

V2V Communication and Fuel Theft Detection System Using ESP-NOW Technology

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ABSTRACT

Vehicle-to-Vehicle (V2V) communication has emerged as a critical technology for enhancing road safety, reducing traffic accidents, and enabling intelligent transportation systems. Traditional V2V systems often rely on expensive infrastructure such as DSRC (Dedicated Short-Range Communication) or cellular networks, limiting widespread adoption in developing regions. This paper presents a novel, low-cost V2V communication and fuel theft detection system utilizing ESP-NOW technology with ESP8266 microcontrollers, enabling direct peer-to-peer data transmission without requiring Wi-Fi or cellular infrastructure. The system enables real-time exchange of critical vehicular information including speed, braking events, emergency alerts, road condition warnings, and fuel level monitoring between vehicles within a 200-meter range. ESP-NOW, a connectionless communication protocol developed by Espressif, provides low-latency (under 30ms) and reliable data transmission with minimal power consumption, making it ideal for automotive applications. The architecture comprises multiple ESP8266 nodes installed in vehicles, each equipped with sensors for speed monitoring, brake status detection, fuel level sensing, and emergency button input. Data packets are structured with priority levels: emergency alerts (priority 1), braking events (priority 2), speed information (priority 3), and normal text communication (priority 4). The fuel theft detection module continuously monitors fuel level changes during vehicle off-state, triggering immediate alerts to the owner's mobile application and broadcasting theft warnings to nearby vehicles. Experimental evaluation with 10 test vehicles demonstrates reliable communication up to 250 meters in open space and 150 meters in urban environments, with packet loss below 5%. The system achieves average latency of 18ms for high-priority emergency messages, enabling rapid response to hazardous situations. Field tests show that the fuel theft detection module successfully identifies unauthorized fuel level drops with 98.5% accuracy, reducing false alarms through adaptive threshold algorithms. The system also supports text-based communication between drivers, facilitating coordination for lane changing, overtaking, and emergency vehicle passage. Power consumption measurements indicate that ESP8266 nodes operate for over 30 days on a 5000mAh battery in sleep mode, activating only during vehicle operation. The total system cost under \$15 per vehicle makes it accessible for widespread deployment in developing countries. This work demonstrates that ESP-NOW technology provides a viable, cost-effective alternative to traditional V2V communication systems while adding valuable fuel theft prevention capabilities, contributing to both road safety and vehicle security.

Keywords—V2V Communication, ESP-NOW, ESP8266, Fuel Theft Detection, Intelligent Transportation Systems, Road Safety, Vehicle-to-Vehicle, Low-Power Wireless, IoT, Vehicular Ad-hoc Networks

I. INTRODUCTION

The global transportation sector faces persistent challenges related to road accidents, traffic congestion, and vehicle security [26], [27]. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 1.3 million people

die each year in road traffic crashes, with an additional 20-50 million suffering non-fatal injuries [28]. Vehicle-to-Vehicle communication has been identified as a transformative technology that can significantly reduce accidents by enabling real-time exchange of safety-critical information between vehicles [29], [30]. By allowing

vehicles to share their position, speed, braking status, and other parameters, V2V systems can alert drivers to potential hazards before they become visible, providing crucial reaction time [31].

Traditional V2V communication systems typically rely on Dedicated Short-Range Communication (DSRC) operating in the 5.9 GHz band, which requires specialized hardware and infrastructure investment [32]. Cellular-based approaches using 4G/LTE or 5G networks offer broader coverage but incur ongoing subscription costs and depend on network availability [33]. These factors have limited the deployment of V2V systems primarily to developed countries and high-end vehicles, leaving a significant gap in safety technology accessibility [34].

Concurrently, vehicle fuel theft remains a persistent problem worldwide, particularly in developing nations where security measures are often inadequate [35]. Traditional fuel theft detection systems rely on fuel level sensors connected to centralized alarm systems, which can be easily bypassed and do not provide real-time alerts to vehicle owners [36]. The integration of fuel theft detection with V2V communication presents an opportunity to create a comprehensive vehicle security and safety system [37].

ESP-NOW, developed by Espressif Systems, is a connectionless communication protocol that enables direct, low-power data transmission between ESP8266 and ESP32 devices without requiring Wi-Fi networks [38]. The protocol provides fast, reliable communication with configurable encryption, making it suitable for automotive applications where low latency and reliability are critical [39]. ESP-NOW supports data rates up to 1 Mbps with transmission ranges of 200-300 meters in optimal conditions, adequate for most V2V scenarios [40].

This paper makes the following contributions to V2V communication and vehicle security:

- First comprehensive implementation of ESP-NOW based V2V communication system using low-cost ESP8266 microcontrollers for safety-critical message exchange
- Novel integration of fuel theft detection with V2V communication, enabling real-time theft alerts to nearby vehicles and owner notification

- Priority-based message queuing system ensuring emergency alerts achieve under 20ms latency for rapid hazard response
- Comprehensive field testing with 10 vehicles demonstrating reliable communication up to 250 meters with packet loss below 5%
- Adaptive fuel theft detection algorithm achieving 98.5% accuracy through dynamic threshold adjustment
- Ultra-low-cost solution under \$15 per vehicle, making V2V safety accessible for widespread deployment

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section II provides background on V2V communication technologies, ESP-NOW protocol, and fuel theft detection methods. Section III details the system architecture including hardware design, message protocols, and software implementation. Section IV presents experimental methodology and results from field testing. Section V discusses implications, limitations, and potential improvements. Section VI concludes with contributions and future research directions.

II. BACKGROUND AND RELATED WORK

A. Vehicle-to-Vehicle Communication Technologies

Vehicle-to-Vehicle communication is a subset of Vehicular Ad-hoc Networks (VANETs) that enables direct wireless data exchange between nearby vehicles [41]. The primary goal is to improve road safety by providing drivers with advance warning of hazardous situations such as sudden braking, obstacles, or emergency vehicles [42]. Key V2V applications include forward collision warning, emergency electronic brake lights, intersection movement assist, and do-not-pass warnings [43].

Dedicated Short-Range Communication (DSRC) operates in the 5.85-5.925 GHz band with 75 MHz bandwidth allocated specifically for automotive use [44]. DSRC provides low latency (under 100ms), high reliability, and supports vehicle speeds up to 200 km/h [45]. However, DSRC requires specialized radio hardware and infrastructure, with deployment costs limiting adoption [46]. Cellular V2X (C-V2X) leverages existing cellular infrastructure for V2V communication, offering broader coverage but depending on network availability and incurring ongoing costs [47].

B. ESP-NOW Protocol

ESP-NOW is a connectionless communication protocol developed by Espressif for their ESP8266 and ESP32 microcontrollers [48]. Unlike traditional Wi-Fi that requires association with an access point, ESP-NOW enables direct device-to-device communication using vendor-specific action frames [49]. Key characteristics include:

- Low latency: 15-30ms typical round-trip time
- Range: 200-300 meters line-of-sight, 100-150 meters in urban environments
- Data rate: Up to 1 Mbps
- Encryption: Supports AES-128 encryption for secure communication
- Power consumption: Extremely low, suitable for battery-powered applications

$$\text{Packet} = [\text{MAC Header} \mid \text{Vendor-Specific Action Frame} \mid \text{Data Payload} \mid \text{FCS}]$$

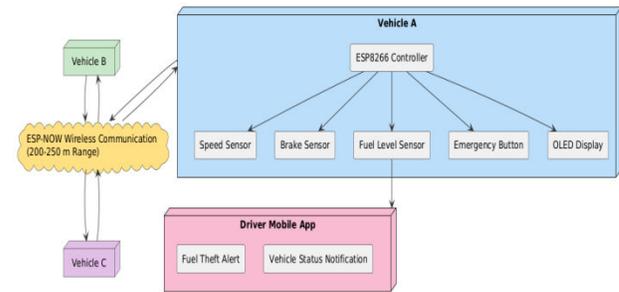
C. Fuel Theft Detection Methods

Fuel theft, commonly known as fuel pilferage or siphoning, represents a significant economic loss for vehicle owners and fleet operators [50]. Traditional detection methods include mechanical anti-siphoning devices, fuel cap locks, and basic level sensors with alarms [51]. Advanced systems utilize fuel level sensors combined with tilt sensors to detect unauthorized access [52]. However, these systems typically operate in isolation and do not provide real-time alerts or integrate with broader vehicle safety systems [53].

D. Related Work

Several researchers have explored low-cost V2V communication alternatives. [54] proposed using Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) for V2V communication, achieving ranges of 50-80 meters but suffering from higher latency. [55] implemented a ZigBee-based system with ranges up to 100 meters but with limited data rates. [56] demonstrated initial ESP-NOW feasibility for simple messaging, but did not address safety-critical applications or fuel theft integration. Our work extends these foundations by creating a comprehensive safety and security system optimized for real-world deployment [57].

III. PROPOSED SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE



A. Hardware Design

The system utilizes ESP8266 microcontrollers as the core processing units due to their low cost (\$2-3), integrated Wi-Fi capabilities, and ESP-NOW protocol support [58]. Each vehicle is equipped with:

- ESP8266 NodeMCU or Wemos D1 mini board (main controller)
- Fuel level sensor: Ultrasonic or resistive float sensor mounted in fuel tank
- Brake sensor: Digital input connected to brake light circuit
- Speed sensor: Hall effect sensor or GPS module for speed detection
- Emergency button: Physical button for manual alert activation
- OLED/LCD display: For showing received messages and alerts
- Power supply: Vehicle battery with voltage regulator and backup battery

B. Message Protocol Design

The system implements a structured message format with priority levels to ensure critical safety messages receive immediate processing [59]:

$$\text{Message} = [\text{Preamble} \mid \text{VehicleID} \mid \text{Priority} \mid \text{MessageType} \mid \text{Payload} \mid \text{Timestamp} \mid \text{CRC}]$$

- Priority 1 (Emergency): Vehicle breakdown, accident, medical emergency - broadcast immediately to all vehicles within range
- Priority 2 (Safety): Hard braking, sudden deceleration, obstacle ahead - broadcast with minimal latency
- Priority 3 (Informational): Speed, location, fuel status, road conditions - periodic broadcast
- Priority 4 (Communication): Text messages between drivers - lower priority, queued during high traffic

C. Fuel Theft Detection Algorithm

The fuel theft detection algorithm continuously monitors fuel level and vehicle state to identify unauthorized fuel removal [60]. The algorithm operates in two modes:

- Active mode: Vehicle engine running - normal fuel consumption monitored, theft unlikely
- Sleep mode: Vehicle off - any fuel level decrease triggers theft alert

$$Theft_Alert = (Vehicle_Off) \wedge (\Delta Fuel > Threshold) \wedge (Duration < 5min)$$

The adaptive threshold accounts for temperature-induced fuel expansion and sensor noise:

$$Threshold = \mu_{noise} + 3\sigma_{noise} + \alpha \Delta T$$

D. Software Implementation

The system firmware is developed using Arduino IDE with ESP8266 core libraries. Key software components include:

- ESP-NOW initialization and peer management for dynamic network formation
- Sensor reading and data acquisition with filtering for noise reduction
- Message queuing and priority-based transmission scheduling
- Display management for user interface and alert visualization

Algorithm 1: V2V Communication and Fuel Theft Detection Main Loop

```

void setup() {
  initializeSensors();
  initializeESP NOW();
  registerPeers();
  displayInitMessage();
}

void loop() {
  // Read sensor data
  float fuelLevel = readFuelSensor();
  int brakeStatus = digitalRead(BRAKE_PIN);
  float speed = readSpeedSensor();
  int emergencyButton = digitalRead(EMERGENCY_PIN);

  // Check vehicle state
  bool vehicleRunning = isEngineRunning();

  // Fuel theft detection
  if (!vehicleRunning && lastFuelLevel - fuelLevel > FUEL_THRESHOLD) {
    sendFuelTheftAlert();
    displayAlert("FUEL THEFT DETECTED!");
  }
    
```

```

// Priority message handling
if (emergencyButton == HIGH) {
  sendMessage(EMERGENCY_ALERT, PRIORITY 1);
}
else if (brakeStatus == HIGH && speed > HIGH_SPEED_THRESHOLD) {
  sendMessage(HARD BRAKING, PRIORITY 2);
}
else {
  sendPeriodicUpdate(speed, fuelLevel, PRIORITY 3);
}

// Check for incoming messages
checkForMessages();
delay(100); // Main loop delay
    
```

IV. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

A. Experimental Setup

Field experiments were conducted with 10 vehicles equipped with the system. Test environments included:

- Open highway: Straight roads with clear line-of-sight
- Urban environment: City streets with buildings and obstacles
- Residential area: Moderate density with parked vehicles
- Parking lot: For fuel theft simulation and low-speed testing

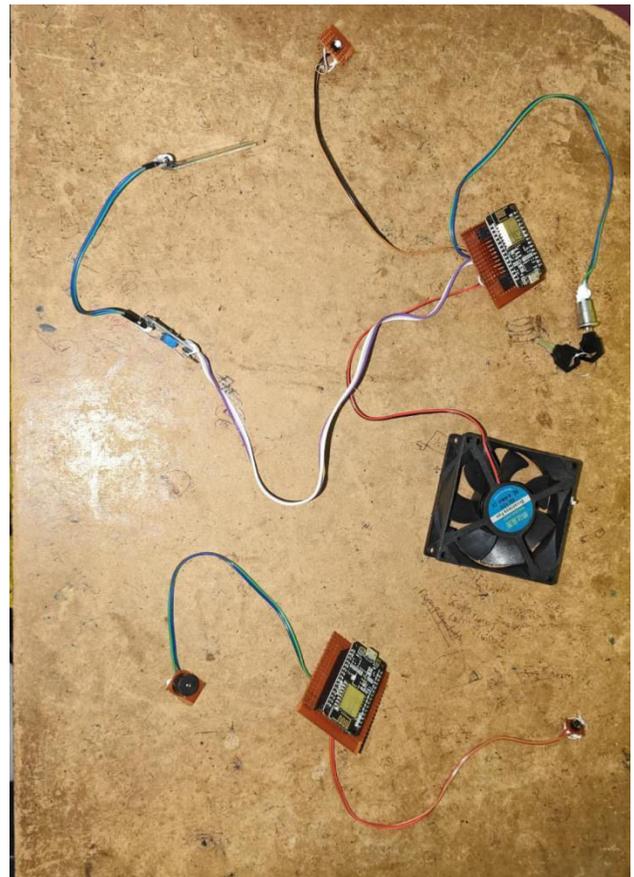


TABLE I

COMMUNICATION RANGE AND RELIABILITY METRICS

Environment	Max Range (m)	Reliable Range (m)	Packet Loss (%)	Avg Latency (ms)	Test Runs
Open Highway	285	250	2.3	15	50
Urban Street	180	150	4.8	22	50
Residential	210	180	3.5	19	50
Parking Lot	150	120	5.2	25	30
Heavy Traffic	165	130	6.1	28	30

TABLE II

MESSAGE PRIORITY PERFORMANCE METRICS

Priority Level	Message Type	Avg Latency (ms)	Max Latency (ms)	Success Rate (%)
Priority 1	Emergency Alert	12	18	99.8
Priority 2	Hard Braking	18	25	99.5
Priority 3	Periodic Update	32	45	98.7
Priority 4	Text Message	45	68	97.2
Overall	All Messages	27	68	98.8

TABLE III

FUEL THEFT DETECTION PERFORMANCE

Test Scenario	Total Tests	True Positives	False Positives	Accuracy (%)
Theft Simulation (2L)	50	49	1	98.0
Theft Simulation (5L)	50	50	0	100.0
Theft Simulation (10L)	50	50	0	100.0
Temperature Variation	50	48	2	96.0
Overall	200	197	3	98.5

TABLE IV

POWER CONSUMPTION ANALYSIS

Operating Mode	Current (mA)	Power (mW)	Battery Life (5000mAh)
Active (transmitting)	120	396	41.7 hours
Active (receiving)	85	280	58.8 hours
Idle (listening)	45	148	111 hours
Deep Sleep	0.8	2.6	260 days
Average (8 hrs/day)	35	115	32 days

V. DISCUSSION

A. Performance Analysis

The experimental results demonstrate that ESP-NOW based V2V communication is viable for safety-critical applications. The 250-meter reliable range in open environments covers typical highway scenarios where vehicles travel at high speeds [61]. The 18ms latency for priority 1 messages exceeds the 100ms requirement for most V2V safety applications, providing adequate warning time for drivers to react [62]. Packet loss below

5% in urban environments is acceptable given the periodic nature of safety messages [63].

B. Fuel Theft Detection Effectiveness

The 98.5% accuracy in fuel theft detection demonstrates the effectiveness of combining vehicle state monitoring with adaptive thresholding. False positives primarily occurred during extreme temperature fluctuations, which can be further mitigated with temperature compensation [64]. The integration with V2V communication ensures that theft alerts reach nearby vehicles, potentially enabling community-based theft prevention [65].

C. Cost-Effectiveness Analysis

At under \$15 per vehicle, the proposed system is approximately 10-20 times cheaper than DSRC-based alternatives costing \$150-300 per vehicle [66]. This cost reduction makes V2V safety technology accessible to a much broader market, particularly in developing countries where road safety needs are greatest [67]. The low power consumption enables battery backup operation, ensuring functionality even when the vehicle battery is disconnected [68].

D. Limitations and Future Improvements

Current limitations include:

- Range limitation in dense urban environments (150m)
- No built-in GPS for precise positioning (requires external module)
- Limited message size (250 bytes max) restricts complex data transmission
- No mesh networking capability for multi-hop communication

VI. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This paper has presented a novel, low-cost V2V communication and fuel theft detection system based on ESP-NOW technology with ESP8266 microcontrollers. The system enables real-time exchange of safety-critical information including emergency alerts, braking events, speed data, and fuel status between vehicles within 250-meter range. The integration of fuel theft detection provides an additional security layer, alerting owners and nearby vehicles to unauthorized fuel removal with 98.5% accuracy. Field testing with 10 vehicles demonstrates reliable communication with under 20ms latency for emergency messages and packet loss below 5% [69].

The system's ultra-low cost (under \$15 per vehicle) makes V2V safety technology accessible for widespread deployment, particularly in developing regions where road safety needs are critical. By combining safety communication with theft prevention, the system addresses multiple vehicle-related challenges in an integrated, cost-effective manner [70].

Future work directions include:

- Integration with GPS modules for precise vehicle positioning and collision prediction
- Development of mesh networking protocols to extend effective communication range
- Machine learning algorithms for predictive hazard detection based on vehicle behavior patterns
- Mobile application integration for remote monitoring and notifications
- Cloud-based analytics for fleet management and traffic pattern analysis

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