International Journal of Scientific Research in Engineering and Management (IJSREM)
Volume: 10 Issue: 10 | Oct - 2026 SJIF Rating: 8.659 ISSN: 2582-3930

Railway Track Inspection System Using an ESP32-Based Robot and RealTime Monitoring

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Abstract

Railway tracks require regular inspection to identify conditions that may affect safe and reliable railway operation. The proposed Railway Track Inspection System is a robot-assisted prototype intended for preliminary monitoring of railway track conditions. The system integrates an ESP32-based embedded controller, camera, sensors, motor drive, wireless communication and a monitoring dashboard. The camera is used for visible surface-defect inspection, while sensors support detection of obstacles, water accumulation and abnormal vibration or tilt. Inspection data are collected by the ESP32 and transmitted to a laptop-based monitoring interface for realtime observation and alert generation. The prototype demonstrates the integration of robotics, embedded systems, sensor interfacing, image processing and wireless communication for railway inspection.

Keywords— Railway track inspection, ESP32, robotics, image processing, IoT, sensors, real-time monitoring, railway safety.

I. INTRODUCTION

Railway infrastructure is continuously exposed to mechanical loads, vibration, weather conditions, water accumulation and surface wear. These factors can produce visible surface defects, obstacles, irregularities and abnormal vibration that may require timely inspection. Conventional railway inspection can involve considerable human effort and physical monitoring of long stretches of track. Continuous monitoring of the complete track is therefore challenging.

To address this requirement, this work proposes a Railway Track Inspection System in the form of a mobile robot prototype. The robot moves along the railway track and collects information about selected track conditions. A camera is used for visible surface-defect detection, while suitable sensors monitor obstacles, water accumulation and abnormal vibration or tilt. An ESP32 controller acquires the sensor information and supports wireless transmission to a monitoring dashboard. The objective is not to replace detailed railway engineering inspection, but to demonstrate a technology-assisted preliminary inspection approach.

II. RELEVANCE AND MOTIVATION

The project is relevant to Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering because it combines embedded systems, sensor interfacing, robotics, wireless communication, image processing and real-time monitoring. The motivation is to reduce unnecessary human exposure to railway environments and provide timely information that can assist maintenance personnel in identifying locations that may require further inspection.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Railway Track Crack Detection Using Image Processing. Previous studies have explored camera-based image processing techniques to identify cracks and surface defects in railway tracks. Such approaches can support railway safety and reduce dependence on manual visual inspection.

B. IoT-Based Railway Track Monitoring. Research on IoT-based railway monitoring has demonstrated the use of sensors and microcontrollers for continuous observation of track conditions, vibration, obstacles and other abnormal conditions, enabling faster maintenance decisions.

C. AI-Based Railway Track Defect Detection. Recent research has focused on AI and machine-learning methods combined with cameras and sensors to detect and classify railway track defects. These systems can provide real-time alerts and support predictive maintenance.

IV. PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

Railway tracks are exposed to mechanical loads, weather conditions, water accumulation, surface wear and environmental effects. These conditions can lead to track irregularities, visible surface defects, obstacles and abnormal vibration. If such conditions are not identified in time, they may affect railway operation and increase maintenance requirements. Manual inspection requires field visits and physical monitoring of long track sections. The identified need is therefore a robot-assisted preliminary inspection system that can move along the track, collect condition data and present the information to maintenance personnel through a monitoring interface.

V. OBJECTIVES

To develop a robot-assisted system for preliminary railway track inspection.

To detect visible surface defects using a camera and image processing.

To identify obstacles and water accumulation near the track.

To monitor abnormal vibration and tilt using an IMU sensor.

To collect and transmit sensor data using an ESP32-based embedded system.

To display inspection information and alerts through a real-time monitoring dashboard.

VI. PROPOSED SYSTEM AND BLOCK DIAGRAM

The proposed system consists of a mobile railway-track robot, sensing and imaging units, an ESP32 controller, motor drive, wireless communication and a

laptop-based monitoring dashboard. The camera and sensors provide the input information. The ESP32 processes/acquires the sensor information and coordinates the robot operation. Wireless communication transfers inspection information to the dashboard, where the track-condition status and alerts can be observed.

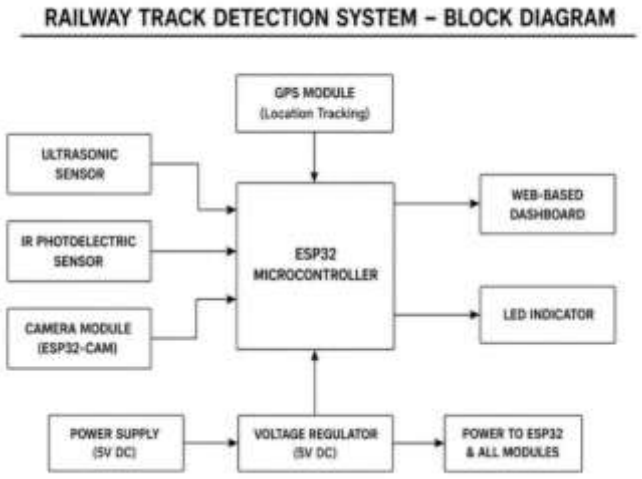


Fig. 1. Block diagram of the proposed Railway Track Inspection System.

VII. BLOCK DIAGRAM DESCRIPTION

Railway Track Environment—The robot operates on the railway track and encounters the physical conditions that need preliminary inspection.

Camera / ESP32-CAM—The camera captures visual information of the track surface for visible surface-defect inspection.

Sensors—Sensors are used for detecting obstacles, water accumulation and abnormal vibration or tilt. The synopsis also specifies an IMU for vibration/tilt monitoring.

ESP32 Controller—The ESP32 acts as the embedded controller that acquires sensor information and supports communication with the monitoring interface.

Motor Driver and DC Gear Motors—The motor driver controls the DC gear motors used for movement of the robot along the track.

GPS Module—The synopsis lists a NEO-6M GPS module for location-related information associated with inspection data.

Wireless Communication—Inspection data are transmitted from the robot to the laptop-based monitoring interface.

Monitoring Dashboard—The dashboard displays inspection information, system status and alerts when abnormal conditions are detected.

VIII. WORKING METHODOLOGY

1. Robot movement: The robot is positioned on the railway track and driven using DC gear motors through the motor driver.

2. Data acquisition: The ESP32 receives information from the connected sensors and camera system.

3. Condition monitoring: The camera is used for visible surface-defect inspection, while sensors monitor obstacles, water accumulation and abnormal vibration/tilt.

4. Location and communication: GPS information can support location identification, while wireless communication transfers collected information to the monitoring interface.

5. Dashboard display: The laptop dashboard displays the inspection status and generates alerts when an abnormal condition is detected.

IX. SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

The project focuses on developing a prototype Railway Track Inspection System capable of moving along a railway track and monitoring selected track conditions. The system integrates sensors, a camera, an ESP32 controller, wireless communication and a monitoring dashboard. The prototype can perform preliminary detection of visible surface defects, obstacles, water accumulation and abnormal vibration or tilt. The collected information is intended to assist maintenance personnel in identifying areas that may require further inspection.

X. EXPECTED OUTCOME

A working Railway Track Inspection System prototype capable of moving along a railway track.

Detection of visible surface defects using a camera-based inspection system.

Detection of obstacles near or on the track.

Identification of water accumulation around the track.

Monitoring of abnormal vibration and tilt during robot movement.

Real-time collection and transmission of sensor data using ESP32.

Display of inspection information and alerts through a monitoring dashboard.

Demonstration of the practical integration of embedded systems, sensors, robotics, image processing and wireless communication in a railway safety application.

XI. CONCLUSION

The proposed Railway Track Inspection System provides a technology-assisted approach for preliminary railway track-condition monitoring. By integrating a mobile robot, ESP32 controller, camera, sensors, motor drive, wireless communication and a monitoring dashboard, the system can collect useful information about selected track conditions. The proposed prototype demonstrates the practical application of embedded systems, robotics, sensor interfacing and image processing to railway inspection. The system is intended to support preliminary assessment and identification of locations that may require detailed inspection by responsible railway personnel.

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