algorithms for the prediction of mobility behaviors of transport users. Subsequently, we describe in Section VI the results of our analysis. Finally, a conclusion is given in Section VII.

## II. RELATED WORK

This work seeks to extract novel added values from the data generated by today’s public transport systems. As more and more sensors have been integrated into public transport infrastructures, and electronic ticketing systems are widely deployed today, large-scale transport data is produced at high rates [24]. Especially, the data recorded by Automated Fare Collection (AFC) and Automated Vehicle Location (AVL) systems are valuable assets for strategic, tactical and operational planning of public transport systems [18]. In the following, we present prior work in this space.

Ferrari et al. have leveraged on AFC data to build a ridership demand model and investigate accessibility barriers for wheelchair users [8]. They discovered that measurable barriers are prevailing both in terms of travel time and number of required interchanges. Moreover, AFC data has been used to characterize passenger flows in intra-urban environments [21]. Based on a gravity model it could be shown that some of the variation in mobility flows is influenced by distance and population of local residents. Ceapa et al. have analyzed time series of AFC data to identify events of overcrowding at public transport stations [6]. Their analysis revealed that overcrowding situations follow regular patterns associated with peak travel times that can be well predicted. Bejan et al. showed that AVL data can be exploited to estimate journey times experienced by road users [2]. This way, information about traffic conditions in urban areas can be provided without the need for additional costly sensing and monitoring infrastructure.

Over the recent years, personalized transport information systems have moved into the focus of research [9]. These systems benefit from predictions of travel decisions of individual travelers. Foell et al. have analyzed temporal patterns in large-scale bus ridership data [11]. In this work, temporal features are mined for the prediction of transport access, e.g., day of the week, but spatial movements patterns are not considered. Li et al. have analyzed travel flow directions at peak hours in relation to stops classified according to surrounding land usage characteristics [15]. Furthermore, Liu et al. have mined spatial and temporal patterns of transport behavior to quantify degrees of regularity inherent to travel [16]. However, the patterns explored in these works characterize aggregated usage, and cannot be used as effective tool to forecast mobility of individual riders.

Understanding human mobility patterns has been the subject of research in various domains beyond transport systems. For instance, Belik et al. explore the role of human movements in spatial epidemics and analyze how the

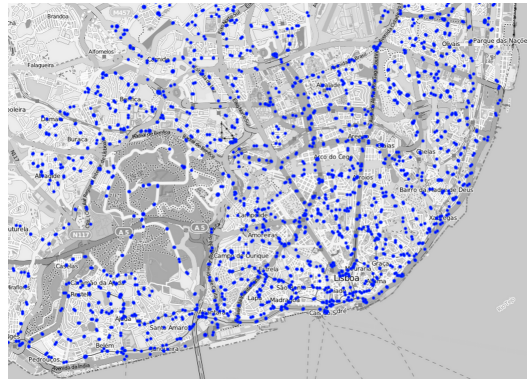


Fig. 1. Locations of bus stops in Lisbon.

spread of diseases is influenced by mobility patterns [3]. In a different setting, Noulas et al. have exploited check-in and movement patterns to predict new venues in location-based social networks [17]. Song et al. have evaluated the limits of predictability in human dynamics by analyzing mobility patterns of mobile phone users [22]. However, a detailed study into individual human mobility patterns in the context of public transport systems and an analysis of their predictability based on AFC and AVL data has not been reported in current literature.

## III. DATASETS AND PREPARATION

The transport data used for our analysis has been collected in Lisbon. Lisbon is the capital and largest city of Portugal with a population of over half a million. Buses are an important part of the city’s public transport infrastructure. In our analysis, we use datasets of bus ride histories provided by the local bus operator. The data has been recorded between 1st of April and 31st of May 2010 (61 days). In the following, we describe the datasets in detail.

### A. Bus network data

Our data provides geographic and topological information about the bus network in two sets of data. Dataset A contains all bus stops in Lisbon and their geographic locations as shown in Fig. 1. Formally, the set of stops is denoted as  $S$ . In total,  $|S| = 2110$  stops are listed. Each stop  $s_i \in S$  is associated with spatial coordinates given its latitude and longitude pair. This allows us to compute the geographic distance  $dist(s_i, s_j)$  between two bus stops  $s_i \in S$  and  $s_j \in S$ . Dataset B provides information about the bus network in Lisbon. To this end, bus routes are listed with information of the bus line id, direction, and the stops on the route. As routes are described as directional, they encompass different stops for each direction. Both datasets have been used to estimate geographic and network-based travel distances as explained later in this paper.

### B. Bus ridership data

Ridership information has been scattered over two additional datasets which needed to be correlated.

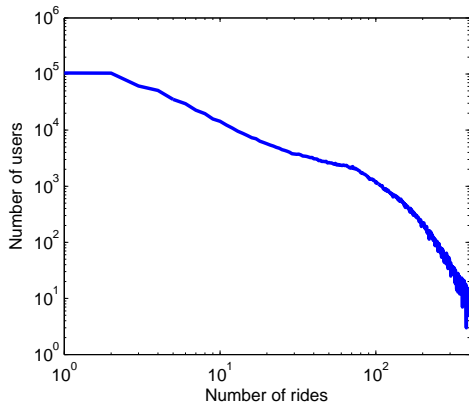


Fig. 2. The ridership distribution shows the number of users with a specific ridership demand that is observed in our data.

Dataset C provides trip records collected by the AFC system deployed in Lisbon. Amongst other information, each record contains the id of the rider’s travel card, time of bus boarding and the id of the bus boarded. Moreover, dataset D provides AVL data from the buses. The data comprises the time-stamped bus arrivals of buses along their routes that were recorded each time passengers were dropped off. Both datasets have been linked to gain complete bus ridership information that exposes the ids of the bus stops where the rides were started. Note that only boarding information can be obtained as bus users in Lisbon are required to use their travel cards only at the beginning of their journey to get on the bus. In order to compensate for potential synchronization issues, we allowed for a small temporal deviation for a successful matching between bus arrival and bus boarding. Bus rides which could not be matched due to larger deviations or other inconsistencies (e.g. we observed some duplicate AFC entries) have been removed from our analysis. As the correlation was performed based on the time of a ride and unique bus id, unambiguous travel histories of individual riders have been obtained. Formally, the data can be described as  $H = \{\langle u, s, t \rangle \mid u \in U, s \in S, t \in T\}$ , where  $u$  is the rider,  $s$  is the bus stop where a ride was started and  $t$  is the time of a boarding. In total, we obtained  $|H| = 24, 257, 353$  bus trips taken by  $|U| = 809, 758$  riders over the observation period.

#### IV. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In this paper, we address the problem of predicting the mobility patterns of bus riders traveling the bus network. Unlike prior work in public transport research [7], the focus of our study is not on aggregate demand patterns. Instead, we aim at personalized predictions which apply to individual travelers and their personal mobility behavior. These predictions are much more useful when an understanding of the specific transport needs of a single person is required.

More precisely, we seek to anticipate the stops relevant for a rider  $u$  to access the transport network. For such a prediction, we make use of historic information about past rides from  $u$ ’s trip history  $H_u = \{\langle u, s, t \rangle \in H \mid s \in S, t \in$

$T\}$ . While  $H_u$  provides useful knowledge about past rides, the accuracy of prediction depends on how  $u$  behaves in the future. In the future,  $u$  may access not only known stops, but also stops that  $u$  never used before. In addition, the relevance of the stops may change and certain stops may be used much more or less frequently by  $u$  in the future. To account for the fact that different bus stops are not equally relevant for a rider, the prediction problem is approached as a ranking task where a stop used more frequently by  $u$  in the future should receive a higher rank. Formally, the ranking results in a total order where a unique position  $r_u(s) \in [1, |S|]$  is assigned to each stop  $s \in S$  resulting in a prediction list. In this list, stop  $s_i$  is ranked higher than stop  $s_j$  with  $i \neq j$  if it holds that  $r_u(s_i) > r_u(s_j)$ .

This problem definition naturally addresses different scenarios of real-world transport usage. On the one hand, the degree as to which the same stops are visited over and over again is determined by routine behavior. There may be stops seen regularly as well as ones which are visited only occasionally. On the other hand, new transport users may be constantly joining the bus system. As a consequence, transport usage histories may contain only little information from which the prediction can benefit. However, accurate predictions should be also available for these users. Fig. 2 shows the distribution of ridership among all bus users over the entire observation period. It can be seen that a broad spectrum of different ridership demand exists which impacts on the amount of historic information available for prediction. In the following, we explore a set of algorithms which can be applied to riders with different characteristics to achieve accurate predictions.

#### V. PREDICTION ALGORITHMS

In this section, we propose a set of algorithms to address the prediction problem introduced above. The algorithms make use of different features which imply mobility preferences among users traveling a bus transport network. We investigate: a) personal and global patterns of transport usage as being encoded in travel card data, b) travel distance metrics which are either based on geographic distances or shaped by the layout of the network topology, and c) collaborative filtering algorithms that exploit similarities and commonalities in transport behavior among different users. While the prediction algorithms and features are described next, a detailed evaluation and comparison of the approaches is given thereafter.

##### A. Personal Mobility

One straightforward way to predict future stop usage is to leverage on the information from the user’s own trip history  $H_u$ . This approach is termed *Personal*. The idea is that those stops which have shown to be of high relevance in the past, will also be equally important in the future. For this purpose, we mine the user’s transport history for stops that have been accessed in the past. Formally, we use

$$f_{u,i} = |\{\langle u, s_i, l, t \rangle \in H_u \mid l \in L, t \in T\}|$$



Fig. 3. Map showing the popularity of bus stops in Lisbon. A bus stop is represented with a circle whose radius is scaled according to the number of rides that were started at the stop.

to determine the number of rides boarded by  $u$  at stop  $s_i$ . Knowledge of the past stop visits can then be employed to define a ranking among all stops. A higher rank is associated with stops that have been visited more often. This way, all stops  $S_u = \{s \in S | \langle u, s, t \rangle \in H_u\}$  that have been visited before appear at the top of the list. As a tie breaker, stops that have been accessed the same number of times are included in a random order. However, this means that all stops  $S \setminus S_u$  that have not been visited before cannot be weighted accordingly. In our evaluation, we will see that neglecting potential new behaviors leads to suboptimal predictions. This can be especially a problem for new or infrequent bus riders. Therefore, we seek to explore further solutions in the following which can operate on a greater variety of scenarios.

### B. Global Mobility

When personal usage patterns superimpose each other, global patterns of transport usage emerge. These global patterns carry important information about which transport decisions are likely to be made by users. As a common phenomenon, popular hot spots exist in transport networks that are particularly attractive to travelers resulting in high levels of transport activity at specific locations. The emergence of such hot spots is due to manifold influences and forces in a city ecosystem, e.g., caused by transport hubs with access to different transport modalities, urban centers of social activity such as leisure and night-life districts, or skewed residential population distributions. Fig. 3 shows the popularity of bus stop visits in Lisbon based on our ridership data. The figure reveals a high skew in the popularity of different stops for attracting ridership. The most 20% frequently visited stops make up for 62.4% of total stop visits. This signifies that global mobility patterns are concentrated on the most popular bus stops. In Lisbon, many popular stops are near to train stations, tourist spots and the city’s harbour. We exploit this observation and define

$$g_i = \sum_{u \in U} f_{u,i}$$

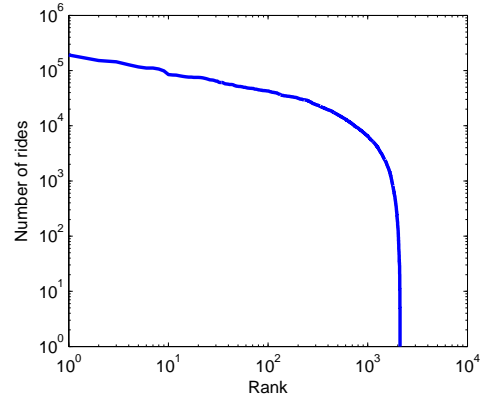


Fig. 4. Ranked distribution of the popularity of bus stops in Lisbon. The x-axis represents the rank of the stop (from most frequently to least frequently used), and the y-axis shows the number of rides starting at this stop.

as the global popularity of bus stop  $s_i$  among all riders. Knowledge of the global popularity patterns can then be used to influence the prediction. The approach termed *Global* simply ranks all stops  $S$  according to their global usage popularities. As a consequence, a universal ranking is established which is the same across all users. A more personalized approach is *Personal*<sup>+</sup> which applies the global popularity patterns only to stops  $S \setminus S_u$  that have not been used by  $u$  before. With this approach, the top entries in the ranked stop list are derived from personal riding patterns as described in the previous section. The lower part of the list consists of all remaining stops ordered according to their global usage popularities.

### C. Geographic Mobility

Finding universal laws to model and explain the movement of people has been an active area of research in the past. In empirical studies, it has been shown that a close relationship exists between human movement and geographic distance [13]. Distance is seen as a barrier to travel, which is empirically proven by the emergence of skewed mobility patterns. More precisely, the probability of traveling to a destination decreases proportional to the distance involved in a trip [13]. As this has been described as a universal law which generally holds for human mobility behaviors, we seek to explore this feature also in the context of public transport usage. Therefore, we propose the *Geographic* approach that calculates personalized travel distances based on the stops  $S_u$  that have been previously visited by  $u$ . Based on these distances, we estimate the degree to which any other bus stop would be a relevant target of the user. Formally, this can be described as

$$d_{u,i} = \min_{1 \leq j \leq |S_U|} \text{dist}(s_j, s_i)$$

which yields the closest distance  $d_i \in \mathbb{R}$  to a stop  $s_i \in S \setminus S_u$  from any stop in  $S_u$  previously visited. A bus stop is assigned a lower rank if it is near to a bus stop that has been used before. Consequently, this approach is shaped both by the geographic layout of the bus network as well as the past bus

rides of travelers. In our evaluation, we have tried different options to define a set of anchor points upon which the distance calculation is based. As one alternative, we have used the most popular stop as an approximation of a user’s home location to center the geographic search. However, the accuracy was higher when incorporating the user’s entire mobility radius given by the full set of  $S_u$ .

Moreover, we have adapted the distance metric to account for variations in popularity among the bus stops in the city. The idea is that popularity represents a complementary factor which changes how distance is experienced by travelers. For this purpose, *Geographic*<sup>+</sup>

$$d_{u,i}^+ = (1 + \log(\frac{\max_{1 \leq r \leq |S|} g_r}{g_i})) \cdot d_{u,i}$$

incorporates the global usage  $g_i$  as part of the weight factor to calculate the adjusted distance  $d_{u,i}^+$ . The weight factor is based on the inverse ratio of a stop’s popularity to the highest stop popularity. We apply a logarithmically scaling to create a smoother weighing effect. The weight factor can be considered as a pulling or pushing force on the distance  $d_{u,i}$ . If the stop is unpopular, the distance is pushed further away, making it less reachable. In contrast, if the stop has a high popularity, the stop is pushed closer to the user. These factors therefore distort the geographic space to account for more realistic transport usage patterns. A similar technique has been applied in information retrieval where the tf-idf factor is used to quantify the degree of unique words in documents [1]. However, the relevance of popular stops is increased with our weighting scheme whereas information retrieval considers more popular documents as less important.

#### D. Network Mobility

While geographic distance represents an unbiased distance estimator in free spaces, public transport networks represent planned and more constrained environments. Instead of arbitrary travel paths that can be followed through the city, public transport systems are based on predefined routes which guide the travel flows. Consequently, the topology of a route network may significantly differ from relations found in geographic space: while stops may be geographically close to each other, short and direct connections may not always be guaranteed among them in a public transport network. Beyond geographic distance, we therefore explore a more meaningful distance metric to identify preferred travel paths of riders that are revealed by routes which are well-connected in terms of the layout of the transport network.

To create this metric, we derive an adjacency matrix  $A$  that maps the neighborhood relations in the public transport network topology. Each entry  $a_{ij} \in A$  of the matrix represents a binary variable which encodes whether stops  $s_i$  and  $s_j$  are connected through a direct bus route segment. More precisely, we set  $a_{ij} = 1$  if there is at least one bus route which links stops  $s_i$  and  $s_j$  as successive stops in the same direction, and  $a_{ij} = 0$  otherwise. Then, we use  $A$  as input to a shortest path algorithm (i.e., Dijkstra) to compute logical travel distances in the public transport network. The result

is a matrix  $L$  whose entries  $l_{ij}$  denote the minimum number of hops required to travel between any stops  $s_i$  and  $s_j$ . Note that different refinements of this algorithm are feasible, e.g. penalizing interchanges or considering the actual travel time on route segments. However, in our work, we have focused on the basic network topology for a direct comparison with the geographic distance space.

For the *Network* approach we then calculate

$$n_{u,i} = \min_{1 \leq j \leq |S_U|} l_{ji}$$

to determine the minimum distance to reach stop  $s_i \in S \setminus S_u$  from any stop in  $S_u$  previously visited. Hence, stops which are easily reachable through a path in the network topology from stops visited in the past receive a higher rank.

Following the same rationale as before, *Network*<sup>+</sup> take this idea one step further and adjusts the distances to account for the varying popularity of bus stops. Formally, we determine

$$n_{u,i}^+ = (1 + \log(\frac{\max_{1 \leq r \leq |S|} g_r}{g_i})) \cdot n_{u,i}$$

which is the hop-based travel distance to reach  $s_i$  from previously visited stops offset by its popularity. As a consequence, a stop is considered to be of high relevance if it has a good link to the user’s stops visited in the past and if it is attracting a large number of rides.

#### E. Collaborative Filtering

On an abstract level, the prediction problem studied in this paper fits the purpose of recommender systems [19]. For suggesting relevant items to users, recommender system provide algorithms to analyze the users’ ratings of items and find common patterns among the collective ratings of all users. In the following, we apply a similar strategy to capture travel decisions in public transport networks. The idea is that when bus stops are seen as items, stop visits define implicit ratings that can be mined to determine the strength as to which different stops are similar in usage among users. Knowledge of the similarity in stop usage then can be exploited to identify stops with strong relations that are likely to become relevant to the user in the future. To this end, we leverage on item-based recommendation [20] which allows us to manage the complexity of the recommendation algorithm despite the high number of users. Item-based recommendation is preferred over a user-based approach when the number of items outweighs the number of users. In our scenario, this premise is satisfied as the set of stops in the public transport network is much smaller than the large population of riders. According to this approach, we determine for each stop  $s_i$  a visit vector

$$t_i = \langle f_{u_1,i}, f_{u_2,i}, \dots, f_{u_{|U|},i} \rangle$$

where the  $i$ -th component encodes the number of visits of the user  $u_i \in U$  at this stop. Given two visit vectors  $t_i$  and  $t_j$  associated with stops  $s_i$  and  $s_j$ , a similarity score  $sim(i, j)$  can be computed to indicate if both stops have similar usage patterns. In our work, we have used the Cosine similarity which measures the cosine of the angle between the vectors.

According to this measure, two stops  $s_i$  and  $s_j$  are similar to each other if a rider visiting  $s_i$  implies that also  $s_j$  is visited.

The similarity scores can be incorporated into an approach *Collaborative* that implements collaborative filtering for predicting stops that will be visited by a user. For every user  $u \in U$  a visit score

$$v_{u,i} = \sum_{s_j \in S_u} sim(j,i) \cdot f_{u,i}$$

is computed that quantifies the prospect that stop  $s_i$  will be used. The score is based on the similarities  $sim(j,i)$  of  $s_i$  with all stops  $s_j \in S_u$  found in a user’s trip history. In addition, the similarity scores are weighted by the frequency of past usage of the stops in  $s_j \in S_u$ . As a consequence, those bus stops are ranked high that exhibit similarities to the ones that are frequently used by the rider. In contrast to classical item-based recommendation where a rating score is computed as the average rating from related items [20], we have customized our algorithm to accumulate evidence of potential stop usage.

#### F. Random Walk Approach

Random walks are employed in various domains to model and reason over uncertain behaviors. A random walk can be applied to explore the decisions which users have can make in linked information spaces [4]. For the purpose of this work, we apply a random walk approach to reason over the collective mobility patterns of bus users. The idea is to model the stop visit patterns of all users in a coherent graph structure, exposing the stops that the user is attracted to and therefore likely to visit in the future.

To implement this model, we define a directed graph  $G = (V, E)$  whose nodes  $V = (U \cup S)$  are the union of all users and stops, and the edges  $E \subset V \times V$  represent usage relations observed in the data. For each user  $u_i$  who has used stop  $s_j$  two directed edges are introduced:  $(u_i, s_j) \in E$  from the user to the stop as well as  $(s_j, u_i) \in E$  in the reverse direction. Each edge  $e \in E$  is associated with a probability  $p(e)$  that models how likely the edge is to be traversed. For the definition of the edge probabilities, we incorporate the variation of stop visits to add weight to edges which lead to more frequently used stops. With this approach,  $p(u_i, s_j)$  is defined as the fraction of  $u_i$ ’s rides that have started from stop  $s_j$ . On the other hand,  $p(s_j, u_i)$  is defined as the fraction of all rides from  $s_j$  that have been taken by  $u_j$ . Hence, the graph encodes both structural relations and quantitative mobility information.

Given this bus usage mobility graph, we then perform a *RandomWalk* which has been devised for recommendation problems [14]. Initially, the random walk starts at node  $u$  representing the user whose mobility pattern is to be predicted. Then, in each iteration the graph is traversed according to the transition probabilities  $p$  assigned to the edges. With a restart probability of  $r$ , however, the random walk is taken back to node  $u$ . This is to direct the search in the direct neighbourhood of the user’s node from which the graph is explored. As the random walk is continued, evidence

TABLE I  
AVERAGE PERCENTILE RANK (MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION)

Approach	APR	
	$\mu$	$\sigma$
Random	0.500	0.174
Global	0.804	0.123
Personal	0.839	0.194
Personal <sup>+</sup>	0.931	0.097
Geographic	0.942	0.116
Geographic <sup>+</sup>	0.958	0.081
Network	0.948	0.105
Network <sup>+</sup>	0.963	0.073
Collaborative	0.972	0.062
RandomWalk	0.973	0.055

is accumulated about the stops which are often encountered and therefore are more connected to the user.

In a matrix form, the solution of the random walk can be expressed by equation

$$s = (1 - r) \cdot p \cdot s + r \cdot q$$

where  $q$  encodes the user’s node as a column vector,  $p$  is the transition probability matrix and  $s$  denotes the steady-state probabilities, i.e., the long-term rate that a random walk terminates in a node when followed infinitely. The steady-state probabilities associated with stops  $S \subset V$  can thus be used as a ranking criterion. Consequently, those stops are ranked high which can be reached more easily from the user’s position in the graph. This is influenced by the user’s own usage pattern as well as that of all other riders which are represented in the graph.

## VI. EVALUATION

For the evaluation of the prediction algorithms, we have relied on bus usage data from Lisbon as discussed before. Given the large number of riders in the dataset, the predictability of the mobility patterns of a large rider population can be analyzed, and the relation between prediction accuracy and different rider types can be assessed. In the following, we first describe the methodology underlying our evaluation and then present the results from the analysis.

### A. Methodology

In order to evaluate the prediction algorithms, the data has been split into a training and test set. The test set comprises the last two weeks of the bus usage data, while the training set spans all days before. This way, the travel histories of riders have been segmented into a historic part (training set) and future part (test set). For each algorithm, we created a ranked list of predicted bus stop usage specific to the individual traveler (using the user’s own ride history and/or the histories of other riders depending on the algorithm). Then, we compared the predictions with the actual observations in the test data. Riders with not at least one ride in either the test or training set have been pruned from the evaluation.

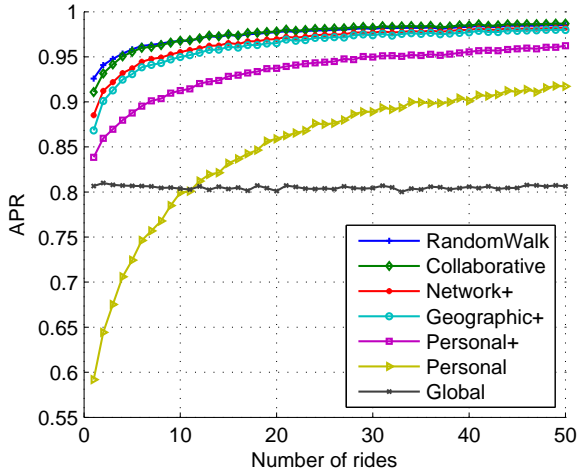


Fig. 5. APR depending on the size of the trip history

As evaluation metric, we used the percentile rank as a measure of prediction accuracy. For any stop  $s \in S_u$  accessed by a user  $u$ , the percentile rank (PR) is given as

$$PR = \frac{|S| - r_u(s) + 1}{|S|}$$

The PR reveals the degree to which the ranked list of bus stops matches the real stop usage of a rider. A PR equal to 1 refers a perfect prediction where the stop used by the rider is ranked at the top of the list. In contrast, if the PR tends to be closer to 0, the prediction becomes worse as the stop is found more towards the end of the list. By applying this metric to all bus rides of a user, every stop use is counted towards the PR. Consequently, more frequently used stops have a bigger impact on the prediction accuracy as they are more relevant to the rider. The PR of all riders  $u \in U$  is then averaged to obtain the average percentile rank (APR). The approach with the highest APR represents the best predictor which exhibits the highest predictive power.

## B. Results

1) *Performance Comparison*: In Table I, we show the APR achieved by the different approaches. As a baseline, we generate a randomly ordered list (*Random*) which yields an APR of 0.5. It can be seen that all of the proposed approaches significantly outperform this baseline. The *Global* predictor shows already clear improvements, as stop visits are clustered around popular stops. The *Personal* approach shows that prior knowledge of the user's behavior can improve the prediction. All other approaches outperform the basic approaches when combining personal and global patterns. *Personal+* improves the performance by a simple approach to fuse personal and global usage patterns. The improvement achieved by *Geographic* provides evidence that transport usage decisions emerge from regular spatial access patterns where closeness is an important criterion. The notion of closeness can be further enhanced with the *Network* approach. As our analysis shows, the topological

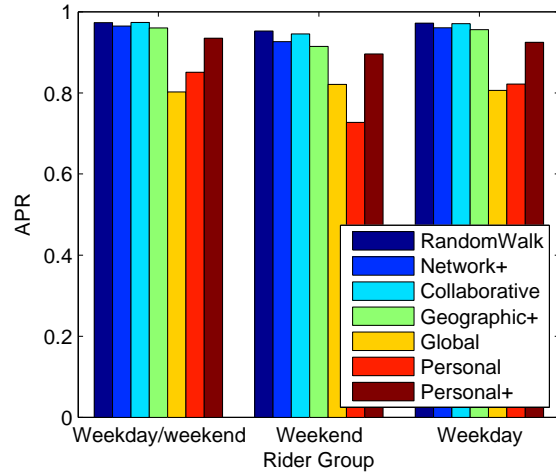


Fig. 6. APR depending on rider group

travel distance within the bus network has a bigger influence on a rider's mobility behavior than geographic distance. If the distances are adapted according to global usage patterns, we can see that the accuracy of the predictions improves (both *Geographic+* and *Network+*). Note that an increase of 0.01 in APR already corresponds to an improvement of 21 ranks in the list. The best results are achieved by the two approaches that can selectively combine collective usage patterns from travelers with similar behaviors: *Collab* achieves an APR of 0.977, and *RandomWalk* achieves the highest prediction accuracy with an APR of 0.973.

2) *Dependency on Ridership*: Fig. 5 shows the APR achieved by the different algorithms in relation to the number of rides taken by the rider. For this purpose, we have grouped all riders according to individual ridership demand observed in the training data, and then computed the APR over all riders in this group. Generally, it can be observed that more active users with a larger number of bus rides are better predictable. The *Personal* approach is particularly sensitive towards the amount of known past transport behavior: While for more active users the rider's own history covers a large portion of the future stop usage, there is a high degree of uncertainty involved for low demand riders resulting in inaccurate prediction. The performance of the *Global* approach is largely independent from ridership demand. All riders tend to visit popular stops in the bus network in a similar way. The best performing approaches have the ability to adapt to both more active and less active riders. As these approaches are designed to interweave global usage patterns with personal ridership habits, a high prediction accuracy can be achieved across a spectrum of different transport behaviors. Among them, the *Personal+* approach is the most limited one as the global usage patterns are not evaluated according to the user's own behavior. The *Random Walk* approach is the best approach, consistently across all rider groups. Notably, it also outperforms the *Personal* approach for the group of



active riders, demonstrating that incorporating knowledge beyond the user's own travel history is beneficial for all riders. Consequently, the *Random Walk* approach can be regarded as the most generic predictor suitable for any level of ridership demand.

3) *Different Rider Groups*: We have further analyzed the predictability of different rider groups with distinct temporal behaviors. To this end, riders have been assigned to one of three categories based on the times of when buses have been used (weekday, weekend or both). Then, we have measured the APR for the different groups. As Fig. 6 shows, weekday riders are most predictable, but only slightly more predictable than weekday/weekend riders. Across all predictors, both rider groups are almost indistinguishable. In contrast, weekend riders show a different behavior. They constitute the group that is most difficult to predict. For these riders, personal travel histories have only a limited value for prediction. This is demonstrated as the *Global* approach outperforms *Personal*, providing evidence that global usage patterns that emphasize common popular destinations dominate on weekends while regular mobility decisions of individual riders emerge on weekdays. As a result, personal travel histories become most useful when weekday activity is involved. Notably, the *Random Walk* approach achieves the best APR across all different rider groups. This again demonstrates the effectiveness of combing personal usage data with related global mobility patterns. This way, accurate mobility predictions can be constructed for riders of different groups, such as weekday and weekend riders.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have presented a large-scale analysis of mobility patterns of urban bus riders. By making use of travel card histories from Lisbon, Portugal, we have explored suitable approaches for predicting the future bus stops accessed by individual riders as part of their bus journeys. To this end, prediction approaches have been described that can capture influential factors on the rider's mobility choices, including notions of spatial and topological travel distance, individual and popular stop usage as well as collective mobility behaviors. In our evaluation, we have demonstrated that accurate predictions can be delivered that can combine knowledge from personal ride histories and the mobility patterns of other riders. This work paves the way for a new generation of transport information systems which can take advantage of a better understanding of the mobility requirements in public transport scenarios, equally relevant for transport providers, third party application developers and finally the individual riders.

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