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# User Equilibrium and System Optimum with Incomplete Information In Traffic Congestion

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*Abstract*—By providing more information about traffic network, such as more feasible paths via intelligent navigation systems (INS), users in the network may change their choices of the path from a source to a destination. This paper investigates a traffic congestion model with incomplete information, in which different users have different information about the network. We introduce the notions of *user equilibrium of incomplete information* (UEII) and *system optimum of incomplete information* (SOII). Then, we prove a theorem about the effect of the change of traffic amount on each couple paths in SOII for the model. Finally, based on this theorem and a property of UEII, we reveal a relationship between UEII and SOII on the cost function.

Keywords—incomplete information, user equilibrium, system optimum, traffic network

# I. INTRODUCTION

Recently the rapid development of mobile internet produces profound influence on the way we live. Intelligent Navigation Systems (INS) based on GPS, such as Google Map or Baidu Map, are representative examples. To reduce the traffic congestion and improve the driving experience, INS provides users more information about transportation network, for instance, more feasible paths to destination. However, how does the more information influence stable state of traffic network? This is the central question of this paper and we focus on the traffic congestion model with the factor of additional information.

In traditional research of traffic congestion effects, it is a common behavior that the users in the transportation network are regarded as independent participants in a noncooperative game [1] with the assumption that users act in selfish to minimize individual travel time by choosing their routes consisting of any arc in the network [2]. The sum of all participants' travel time in the equilibrium of aforementioned game, which is known as user equilibrium (UE) [3], is not an status with the minimization of social time cost, which is called system optimum (SO) [4]. Inspired by the inefficient of UE caused by each user ignoring the welfare of whole population [5], many researchers focused on the impact of selfishness. Reference [2] proved that the time consumption of UE is no more than the cost of an optimal routing of twice as much traffic. For more general, the ratio between UE and SO (also called "the price of anarchy" [6]) was studied in a series of papers with more realistic model features, including traffic capacity of arc [7], [8], nonatomic congestion games [9] and more practical latency function of arc [10], [11] and structure of network [12]-[14]. References [15]-[20] focused on the behavior changes of selfish users affected by pricing strategy and references [21]-[23] concentrate on designing algorithm mechanism.



Fig. 1. Example of Braess's paradox

An intuitive measure to improve the performance of network is to decrease the time cost of arcs, but, in UE, there has a counterintuitive and well-known phenomenon called Braess's Paradox (BP) proposed by [24] and [25]. Fig. 1 can be a concise interpretation of the paradox. In Fig. 1, label of each arc is the load-dependent cost function specifying the time to travel along the arc. Suppose that there are 2000 users travel from origin node O to destination node D in the directed network of Fig. 1(a). Base on the assumption of UE, each user minimize their own time cost, the equilibrium result is that half of the 2000 users choose the path  $0 \rightarrow W \rightarrow D$ , the other half take the path  $0 \rightarrow V \rightarrow D$  and all users have the same time cost, 70. Then, suppose that the cost of arc  $W \rightarrow V$ reduces to 0, and the equilibrium result is that all users choose the path  $0 \rightarrow W \rightarrow V \rightarrow D$  and every user suffers the increasing time cost, 80. The decreasing of arc cost increase the cost of all users. Encouraged by the finding of the interesting fact, BP, researchers have attempted to explore its significant impact on the designing of the transportation network in congested regions. These previous works mainly contain detecting BP in networks [26]-[30], researching the variants of BP not in the traffic context [31]-[34] and

designing the network to reduce the negative impacts from BP [35]–[39].

The foregoing works are based on the assumption that users in transportation network are familiar with all arcs. But, in most cases, due to the complexity of the transportation network, each user cannot be aware of all nodes and arcs. On the other hand, users have various ways to obtain information about the network, especially from the INS. Therefore, different users will have different knowledge of network so that they choose a selfish path based on their own subset of arcs. Reference [40] studied congestion games with playerspecific latency functions with a player-specific constant which can be considered as another way to model the incomplete information about the nodes and arcs. Under the consideration of multiple types participants differed by their accessible arcs, Reference [41] extended the conception of UE, proved the existence and uniqueness of it and extended the concept BP to informational Braess's paradox (IBP) in which more information could degrade the network performance. Reference [42] proved that there exists more appropriate configuration of information which can improve the performance of network with uncertain congestion. Reference [43] showed that a suitable private information disclosure mechanisms can improve the overall efficiency in the transportation network. Reference [44] considered a class of Bayesian congestion game in which there are two Traveler Information Systems providing information with two different accuracy and showed that the heterogeneity of information is benefit to the overall efficiency.

In this paper, we further research the model proposed by [41] and our main results are as follows:

- Proving the characteristic that, in the status of SOII, the marginal benefit of decreasing amount of flow one path is no more than the marginal cost of increasing amount of flow on any another path.
- Showing that the marginal factor of cost function neglected by users is the reason of the difference between user equilibrium of incomplete information (UEII) and system optimum of incomplete information (SOII) in the traffic congestion model.

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we introduce the formal definition of the network model. In Section 3, we first state the definition of UEII and provide a numerical example to illustrate the notion of UEII. Then we prove a useful property of SOII and give the relationship between UEII and SOII. Finally, Section 4 contains concluding remarks.

#### II. MODEL

In this section, we describe the network model and introduce the necessary notation for the analysis.

We consider a directed network G = (N, A) with node set N, arc set A and an origin-destination pair  $\{O, D\}$ . Each arc  $a \in A$  connects two nodes  $\{n_i, n_j\}$ , which called the start node and end node of arc a respectively. A path  $P \in G$  is a series of arcs  $a_1, ..., a_n$  to connect O and D, where the end node of  $a_i$  is the start node of  $a_j$ . We denote the set of all paths by  $\mathcal{P}$ . To model the incomplete information of arcs, we assume that there are K types of users traveling on G and each type of

users set, denoted by  $T_i$ , only know an arc subset  $A_i \subseteq A$  (i = 1, ..., k).

The obligatory notations for further research as follow.

 $d_i$ total demand flow of all users in  $T_i$  $d_{(1:K)}$ vector of  $d_i, i \in \{1, \dots, K\}$  $A_{(1:K)}$ vector of  $A_i, i \in \{1, \dots, K\}$  $\mathcal{P}_i^{\Gamma}$  $f_i^P$  $f^P$ set of paths composed of arcs in  $A_i$ amount of flow of users in  $T_i$  on path P total amount of flow on path P,  $f^P = \sum_{i=1}^{K} f_i^P$ fa total amount of flow on arc a,  $f^{a} = \sum_{P \in \mathcal{P}: a \in P} f^{P}$ flow of type *i*, which is a vector of  $f_{i}^{P}$ , fi  $P \in \mathcal{P}_i$  $f_{(1:K)}$ flow, which is a vector of  $f_i$ ,  $i \in \{1, ..., K\}$  $c^{a}(\cdot)$ load-dependent cost function of each arc  $a \in A$ , which is nonnegative, nondecreasing and differentiable  $(c^{a}(\cdot))'$ derivative of  $c^{a}(\cdot)$  $c^P(f_{(1:K)})$ cost of path P incurred by flow  $f_{(1:K)}$ ,  $c^{P}(f_{(1:K)}) = \sum_{a \in P} c^{a}(f^{a})$ total cost function of arc  $a \in A$ ,  $l^{a}(\cdot)$  $l^a(x) = c^a(x) \cdot x$  $(l^a(\cdot))'$ derivative of  $l^{a}(\cdot)$ ,  $(l^a(x))' = c^a(x)' \cdot x + c^a(x)$  $\left(l^{p}(f_{(1:K)})\right)'$ sum of  $(l^{a}(\cdot))', a \in P$ , incurred by flow

$$f_{(1:K)}, \left(l^{p}(f_{(1:K)})\right)' = \sum_{a \in P} \left(l^{a}(f^{a})\right)'$$
  
set of all  $c_{a}(\cdot), a \in A$ 

Base on the above notations, we define  $(G, A_{(1:K)}, d_{(1:K)}, C)$  as an instance of the model. In additional, we call a feasible flow of type *i* is a vector  $f_i = (f_i^P : P \in \mathcal{P}_i)$  when  $\sum_{P \in \mathcal{P}_i} f_i^P = d_i$  and a feasible flow for an instance is a vector  $f_{(1:K)} = (f_i : i \in \{1, ..., K\})$  when each  $f_i, i \in \{1, ..., K\}$  is a feasible flow of type *i*.

# III. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UEII AND SOII

#### A. User Equilibrium of Incomplete Information

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UEII is an equilibrium of the noncooperative game in which each user act in selfish manner to travel along the available minimum-latency path consisted of arcs in  $A_i$ . Therefore, each user has no path to choose to further reduce the cost. We next formalize this user equilibrium notion in our model.

**Definition 3.1.** A feasible  $f_{(1:K)}$  for instance  $(G, A_{(1:K)}, d_{(1:K)}, C)$  is at user equilibrium of incomplete information(UEII) if for each  $i \in \{1, ..., K\}$ , every couple  $P_1, P_2 \in \mathcal{P}_i$ ,  $\delta \in (0, f_i^{P_1}]$ , and a new feasible  $\overline{f_{(1:K)}}$  constructed by  $f_{(1:K)}$  in which is replaced the *i*th element by the following  $\overline{f_i}$ ,

$$\overline{f_i} = \begin{cases} f_i^P - \delta & \text{if } P = P_1 \\ f_i^P + \delta & \text{if } P = P_2 \\ f_i^P & \text{if } P \notin \{P_1, P_2\} \end{cases}$$

we have  $c^{P_1}(f_{(1:K)}) \le c^{P_2}(\overline{f_{(1:K)}})$ 



Fig. 1. Example of a network

Because of the nondecreasing and differentiable cost function of each arc, making  $\delta$  approximate 0 generates the following useful lemma of UEII.

**Lemma 3.2.** A feasible flow  $f_{(1:K)}$  for instance  $(G, A_{(1:K)}, d_{(1:K)}, \mathcal{C})$  is at user equilibrium of incomplete information (UEII) if and only if for each  $i \in \{1, ..., K\}$ , every couple  $P, \overline{P} \in \mathcal{P}_i$  with  $f_i^P > 0$ , we have  $c^P(f_{(1:K)}) \leq c^{\overline{P}}(f_{(1:K)})$ .

From Lemma 3.2, if a feasible flow  $f_{(1:K)}$  is at UEII, users of each type have the equal cost on their paths consisted of their own arc set. Lemma 3.2 can be deemed to the Wardrop's principle [45] of incomplete information [41].

The following is a numerical example of the UEII in a specific network.

**Example 1.** Consider the directed network G = (N, A) given in Fig. 1, where each arc  $a_i$  labeled by a pair  $(a_i, c^{a_i}(x))$ . We denote all different paths from origin O to destination D as following:  $P_1 = a_1, P_2 = a_2 \rightarrow a_3, P_3 = a_2 \rightarrow a_5 \rightarrow a_6$ , and  $P_4 = a_4 \rightarrow a_6$ . Suppose that there are two types of users with respect to arc subset  $A_1 = \{a_1\}, A_2 = A$  and total demand flow  $d_1 = d, d_2 = 1 - d$  ( $0 \le d \le 1$ ). Then we have  $\mathcal{P}_1 = \{P_1\}$  and  $\mathcal{P}_2 = \{P_1, P_2, P_3, P_4\}$ .

Suppose the flow of type 1 on  $\mathcal{P}_1$  is  $f_1^{P_1}$  and the flows of type 2 on  $\mathcal{P}_2$  are  $f_2^{P_1}, f_2^{P_2}, f_2^{P_3}, f_2^{P_4}$ . Then we have the following equations:

$$c^{P_1}(f_{(1:2)}) = f_1^{P_1} + f_2^{P_1} + 3/2$$
(1.1)

$$c^{P_2}(f_{(1:2)}) = (f_2^{P_2} + f_2^{P_3}) + (f_2^{P_2} + 3)$$
(1.2)

$$c^{P_3}(f_{(1:2)}) = (f_2^{P_2} + f_2^{P_3}) + f_2^{P_3} + (f_2^{P_3} + f_2^{P_4})$$
(1.3)

$$c^{P_4}(f_{(1:2)}) = f_2^{P_4} + 3 \tag{1.4}$$

From (1.1), (1.2), (1.3), (1.4), we have  $c^{P_3}(f_{(1:2)}) \leq c^{P_2}(f_{(1:2)})$  and  $c^{P_3}(f_{(1:2)}) \leq c^{P_4}(f_{(1:2)})$ . Therefore, according to Lemma 3.2, users of type 2 will not choose the paths,  $P_2$  and  $P_4$ . That is we have  $f_2^{P_2} = f_2^{P_4} = 0$  and  $f_2^{P_1} + f_2^{P_3} = 1 - d$ . The critical condition of type 2 to use path  $P_1$  or not, that is  $f_2^{P_1}$  equals 0 or not, can be described as the following equation

$$f_1^{P_1} + 3/2 = 3f_2^{P_3},$$

where  $f_1^{P_1} = d$  and  $f_2^{P_3} = 1 - d$ .

Hence, the critical point of d is 3/8 and we have the following result of UEII:

If  $d \leq 3/8$ , the flow at UEII is  $f_{(1:2)} = ((f_1^{P_1}), (f_2^{P_1}, f_2^{P_2}, f_2^{P_3}, f_2^{P_4}))$ , in which  $f_1^{P_1} = d$ ,  $f_2^{P_1} = 3/8 - d$ ,  $f_2^{P_3} = 5/8$  and  $f_2^{P_2} = f_2^{P_4} = 0$ . The cost of path  $P_1$  of type 1 is  $c^{P_1}(f_{(1:K)}) = 15/8$ , and the cost of paths of type 2 is  $c^{P_1}(f_{(1:K)}) = c^{P_3}(f_{(1:K)}) = 15/8$ . From this result, we can see that type 1 and type 2 have the same equilibrium cost when they share a common path  $P_1$ .

If d > 3/8, the flow at UEII is  $f_{(1:2)} = ((f_1^{P_1}), (f_2^{P_1}, f_2^{P_2}, f_2^{P_3}, f_2^{P_4}))$ , in which  $f_1^{P_1} = d$ ,  $f_2^{P_3} = 1 - d$  and  $f_2^{P_1} = f_2^{P_2} = f_2^{P_4} = 0$ . The cost of path  $P_1$  of type 1 is  $c^{P_1}(f_{(1:K)}) = d + 3/2$ , and the cost of path  $P_3$  of type 2 is  $c^{P_3}(f_{(1:K)}) = 3(1 - d)$ . The result shows that type 1 and type 2 can have the different equilibrium cost.

## B. System Optimum of Incomplete Information

SOII is a feasible flow that minimizes total cost of all users in the noncooperative game with incomplete information. According to our definition of total cost and feasible flow, SOII is a solution of the following optimization problem:

$$\min \sum_{a \in A} l^{a}(f^{a})$$
s.t.: 
$$\sum_{P \in \mathcal{P}_{i}} f_{i}^{P} = d_{i} \qquad \forall i \in \{1, \dots, k\}$$

$$f^{a} = \sum_{i=1}^{K} \sum_{P \in \mathcal{P}_{i}: a \in P} f_{i}^{P} \qquad \forall a \in A$$

$$f_{i}^{P} \ge 0 \qquad \qquad \forall i \in \{1, \dots, k\},$$

$$\forall P \in \mathcal{P} \qquad (*)$$

Because of the differentiable cost function of each arc, the optimal solution for problem (\*) is exist. In the sense of SOII, making an arbitrarily small flow from one path to another will lead to an increase in the total cost. That is, the marginal benefit of cutting amount of flow on path  $P_i$  is no more than the marginal cost of adding amount of flow on another path  $P_j$ . We next formalize the characteristic of SOII and give a proof via the Karush-Kuhn-Tucker (KKT) theorem [46].

**Lemma 3.3.** A flow  $f_{(1:K)}$  for instance  $(G, A_{(1:K)}, d_{(1:K)}, C)$  is at system optimum of incomplete information (SOII) if and only if for each  $i \in \{1, ..., K\}$ , every couple  $P, \overline{P} \in \mathcal{P}_i$  with  $f_i^P > 0$ , we have  $(l^P(f_{(1:K)}))' \leq (l^{\overline{P}}(f_{(1:K)}))'$ .

**Proof:** Suppose  $(l^{p}(f_{(1:K)}))'$  of type *i* at SOII equals  $\zeta_{i}$ . From the conditions of Lemma 3.3, we have the following expression:

$$\left(l^{P}(f_{(1:K)})\right)' = \begin{cases} = \zeta_{i} & \text{if } f_{i}^{P} > 0\\ \ge \zeta_{i} & \text{if } f_{i}^{P} = 0 \end{cases}$$

Let  $\eta_i^P$  be:

$$\eta_i^P = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } f_i^P > 0\\ \left( l^P(f_{(1:K)}) \right)' - \zeta_i & \text{if } f_i^P = 0 \end{cases}$$

Then we have the following equation:

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial f_i^P} \left( \sum_{a \in A} l^a(f^a) - \sum_{i=1}^K \zeta_i \left( \sum_{P \in \mathcal{P}_i} f_i^P - d_i \right) - \sum_{i=1}^K \sum_{P \in \mathcal{P}_i} \eta_i^P f_i^P \right) = 0.$$

Therefore, the KKT conditions are satisfied by the flow  $f_{(1:K)}$  with parameters  $\zeta_i$  and  $\eta_i^P$ . In problem (OP), due to the convexity of objective function and the affine property of constrain functions, the KKT conditions is the sufficient condition for optimal solution and the flow  $f_{(1:K)}$  for instance  $(G, A_{(1:K)}, d_{(1:K)}, C)$  is at SOII.

Conversely, because of the convexity of objective function and the affine property of constrain functions, KKT conditions are satisfied and for all  $i \in \{1, ..., K\}$ ,  $P \in \mathcal{P}_i$ , we have the following expression:

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial f_i^P} \left( \sum_{a \in A} l^a(f^a) - \sum_{i=1}^K \zeta_i \left( \sum_{P \in \mathcal{P}_i} f_i^P - d_i \right) - \sum_{i=1}^K \sum_{P \in \mathcal{P}_i} \eta_i^P f_i^P \right) = 0,$$
(1)

where  $\eta_i^P = \begin{cases} = 0 \text{ if } f_i^P > 0 \\ \ge 0 \text{ if } f_i^P = 0 \end{cases}$ . Then, we can simplify the (1) to the following:

$$\sum_{a \in A} \frac{\partial f^a}{\partial f_i^P} \left( l^a(f^a) \right)' = \left( l^P(f_{(1:K)}) \right)' = \begin{cases} = \zeta_i & \text{if } f_i^P > 0\\ \ge \zeta_i & \text{if } f_i^P = 0 \end{cases}$$

Therefore, we get the conclusion,  $(l^{P}(f_{(1:K)}))' \leq (l^{\overline{P}}(f_{(1:K)}))'$ .  $\Box$ 

### C. Relationship Between UEII and SOII

We notice Lemma 3.2 and Lemma 3.3 have some formal resemblance. Base on them, we will further reveal the relationship between UEII and SOII of the traffic congestion model. In the following theorem, we define  $\mathcal{L}$  as the set of all  $(l^{a}(\cdot))', a \in A$ .

**Theorem 3.5.** A feasible flow  $f_{(1:K)}$  for instance  $(G, A_{(1:K)}, d_{(1:K)}, \mathcal{L})$  is at user equilibrium of incomplete information (UEII) if and only if  $f_{(1:K)}$  is at system optimum of incomplete information (SOII) for instance  $(G, A_{(1:K)}, d_{(1:K)}, \mathcal{C})$ .

**Proof:** From the Lemma 3.4, a flow  $f_{(1:K)}$  is at SOII for instance  $(G, A_{(1:K)}, d_{(1:K)}, C)$ , if and only if for each  $i \in \{1, ..., K\}$ , every couple  $P, \overline{P} \in \mathcal{P}_i$  with  $f_i^P > 0$ , we have  $(l^P(f_{(1:K)}))' \leq (l^{\overline{P}}(f_{(1:K)}))'$ . On the other hand, from the definition of notations, we have:

$$\begin{pmatrix} l^{P}(f_{(1:K)}) \end{pmatrix}' \leq \left( l^{\overline{P}}(f_{(1:K)}) \right)' \Leftrightarrow$$

$$\sum_{a \in P} c^{a}(f^{a})' \cdot f^{a} + c^{a}(f^{a}) \leq \sum_{a \in \overline{P}} c^{a}(f^{a})' \cdot f^{a} + c^{a}(f^{a})$$

$$(2)$$

Equation (2) is the definition of UEII of the instance  $(G, A_{(1:K)}, d_{(1:K)}, \mathcal{L})$  according to Lemma 3.2.  $\Box$ 

From Theorem 3.5, we can see that a flow  $f_{(1:K)}$  of SOII will be a flow of UEII when the arc cost function has a new form:  $(l^a(x))' = c^a(x)' \cdot x + c^a(x)$ . The new form consists

of the origin form,  $c^{a}(x)$ , and a new component,  $c^{a}(x)' \cdot x$ , which can be illustrated as the traffic congestion incurred by the marginal increase traffic suffering from the already existing. Therefore, comparing to SOII, the poor performance of the UEII is the ignorance of users with the additional negative effect,  $c^{a}(x)' \cdot x$ .

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The widely-used INS gives users more information about transportation network and exerts important influences on traffic decision. In this paper, we investigate the traffic congestion model with incomplete information. We first propose the definition of UEII of incomplete information model in which different type users have different arc sets to choose their path. Then, we propose a new theorem of SOII whose form is similar to a necessary and sufficient condition of UEII. Finally, the theorem is applied to reveal the relationship of cost function of UEII and SOII which can account for the subtle difference between them. The proposed methodology will be applied to bioenergy production, biomass supply chain, mining industry, robotics, railway, aviation and healthy industries[47]–[71] [72]–[74].

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