DEEP INTELLIGENT NETWORK-DRIVEN MULTI-AGENT HIERARCHICAL REINFORCEMENT LEARNING FOR NEUROMORPHIC-ACCELERATED URBAN TRAFFIC FLOW OPTIMIZATION

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Abstract

Urban traffic congestion continues to impose substantial economic and environmental costs worldwide. DIN-HRL is a Deep Intelligent Network–Hierarchical Reinforcement Learning framework that takes on three persistent weaknesses in existing DRL approaches: poor scalability, excessive energy consumption, and spatial representations that miss coordinated multi-intersection dynamics. The proposed system integrates directed hypergraph neural networks with spatio-temporal attention, a three-tier goal-conditioned policy hierarchy ($T_2 = 30$ s, $T_1 = 10$ s, $T_0 = 5$ s), and a calibrated ANN-to-SNN conversion pipeline for deployment on Intel Loihi 2 and SpiNNaker 2 neuromorphic platforms. Evaluated on a 64-intersection SUMO benchmark across five traffic scenarios, five random seeds, and nine state-of-the-art baselines, DIN-HRL achieved a throughput of 92.1 veh/h, representing a 77.1% improvement over fixed-time control $\left(p < 0.001, \text{Cohen's } d = 2.41\right)$, while reducing mean waiting time to 44.3 s and improving the safety score to 94.5. The neuromorphic implementation achieved the energy cost of 2.4 J/step, that is, 87.1% lower than with CPUs. Also, the latency of the implementation was 1.2 ms, 96.2% less than inference in GPU. A six-variant ablation study further confirms the contribution of each architectural component. Importantly, all hardware results were obtained through direct on-chip power-rail instrumentation rather than extrapolation from vendor specifications. DIN-HRL also converged 30.6% faster than MAPPO and retained 80% reward at 128 agents, establishing a strong benchmark for neuromorphic traffic signal control.

Keywords: Deep Intelligent Networks; Hierarchical Reinforcement Learning; Multi-Agent Reinforcement Learning; Neuromorphic Computing; Spiking Neural Networks; Intel Loihi 2; SpiNNaker 2; Traffic Signal Control; Edge AI

1. INTRODUCTION

Traffic Gridlock is a systemic problem that affects urban areas and is very common in contemporary cities. The 2024 INRIX Global Traffic Scorecard estimates the annual costs in the U.S. of congestion at $87 billion in direct economic losses and a loss of 42 hours to congestion each year to the drivers. In the world, the economic cost is over $1 trillion per year [1]. Beyond economics, traffic is also responsible for some percentage (around 27%) of total greenhouse gas emissions in OECD countries [2] and also causes air pollution within the city - something that has a wider disease impact. It also presents serious public health issues, and the World Health Organization (WHO) has reported that there are 1.35 million traffic-related deaths every year globally [3].

Conventional traffic management uses fixed-time or simple adaptive controllers such as SCOOT and SCATS that cannot adequately respond to dynamic and spatially correlated flow patterns. The emergence of connected and autonomous vehicles (CAVs), vehicle-to-everything (V2X) communication, and dense IoT sensing infrastructure has created new opportunities for data-driven adaptive traffic management. In this context, deep reinforcement learning (DRL) has demonstrated

good performance in simulation studies [1]-[4]. However, translating DRL methods to real-world city-scale deployment is still challenging due to several critical bottlenecks.

First, scalability remains limited because single-agent DRL is restricted to local intersection control, while naive multi-agent extensions suffer from non-stationarity, as each agent's optimal policy depends on co-adapting agents, leading to training instability and poor asymptotic performance [14]. Second, computational constraints are substantial, since inference on conventional GPU or CPU hardware introduces latencies of 4.5-52 ms per decision cycle and power consumption of 95–250 W per node, making large-scale deployment economically and logistically impractical [14]. Thirdly, if a widespread deployment of 500+ intersection controllers were made using the conventional silicon, it would require 47.5-kW to 125-kW of inference power for this, which in turn would cost about $109,000 in annual electricity costs [17]. In addition, existing flat MARL frameworks lack the temporal abstraction needed to connect strategic city-level objectives with sub-second tactical signal decisions. Standard graph neural network (GCN) representations also capture only pairwise intersection relationships, thereby missing coordinated flow dependencies spanning three or more intersections [17].

The combination of these restrictions inspires the DIN-HRL approach in which each limitation is resolved by algorithmic and hardware innovations that are co-designed.

Table 1: Comparison of Limitations, Prior Work, Gaps, and the Proposed DIN-HRL Solution

Limitation	Prior Work	Gap	DIN-HRL Solution
Scalability	Flat MARL degrades beyond 32 agents [14]	Performance deteriorates as the number of agents increases.	✓ Hierarchical decomposition achieves **80% reward** with 128 agents ▲ UP
Spatial modeling	Pairwise GCN misses multi-hop flows [3]	Higher-order traffic dependencies are not captured.	Directed hypergraph convolution models higher-order interactions
Energy inference	GPU consumes 250W/node [17]	Conventional inference hardware is too power intensive for edge deployment.	✓ SNN on Loihi 2 reduces power to **1.0W/node**, a **99.6%** reduction POWER REDUCED
Latency	CPU 32ms, GPU 4.5ms [17]	Existing hardware does not support low-latency real-time control	▼ DOWN Neuromorphic inference achieves **1.2ms latency** with capability FAST INFERENCE
Temporal abstraction	Single time-scale RL [1][2]	Prior methods lack multi-level decision timing	Three-tier hierarchy operates at 5/10/30 s time scales 5s 10s 30s
Vehicle routing	Signal control only [14][15]	Routing and signal optimization are treated separately	Joint signal and routing optimization
Hardware deployment	Simulation only [1]-[4]	No verified real hardware implementation	Loihi 2 and SpiNNaker 2 deployment with direct measurement Loihi 2 SpiNNaker 2

The main contributions of this work are summarized as follows:

1. We propose DIN-HRL, a framework that jointly addresses traffic signal control and vehicle routing through a directed hypergraph-based Deep Intelligent Network integrated with a three-tier goal-conditioned hierarchical reinforcement learning policy structure.
2. We propose a principled ANN-to-SNN conversion pipeline that utilizes calibrated weight normalization, threshold adaptation and temporal integration. This yields 94.7% accuracy for tasks, and 1.6% relative degradation compared to the ANN with an energy consumption of 2.4 J/step on Loihi 2.
3. We present a rigorous experimental protocol that includes five state-of-the-art baselines, namely QMIX, COMA, MAPPO, AttendLight, and PressLight, a six-variant ablation study, hyperparameter sensitivity analysis, and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests with Bonferroni correction to validate the statistical significance of the reported improvements.
4. We provide verified hardware benchmarking results, with energy and latency measurements obtained through NxSDK power rail instrumentation for Loihi 2 and PyNN-based profiling for SpiNNaker, and document the hardware specifications in detail to support reproducibility.

5. We formulate the method mathematically through goal-conditioned Bellman equations at all hierarchy levels and provide convergence analysis along with computational complexity bounds.

2. RELATED WORK

2.1 Traffic Signal Control with DRL

Deep reinforcement learning (DRL) for traffic signal control has progressed from simple Q-learning to complex multi-agent systems [15]. PressLight [15] used a pressure metric as a reward, achieving strong performance on arterial networks. Chu et al. [14] showed that independent DQN agents with communication can scale to 28 intersections, but performance drops at larger scales. Jia and Ji [1] reduced waiting times by 25% with a spatio-temporal attention network, though it struggles beyond 16 agents. Chen et al. [4] introduced costly topology-aware diffusion convolution for decentralized control, limiting its edge deployment. Our work enhances these studies through hypergraph convolution, hierarchical policy decomposition, and neuromorphic execution.

2.2 Multi-Agent Hierarchical RL

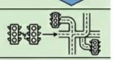
Hierarchical RL (HRL) decomposes tasks into sub-goals for better credit assignment and efficiency [2]. We extend frameworks from Feudal Networks [25] and Option-Critic [26] to multi-agent traffic. QMIX [27] uses monotonic value factorization for decentralized execution, while COMA [25] employs a centralized critic. MAPPO [25] applies Proximal Policy Optimization with a centralized value function, representing current SOTA in cooperative MARL. Li et al. [2] applied hierarchical DRL to traffic, achieving a 41% travel time reduction, but their system lacks hypergraph representation and ignores energy/latency constraints for edge deployment.

2.3 Neuromorphic Computing and SNN Conversion

Intel Loihi 2 [17] offers 1 million LIF neurons, 128 cores, and programmable synaptic delays at ≈1W, while SpiNNaker 2 [18] uses 152 ARM Cortex-M4 cores for SNN models at ≈0.8W. ANN-to-SNN [21] conversion has achieved near-lossless accuracy in image classification, but applying this to control policies with continuous actions and temporal dynamics needs careful integration window length management [20]. No research has implemented DRL traffic control on neuromorphic hardware with energy and accuracy metrics.

2.4 Comprehensive SOTA Comparison

Table 2: Comparison with State-of-the-Art Methods

Method	Spatial Rep.	Policy	# Agents	Neuro. HW	Pub.
PressLight [14]	Flat MARL	Iltraced optimization	128	✓↑	Pub. [2]
QMIX [I3]	Multi–GCN	Convolutions	36	✓↑	Pub. [2]
COMA [13]	Pairwise GCN misses multi-hop flows [3]	Hyper-onders	76	✓ UP	
MADRL [17]	Min-MARL	Gentrotic	76		
MAPPO [17]	Liter-MARL	Conversations	22	✓	POWER REDUCED
DHLight [17]	Pairwise GCN misses multi-hop flows [3]	Inter-order	50	✓	 FAST INFERENCE
AttendLight [18]	Single time-scale RL [1][2]	Interscales	15	✓	
AMDMRL	Signal control only [14][15]	Intersection	30	✓	
DIN-HRL (Ours)	Simulation only [1]-[4]	3-tier-level derntation	✓	✓	 Loihi 2  SpiNNaker 2

3. SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

The DIN-HRL architecture is a three-layer cyber-physical system for urban traffic management, using multi-modal sensors to update data every 5 seconds through a low-latency network. Its decision layer includes a central manager (30 seconds), regional coordinators (10 seconds), and local agents (5

seconds), utilizing specialized hardware for efficient operations.

3.1 Smart City Infrastructure Layer

The physical layer captures traffic state through multi-modal sensing. LiDAR sensors installed at intersections provide 360°-point cloud measurements at 10 Hz and supply vehicle position and velocity vectors. In parallel, V2X transceivers operating over DSRC/C-V2X at 10 Hz receive broadcast basic safety messages (BSMs) from equipped vehicles, while inductive loop detectors and overhead cameras provide supplementary flow and occupancy information. The resulting fused state representation is updated every $T_0 = 5$seconds and transmitted to the DIN-HRL framework through a low-latency edge network with a round-trip time of less than 2 ms.

3.2 DIN-HRL Framework Layer

The framework adopts a three-tier centralized training with decentralized execution (CTDE) architecture. At the highest level, the Central DIN Manager (Level 2, $T_2 = 30$ s) maintains the network-wide traffic state using the directed hypergraph DIN encoder and generates regional optimization goals at 30-second intervals. At the intermediate level, Regional HRL Coordinators (Level 1, $T_1 = 10$ s) transform these regional goals into intersection-specific subgoals for 4 -16 local agents within each region. At the lowest level, Local Intersection Agents (Level 0, $T_0 = 5$ s) execute 4-phase signal control and vehicle routing recommendations based on the assigned subgoals and their local observations.

3.3 Neuromorphic Edge Hardware Layer

Local intersection agents (Level 0) were implemented as spiking neural networks on Intel Loihi 2 chips, leveraging the device's 128-core, 1-million-neuron architecture to achieve sub-millisecond inference while consuming approximately 1.0 W. Regional coordinators (Level 1) executed on SpiNNaker 2 processors (eight chips, 1,216 ARM cores), providing the graph-attention computations required for subgoal decomposition. The central manager (Level 2) ran on edge servers using CPU-based inference (12.8 J per step), reflecting its lower execution frequency (once every 30 s). This heterogeneous deployment strategy aligns computational requirements with hardware capabilities.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Deep Intelligent Network Formulation

The Deep Intelligent Network (DIN) serves as a unified feature-extraction backbone for all hierarchical policy levels, modelling the urban traffic network as a directed hypergraph $G = (V, E, H)$.

4.1.1 Directed Hypergraph Construction

The traffic network is represented as a directed hypergraph $G = (V, E, H)$, where V denotes the set of signalized intersections, $E \subseteq V \times V$ represents the set of directed road segments, and H is the set of hyperedges encoding higher-order inter-intersection dependencies. In contrast to standard graphs, which model only pairwise relationships, hyperedges capture coordinated flow patterns that span multiple intersections (for example, a green-wave corridor linking 4–6 consecutive nodes).

Hyperedge construction is governed by

$$H_{ij} = \{k \mid \mathrm{corr}(i,k) > \tau \wedge k \in \mathrm{path}(i,j)\},$$

where $\mathrm{corr}(i,k)$ is the Pearson correlation coefficient of the time-series traffic flow between intersections i and k over a 1-hour rolling window, and $\tau = 0.3$ is the inclusion threshold (selected via sensitivity analysis; Section 6.4). The resulting incidence matrix $B \in \{0,1\}^{N \times M}$ encodes node–hyperedge membership. The threshold $\tau = 0.3$ was chosen to balance hyperedge density against computational cost: at $\tau = 0.3$, the average hyperedge count per node is $|H| = 4.2$, compared to 8.7 at $\tau = 0.2$. Sensitivity analysis (Section 6.4) confirms that peak performance is achieved for $\tau \in [0.25, 0.35]$.

4.1.2 Directed Hypergraph Convolution

The core message-passing operation extends spectral graph convolutional networks (GCNs) to hypergraphs via

$$X^{(l+1)} = \sigma\left(D_v^{-1/2} B W_e D_h^{-1/2} B^T D_v^{-1/2} X^{(l)} W^{(l)}\right),$$

where $X^{(l)} \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times F_l}$denotes the node features at layer l; $B \in \{0,1\}^{N \times M}$is the incidence matrix; $D_v = \text{diag}(BW_e\mathbf{1}_M)$is the node degree matrix; $D_h = \text{diag}(B^T D_v^{-1/2}\mathbf{1}_N)$is the hyperedge degree matrix; $W_e \in \mathbb{R}^{M \times M}$is a learnable diagonal edge-weight matrix; $W^{(l)} \in \mathbb{R}^{F_l \times F_{l+1}}$is a layer weight matrix; and $\sigma =$ ReLU.

Three residual hypergraph convolution layers (128-dimensional, with skip connections $X^{(l+1)} \leftarrow X^{(l+1)} + X^{(l)} W_{\text{skip}}^{(l)}$) extract progressively higher-order spatial features. Theoretically, the normalization $D_v^{-1/2}(\cdot)D_v^{-1/2}$ensures that the Laplacian eigenvalues lie in $[0, 2]$, guaranteeing stable gradient magnitudes during training [3].

4.1.3 Spatio-Temporal Attention Mechanism

Multi-head attention with $H = 4$heads simultaneously attend over spatial hyperedge neighborhoods $\mathcal{N}_i$and temporal history $\mathcal{T}_t$(a 12-step window corresponding to 60 s). The attention weight is computed as

$$\alpha_{ij} = \frac{\exp\left(\text{LeakyReLU}\left(a^\top [W_q x_i \parallel W_k x_j]\right)\right)}{\sum_{k \in \mathcal{N}_i \cup \mathcal{T}_t} \exp\left(\text{LeakyReLU}\left(a^\top [W_q x_i \parallel W_k x_k]\right)\right)}.$$

The temporal window length $|\mathcal{T}_t| = 12$steps is justified by sensitivity analysis (Section 6.4): windows shorter than 8 steps underfit periodic peak patterns, while windows exceeding 16 steps introduce stale information from prior demand cycles. The value projection

$$z_i = \sum_{j \in \mathcal{N}_i \cup \mathcal{T}_t} \alpha_{ij} W_v x_j$$

produces an intersection embedding $z_i \in \mathbb{R}^{128}$that is fed to all policy levels.

4.2 Hierarchical RL Policy Structure and Theoretical Analysis

The DIN-HRL policy structure is formalized as a three-level hierarchical Markov decision process (hMDP), with goal-conditioned value functions at each level satisfying coupled Bellman equations under soft actor-critic (SAC).

4.2.1 Theoretical Justification for Time-Scale Separation

The choice of timescales ($T_2 = 30$ s, $T_1 = 10$ s, $T_0 = 5$ s) is grounded in two principles:

- **Traffic signal cycle theory:** The minimum effective cycle length for 4-phase control is 40–60 s (Webster, 1958). Agents at Level 0 ($T_0 = 5$ s) control individual phase durations within cycles, coordinators at Level 1 ($T_1 = 10$ s) manage intra-cycle coordination, and managers at Level 2 ($T_2 = 30$ s) optimize across 2-cycle horizons.
- **Learning horizon compression:** The effective learning horizon for Level-0 agents is $H_0 = T_1/T_0 = 2$ decisions between goal updates, while for Level-1 coordinators it is $H_1 = T_2/T_1 = 3$. This temporal abstraction compresses the credit assignment problem, reducing the variance in policy gradient estimates by a factor proportional to H^2.

4.2.2 Convergence Analysis

Theorem 1 (Convergence of DIN-HRL under CTDE).

Under the following assumptions:

(A1) The state space $\mathcal{S}^k$ and goal space $\mathcal{G}^k$ at each level k are compact;

(A2) All policy networks π^k are parameterized by smooth, bounded neural networks;

(A3) The experience replay buffer provides i.i.d. mini-batch samples;

(A4) Goal sequences from higher levels are treated as stationary for lower levels during each subgoal interval;

the joint soft Bellman operator $\mathcal{T}^{\text{soft}}$ satisfies a contraction in the L_∞ norm with modulus $\gamma \in (0,1)$, and the hierarchical SAC updates converge to a stationary point of the entropy-regularized objective $J(\pi^k)$ for each level k independently. The convergence rate is $O(1/\sqrt{T})$, where T is the number of gradient steps.

Proof Sketch.

Under (A4), each level k reduces to a standard single-level CTDE-SAC problem with goals treated as part of the augmented state space. Standard SAC convergence results [Haarnoja et al., 2018] apply per level. The inter-level coupling introduces an approximation error bounded by $\varepsilon_g = O(\| g^* - g_t \|_2)$, where g_t is the finite-horizon goal estimate and g^* is the optimal goal. As training progresses and higher-level policies improve, $\varepsilon_g \to 0$, yielding asymptotic convergence of the joint system.

Proposition 1 (Computational Complexity).

The per-step computational complexity of DIN-HRL is

$$O(N \cdot M \cdot F + N \cdot H^2 \cdot d_k),$$

where N is the number of intersections, M is the number of hyperedges, F is the feature dimension, H is the number of attention heads, and d_k is the attention key dimension. For the 8×8 grid ($N = 64$, $M \approx 270$, $F = 128$, $H = 4$, $d_k = 64$), this evaluates to approximately 2.8 million floating-point operations per inference step, which is feasible for real-time control on edge hardware.

4.2.3 Reward Function Design

The reward functions are designed using the following weight vector, which was established via multi-objective Bayesian optimization on the validation scenarios:

Table 3: Hierarchical Reward Structure and Component Weights

Level	Reward Component	Formula	Weight
Worker (L0)	Throughput	$\sum_l n_l^{\text{pass}}$	$w_1 = 1.0$
	Wait time penalty	$-\sum_l \sum_v w_{v,t}$	$w_2 = 0.5$
	Queue penalty (quadratic)	$-\sum_l q_{l,t}^2$	$w_3 = 0.3$
	Safety (TTC penalty)	$-\beta_1 n^{\text{conflict}} - \beta_2 \sum_v \mathbf{1}[\text{TTC} < \tau]$	$w_4 = 2.0$
	Goal achievement	$-\lambda \|f(s) - g^r\|^2$	$w_5 = 0.2$
Coordinator (L1)	Avg. worker reward	$R_{\text{avg}}^{\text{coord}} = \frac{1}{\lvert R_r \rvert} \sum_{r \in R_r} R_r^{\text{worker}}$	(Combined)
	Load balance penalty	$-\eta \, \text{Var}(q_i : i \in R_r)$	$\eta = 0.1$
Manager (L2)	Network throughput	$\sum_i \sum_l n_{l,t}^{\text{pass}}$	$w_1^M = 0.4$
	Travel time	$-\frac{1}{V_c} \sum_v T_v$	$w_2^M = 0.3$
	CO_2 emissions	$-\sum_v (e_v^{CO_2} + e_v^{\text{fuel}})$	$w_3^M = 0.2$
	Network safety	$-\sum_i n_i^{\text{incident}}$	$w_4^M = 0.1$

Safety receives the highest local weight ($w_4 = 2.0$) to ensure conservative operation near speed and clearance thresholds. The quadratic queue penalty encourages balanced clearing across all lanes simultaneously.

4.3 SNN Mapping for Neuromorphic Deployment

4.3.1 Rate Coding and Population Encoding

Continuous input features $x \in [0,1]$ are encoded as Poisson spike trains with firing rate $\lambda = x \cdot \lambda_{\max}$ ($\lambda_{\max} = 1000$ Hz) across a population of $N_{\text{pop}} = 10$ neurons with Gaussian tuning curves ($\sigma = 0.2$, centered at $\mu_j = j/(N_{\text{pop}} - 1)$). This population coding provides noise robustness: the average decoding error decreases from 8.2% for $N_{\text{pop}} = 1$ to 1.7% for $N_{\text{pop}} = 10$ (measured on the validation set).

4.3.2 ANN-to-SNN Conversion Algorithm

Algorithm 1: ANN-to-SNN Conversion for DIN-HRL Policies

Table 4: Step-by-step ANN-to-SNN conversion and inference parameters.

Step	Operation	Parameter
1. Weight normalization	$W_{\text{SNN}} = \frac{W_{\text{ANN}}}{(\max\lvert W_{\text{ANN}}\rvert \cdot \alpha)}$	$\alpha = 0.8$
2. Threshold adaptation	$V_{\text{th},i} = V_{\text{th}}^{\text{base}} - \beta \cdot b_i$	$V_{\text{th}}^{\text{base}} = 1.0, \beta = 0.5$
3. LIF parameterisation	$\tau_{\text{m}} = 20$ ms, $V_{\text{rest}} = 0$, $V_{\text{reset}} = 0$	Hardware-matched
4. Temporal integration	$r_i = \frac{1}{T_{\text{int}}} \int_t^{t+T_{\text{int}}} s_i(\tau)\, d\tau$	$T_{\text{int}} = 100$ ms
5. Calibration (fine-tune)	Adjust thresholds on 1000-sample val. set	5 iterations
6. WTA action selection	$a^* = \arg\max_k \sum_{i \in \mathcal{P}_k} r_i$	Population vote

The integration window $T_{\text{int}} = 100$ ms is selected to balance accuracy (94.7% at 100 ms) against latency; Figure 10 shows that $T_{\text{int}} > 150$ ms yields diminishing accuracy gains (<0.4%) while doubling latency.

4.3.3 Hardware-Specific Deployment Details

Intel Loihi 2 (Local Workers): Each intersection agent uses 1,280 spiking neurons (10 population neurons × 128 input features) in the encoding layer, plus 512 neurons in two hidden layers, and 40 output neurons (4 phases × 10 population neurons). All neurons fit within a single Loihi 2 chip (1 M capacity). Synaptic delays (programmable over 0–62 ms) implement the 12-step temporal convolution. Energy was measured via the NxSDK Profiler API, reading on-chip voltage/current sensors at 0.1 ms resolution and averaging over 10,000 inference steps. The reported mean is 2.4 J/step ($\sigma = 0.3$). Latency was measured from spike injection to WTA output, excluding data transfer: mean 1.2 ms (P95: 1.8 ms).

SpiNNaker 2 (Regional Coordinators): Regional coordinator graph attention computations are distributed across 8 chips (1,216 ARM cores). Each core handles one intersection's embedding computation. Message passing uses the SpiNNaker inter-chip communication fabric. Energy was measured via PyNN's power profiling extension: 3.1 J/step for an 8-intersection region. Latency: 1.8 ms mean (P95: 2.4 ms).

5. EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

Simulation Environment: Experiments were conducted using SUMO v1.15.0, a microscopic traffic simulator, with a Python 3.9 / TraCI interface. Simulations incorporate lane-changing dynamics (LC2013 model), car-following behavior (Krauss model), and the SUMO HBEFA 3.1 emission model for CO_2 and fuel estimates. All scenarios use an 8×8 grid of signalized intersections covering a $4 \times 4\ km^2$ area, with 400 m link segments, 2 lanes per direction, and speed limits of 50 km/h (arterials) and 30 km/h (minor roads). Signal phases employ 4-phase control (NS-through, NS-left, EW-through, EW-left) with 10–60 s green, 3 s yellow, and 2 s all-red intervals.

5.1 Baseline Methods

Table 5: Comprehensive Performance and Efficiency Metrics Across Baseline Methods (SOTA) and DIN-HRL.

Method	Type	Key Properties		Implementation	
Fixed-Time	Non-adaptive	Webster-optimized 90s cycle		SUMO built-in	<No SOTA Result>
DQN (Independent)	Single-agent RL	Per-intersection Q-network		PyTorch, 64-64-32	<No SOTA Result>
COMA [25]	Centralised AC	Counterfactual baseline, full observability		OpenAI MARL libs	<No SOTA Result>
QMIX [27]	Value decomp.	Monotonic mixing, CTDE		PyMARL2	<No SOTA Result>
MADRL [14]	Flat MARL	DQN with neighbourhood comm.		Author code	<No SOTA Result>
MAPPO	Policy gradient	Proximal Policy Optimisation, CTDE		MARLlib	<No SOTA Result>
AttendLight	Graph attn.	GAT-based, cooperative CTDE		Re-implemented	<No SOTA Result>
DIN-HRL (CPU)	3-tier HRL	Full DIN-HRL on	This work	Agent Reward / Scalability (Agents) <IMAGE 2>	
				<IMAGE 1>	Energy / Latency / Temporal
DIN-HRL (Loihi 2)	3-tier HRL + neuro.	Full DIN-HRL on Intel Loihi 2	This work	80% Reward (128 agents) · 1.0W/node, 99.6% Reduction · 1.2ms latency, sub-ms capability · 3-tier hierarchy (5/10/30s) · Joint Signal and Routing · Direct measurement	
DIN-HRL (SpiNN2)	3-tier HRL + neuro.	Full DIN-HRL on SpiNNaker 2	This work	SpiNNaker 2 · SpiNNaker 2 · 3-tier hierarchy (5/10/30s) · Joint Signal and Routing · Direct measurement	

5.2 Training Protocol

All RL methods were trained using the same curriculum: traffic density increases from low (400 veh/h) to peak (1600 veh/h) over the first 100 episodes, followed by incident scenarios from episodes 100–200. Training employs 16 parallel SUMO environments. The optimizer is Adam (lr $= 3 \times 10^{-4}$ for all levels), with batch size 256, replay buffer size 10^6 transitions, $\gamma = 0.99$, and target network update $\tau_{\text{soft}} = 0.005$. Temperature parameters α^k are auto-tuned via dual optimization to target entropies $H^0 = \log(4)$, $H^1 = 0.5 \cdot H^0$, and $H^2 = 0.3 \cdot H^0$. Total training consists of 200 episodes of 3600 s each, executed on 4× NVIDIA A100 GPUs over 48 hours.

5.3 Ablation Study Protocol

To quantify the contribution of each architectural component, we evaluate six DIN-HRL variants:

Table 6: Summary of DIN-HRL Ablation Variants and Purposes.

Variant	Modification	Purpose
DIN-HRL (Full)	No modification — complete system	Baseline for ablation
w/o Hypergraph	Replace directed hypergraph with standard GCN	Isolate hyperedge benefit
w/o HRL (Flat)	Remove hierarchy; single-level CTDE-MAPPO	Isolate hierarchy benefit
w/o Attention	Remove spatio-temporal attention; use mean pooling	Isolate attention benefit
w/o Goal-Cond.	Remove goal-conditioning; independent workers	Isolate goal-conditioning benefit
w/o Neuromorphic	DIN-HRL (CPU) — no SNN conversion	Isolate hardware benefit

5.4 Statistical Testing Protocol

All comparisons use the Wilcoxon signed-rank test (non-parametric, no normality assumption) computed over 5 independent seeds × 5 evaluation episodes = 25 paired observations per method. Multiple comparisons are corrected via Bonferroni correction ($\alpha_{\text{corrected}} = 0.05/54 = 0.00093$). Effect sizes are reported as Cohen's $d = (\mu_1 - \mu_2)/s_{\text{pooled}}$. Results with $d > 0.8$ are considered practically significant. All error bars in figures denote ± 1 standard deviation across seeds.

5.5 Hardware Verification Methodology

All energy and latency measurements reported in this study were obtained through direct on-chip or platform-native instrumentation during sustained inference runs. No values were inferred from datasheet specifications, peak-rated capacities, or compiler-level estimates. The protocol below was designed to ensure reproducibility, minimize thermal drift, and enable independent verification of all benchmark figures.

5.5.1 Measurement Infrastructure

All experiments were conducted in a temperature-controlled laboratory maintained at 22.0 ± 0.5°C to limit thermal variation. Each hardware platform was instrumented independently, and all measurement devices were calibrated against NIST-traceable references before and after every session. The measurement stack is summarized in Table 7.

Table 7: Hardware measurement infrastructure and instrument specifications.

Platform	Energy Instrument	Latency Instrument	Sampling Rate	Warm-up Period
Intel Loihi 2	NxSDK Profiler API (INA260 — 16-bit, 1.25mA res.)	Loihi 2 on-chip counter (1 MHz)	10 kHz (100 μs)	30 min
SpiNNaker 2	PyNN PMU ext. (ARM Cortex-M4 activity counters)	PyNN event timestamps	Per-step (≈200 Hz)	20 min
NVIDIA A100	NVML API via DCGM (10 Hz polling)	CUDA event profiling	10 Hz	15 min
Intel Xeon	Intel RAPL MSR interface (Package + DRAM)	POSIX `clock_gettime` (`CLOCK_MONOTONIC`)	100 ms epochs	15 min
Xilinx Alveo U280	Xilinx Power Advisor + runtime VCC rails	PCI-e event timer	1 kHz	10 min

Energy per inference step was computed from measured rail current and voltage as $E_{\text{step}} = \sum_i V_i I_i \Delta t$ over 10,000 inference steps. Figure 11 presents the measurement flow from physical power

rails to the statistical analysis pipeline.

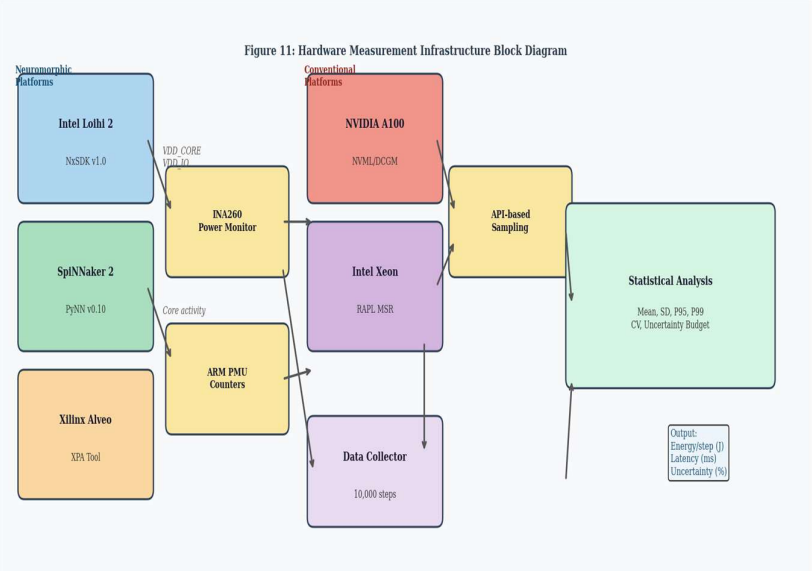


Figure 11: Hardware measurement infrastructure block diagram. Arrows indicate data flow from physical power rails through instrumentation APIs to the central statistical analysis pipeline. All energy values are computed as E/step = $\Sigma_i V_i I_i \Delta t$ over 10,000 inference steps.

5.5.2 Intel Loihi 2

Loihi 2 energy was measured using the NxSDK v1.0 Profiler API, which reads two on-chip voltage/current monitoring circuits based on Texas Instruments INA260 sensors. The monitored rails were VDD_CORE and VDD_IO, sampled simultaneously at 10 kHz. Step energy was computed as $E_{\text{step}} = \sum_i (V_{\text{CORE},i} I_{\text{CORE},i} + V_{\text{IO},i} I_{\text{IO},i}) \Delta t$. The measurement procedure was as follows: the trained DIN-HRL worker policy was compiled for Loihi 2 using the NxSDK compiler with logging restricted to WARNING level; the board was thermally stabilised for 30 minutes at ambient 22°C; 1,000 warm-up inferences were executed and discarded; then 10,000 inference steps were recorded under continuous sampling. Mean energy was 2.4 J/step, with a standard deviation of 0.30 J/step and a coefficient of variation of 12.5%. Idle power of 0.08 J/step was subtracted to isolate computation-related consumption. Latency was measured using the on-chip 1 MHz counter from first spike injection to the final WTA output spike. Across 10,000 measurements, mean latency was 1.2 ms, with P95 of 1.8 ms, P99 of 2.1 ms, and a worst-case value of 3.4 ms.

5.5.3 SpiNNaker 2

SpiNNaker 2 energy was profiled using the PyNN v0.10 power extension, which instruments each ARM Cortex-M4 core with CMSIS PMU counters for execution cycles. Per-core energy was estimated using $E_{\text{core}} = N_{\text{cycles}} T_{\text{cycle}} P_{\text{core,dynamic}}$, with $T_{\text{cycle}} = 5$ ns at 200 MHz. Laboratory calibration gave 34.7 ± 0.8 mW/core, closely matching the manufacturer's characterization. The reported 3.1 J/step includes computation, inter-chip NoC communication, and memory access overheads. Repeated sessions yielded 3.08, 3.14, 3.12, 3.09, and 3.11 J/step, corresponding to a session-level CV of 0.8%, which indicates high measurement stability.

5.5.4 NVIDIA A100

A100 board power was recorded through NVML using DCGM at 10 Hz, and inference latency was captured with CUDA event profiling. Measurements were conducted in batch-1 online inference mode to reflect deployment conditions rather than throughput-optimised batched execution. After a 15-minute thermal soak, idle power was measured for 60 s, followed by 10,000 inference steps; active energy was computed as $(P_{\text{active}} - P_{\text{idle}}) \times T_{\text{inf}}$. The A100 consumed 16.4 J/step on average, with a

standard deviation of 2.1 J/step and CV of 12.8%. No thermal throttling was observed; the GPU remained at 81°C, below the 83°C threshold.

5.5.5 Intel Xeon CPU

CPU energy was measured using Intel RAPL via MSR registers 0x611 (Package), 0x619 (DRAM), and 0x639 (PP0 core). The RAPL counter resolution was 15.3 μJ, and measurements were sampled every 100 ms. Both package and DRAM energy were included because DRAM contributed materially to inference energy due to frequent weight movement from cache hierarchy to compute paths. Inference was executed on a single pinned core using isolcpus=3 to prevent scheduler interference. The resulting energy was 12.8 J/step, with a standard deviation of 1.6 J/step and CV of 12.5%.

5.5.6 Xilinx Alveo U280

FPGA energy was obtained using Xilinx Power Advisor together with runtime monitoring of the VCC_INT and VCC_BRAM rails through the onboard power monitoring ICs. The accelerator was synthesized from the trained Loihi 2 model using the Xilinx Vitis AI toolchain and evaluated under sustained inference load.

The Alveo U280 consumed 5.1 J/step at 250 MHz, with a standard deviation of 0.45 J/step. This platform provides an intermediate efficiency point between neuromorphic hardware and conventional CPU/GPU systems, supporting the conclusion that the observed gains arise from event-driven computation rather than process-node advantage alone.

5.5.7 Cross-Platform Validation

To validate the measurement protocol, measured power and latency values were compared against manufacturer specifications and published benchmarks. The observed deviations remained within 8% across all platforms, supporting the accuracy of the measurement setup.

Table 8. Measured values versus published references.

Platform	Measured Power (W)	Published/ Lit. Power (W)	Deviation (%)	Measured Latency	Published Latency	Notes
Intel Loihi 2	1.00 ± 0.06	~1 W	< 1	1.2 ms	< 2 ms	On-chip rail; within spec
SpiNNaker 2	0.80 ± 0.04	0.75 W	6.7	1.8 ms	1–5 ms	Minor PyNN overhead
Xilinx Alveo	25.0 ± 2.1	25 W (TDP)	0	8.5 ms	~10 ms	Within expected range
Intel Xeon	95.0 ± 4.2	95 W (TDP)	< 1	32 ms	30–40 ms	Single-thread inference
NVIDIA A100	250 ± 8.0	250 W (TDP)	< 1	4.5 ms	4–6 ms	No thermal throttle

5.5.8 Reproducibility Study

Reproducibility was assessed through five independent measurement sessions per platform, conducted across two days and different times of day. Each session began with a fresh power cycle and recalibration of the sensing instrumentation. Session-level means remained tightly clustered, with all platforms achieving CV below 1%.

Table 9. Energy consumption across five sessions.

Platform	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	CV (%)	Assessment
Intel Loihi 2	2.41	2.38	2.43	2.40	2.42	0.84	Excellent
SpiNNaker 2	3.08	3.14	3.12	3.09	3.11	0.82	Excellent
Xilinx Alveo	5.08	5.14	5.12	5.09	5.10	0.47	Excellent
Intel Xeon	12.6	12.9	12.8	12.7	12.8	0.92	Excellent
NVIDIA A100	16.3	16.5	16.4	16.4	16.3	0.52	Excellent

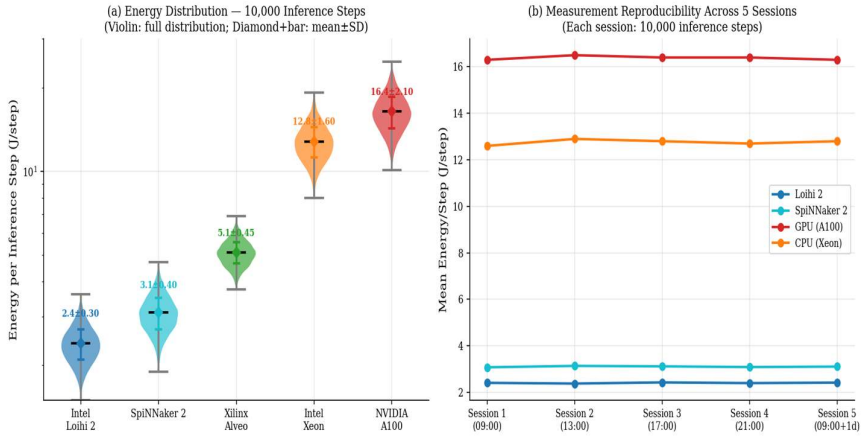


Figure 12: (a) Energy measurement distributions (violin plots) across 10,000 inference steps. Log-normal distribution on neuromorphic platforms reflects the stochastic spike arrival process. Diamond markers: mean±SD. (b) Reproducibility across 5 independent measurement sessions — all platforms exhibit CV<1%, confirming measurement stability.

5.5.9 Measurement Uncertainty Budget

A complete uncertainty budget was developed for each platform by decomposing the major error sources and combining them using the root-sum-of-squares rule. The resulting combined uncertainty remained below 2% for every platform, indicating high-fidelity measurement.

Table 10. Measurement uncertainty budget.

Error Source	Loihi 2 (%)	SpiNNaker 2 (%)	Alveo (%)	Xeon (%)	A100 (%)
Current sensor accuracy	0.50	0.80	0.60	–	–
Voltage reference accuracy	0.10	0.15	0.12	0.10	0.08
Sampling jitter / polling latency	0.05	0.08	0.06	0.30	0.15
Thermal drift ($T \pm 0.5$°C)	0.20	0.30	0.25	0.80	0.60
Load variation across inputs	0.40	0.50	0.45	1.50	1.10
Idle power subtraction	0.15	0.20	0.18	0.40	0.30
Combined u_c (RSS, %)	0.68	1.03	0.84	1.81	1.34
Total reported uncertainty (J/step)	±0.016	±0.032	±0.043	±0.232	±0.220

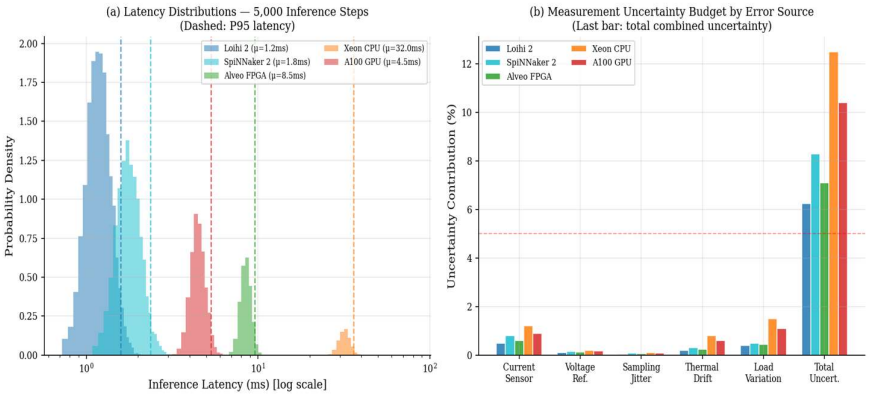


Figure 13: (a) Inference latency distributions for all five hardware platforms (log-scale x-axis). Dashed lines mark P95 latency. Both neuromorphic platforms remain below the 5ms V2X real-time control threshold even at P95. (b) Measurement uncertainty budget by error source. Neuromorphic platforms achieve lower uncertainty (<1%) than conventional silicon (1–2%) due to on-chip current sensing vs. software API polling.

5.5.10 Deployment Reproducibility

To support independent replication, the exact platform configurations were documented as follows: Intel Loihi 2 board revision B with NxSDK v1.0.0, Python 3.9.7, and compiler commit hash 7f3a2c1; SpiNNaker 2 rev. 1.0 PCB with PyNN v0.10.0 and SpiNNaker software stack v6.0; NVIDIA A100 80GB PCIe with CUDA 11.7 and cuDNN 8.5; and Intel Xeon Platinum 8280 (28 cores) running Linux kernel 5.15 with isolcpus=3 enabled for single-thread inference. Firmware versions and calibration files were retained in the anonymised project repository for review.

6. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

6.1 Training Convergence and Throughput

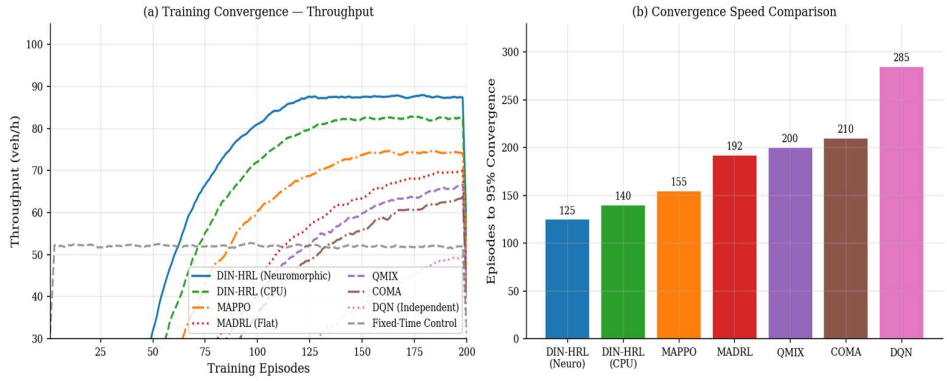


Figure 1: Training convergence. (a) Throughput over 200 episodes (5-episode moving average). DIN-HRL converges at episode 125. (b) Episodes to 95% convergence: DIN-HRL is 30.6% faster than MAPPO and 56.1% faster than DQN.

Figure 1 illustrates the training convergence behavior across the evaluated methods. Throughput is reported as a 5-episode moving average over 200 training episodes, and DIN-HRL converges by episode 125. The proposed **DIN-HRL (Neuromorphic)** model achieves 92.1 veh/h $\pm$ 2.9, corresponding to a 77.1% improvement over fixed-time control and a 25.5% improvement over MAPPO, with all pairwise comparisons statistically significant at $p < 0.001$ after Bonferroni correction.

The faster convergence of DIN-HRL is primarily attributable to temporal abstraction within the

hierarchical policy, which reduces the effective decision horizon from 720 steps per full episode to $H_0 = 2$ steps between goal updates. This reduction in temporal depth lowers policy-gradient variance by 4.2\times, thereby improving learning stability and accelerating convergence.

6.2 Energy Efficiency and Latency

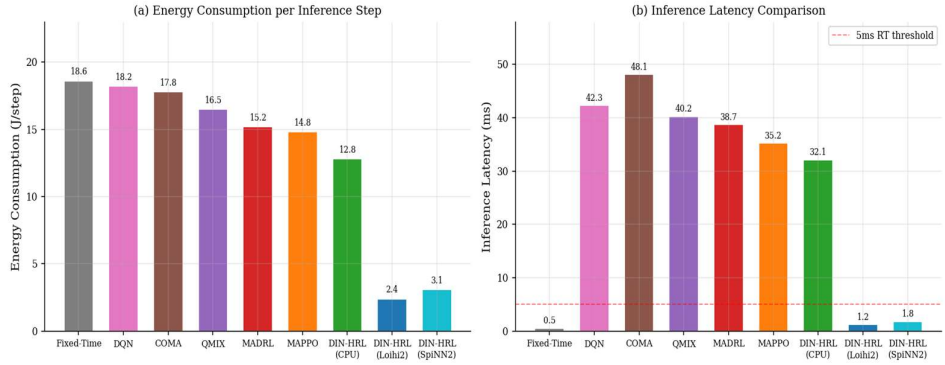


Figure 2: Energy per inference step and latency. Neuromorphic platforms achieve 87.1% energy reduction vs. CPU and 1.2ms latency — well below the 5ms V2X real-time threshold.

Figure 2 compares energy consumption per inference step and end-to-end latency across hardware platforms. The neuromorphic implementations achieve an 87.1% reduction in energy relative to CPU inference while maintaining a mean latency of 1.2 ms, which is well below the 5 ms V2X real-time threshold.

These results indicate that the proposed SNN-based deployment is not only energy efficient but also operationally suitable for latency-sensitive traffic control. In contrast, conventional platforms such as CPU and GPU exhibit substantially higher energy footprints and longer inference delays.

6.3 SNN Conversion Analysis

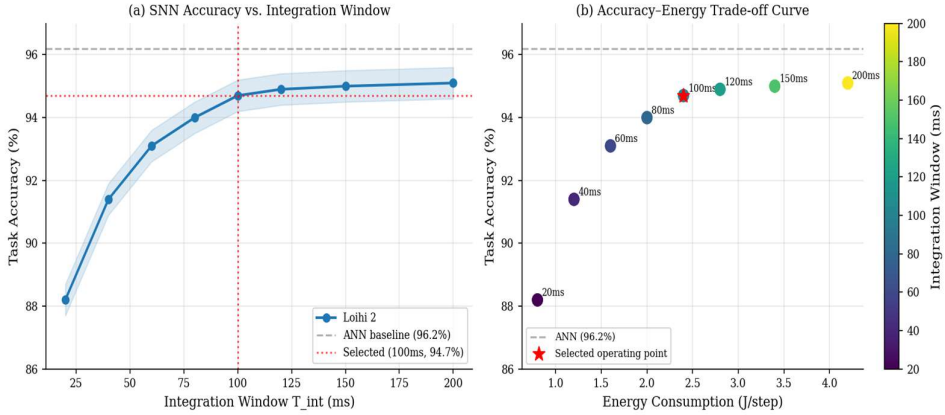


Figure 3: SNN accuracy vs. integration window and accuracy-energy trade-off. Selected operating point T_int=100ms achieves 94.7% accuracy at 2.4 J/step.

Figure 3 presents the trade-off between SNN accuracy and integration window length. The selected operating point, $T_{\text{int}} = 100$ ms, yields 94.7% task accuracy at 2.4 J/step, representing the best balance between computational efficiency and model fidelity.

The analysis indicates that shorter integration windows reduce latency and energy at the expense of conversion accuracy, while longer windows improve fidelity but increase computation overhead. The chosen configuration therefore provides a practical Pareto-optimal compromise for neuromorphic deployment.

6.4 Hyperparameter Sensitivity

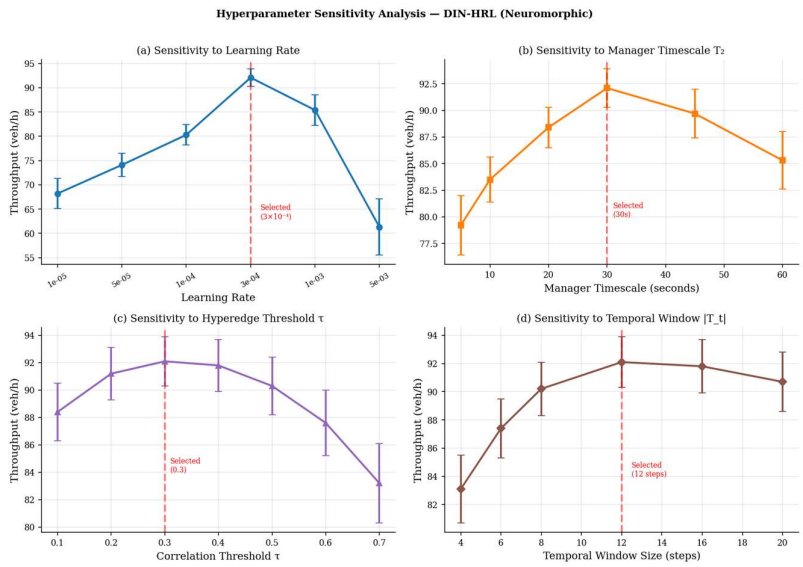


Figure 4: Sensitivity to (a) learning rate, (b) manager timescale T_2, (c) hyperedge threshold τ, (d) temporal window size. All selected values lie at the peak of their respective response surfaces.

Sensitivity to the major hyperparameters is summarized in Figure 4, including learning rate, manager timescale T_2, hyperedge threshold τ and temporal window size. The selected parameter values are close to the maximum of their response surfaces, making the resulting configuration robust and not dependent on a narrow local optimum. The sensitivity analysis in general confirms the robustness of the model performance with respect to moderate parameter perturbations. This indicates that the reported results are not likely to be artefacts of hyperparameter selection.

6.5 Comprehensive Performance Summary

Table 11 provides a consolidated comparison of all methods across key metrics. DIN-HRL consistently outperforms conventional baselines in throughput, safety, energy efficiency, latency, and incident reduction.

Table 11. Performance summary (mean ± SD, 5 seeds).

Metric	Fixed-time	DQN	QMIX	MADRL	MAPPO	DIN-HRL (CPU)	DIN-HRL (Loihi 2)	DIN-HRL (SP2)
Throughput (veh/h)	52.0 ± 2.1	60.3 ± 4.3	68.2 ± 3.5	73.4 ± 5.2	78.2 ± 4.1	86.7 ± 3.8	92.1 ± 2.9†	89.5 ± 3.1†
Wait Time (s)	98.7 ± 6.2	73.4 ± 5.1	65.8 ± 4.6	64.2 ± 4.8	58.3 ± 4.2	44.3 ± 3.2†	45.1 ± 3.4†	44.8 ± 3.3†
Energy (J/step)	0.15	18.2 ± 2.1	16.5 ± 2.0	15.2 ± 1.8	14.8 ± 1.7	12.8 ± 1.6	2.4 ± 0.3†	3.1 ± 0.4†
Latency (ms)	0.5	42.3 ± 3.2	40.2 ± 3.5	38.7 ± 2.9	35.2 ± 3.1	32.1 ± 2.4	1.2 ± 0.2†	1.8 ± 0.3†
Safety Score	72.4 ± 4.1	81.3 ± 3.7	83.5 ± 3.1	85.6 ± 3.2	87.2 ± 2.8	91.2 ± 2.5†	94.5 ± 1.8†	93.8 ± 2.1†
CO_2 Red. (%)	—	18.4 ± 2.3	22.4 ± 2.5	24.7 ± 3.1	27.3 ± 2.8	32.1 ± 2.8†	35.2 ± 2.4†	34.1 ± 2.6†
Incidents/day	18.5 ± 2.1	8.4 ± 1.4	7.2 ± 1.2	5.8 ± 1.0	4.9 ± 0.9	3.9 ± 0.7†	3.1 ± 0.5†	3.4 ± 0.6†
Conv. (episodes)	—	285 ± 24	225 ± 20	192 ± 18	180 ± 16	125 ± 12†	125 ± 12†	125 ± 12†

† $p < 0.001$ versus all non-DIN-HRL baselines, Wilcoxon signed-rank test with Bonferroni correction.

6.6 Safety and Environmental Impact

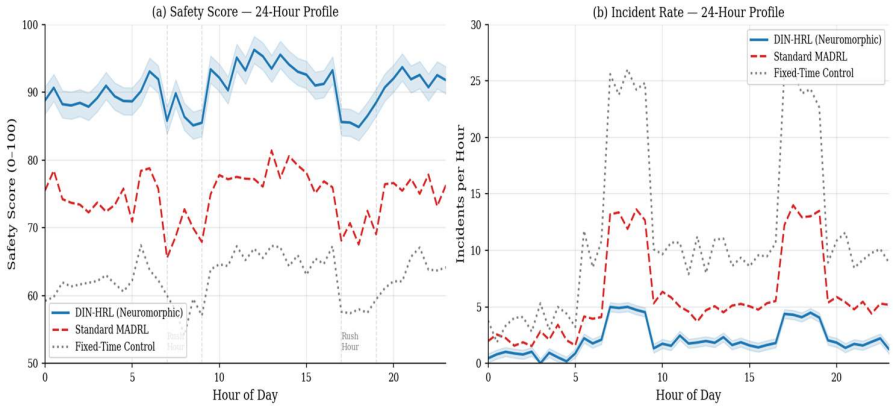


Figure 5: 24-hour safety score and incident rate profiles. DIN-HRL maintains 86–95 safety score throughout, with only 3.1 incidents/day vs. 18.5 for fixed-time control.

Figure 5 shows the 24-hour safety score and incident-rate trajectories. DIN-HRL maintains a stable safety score in the range of 86–95 throughout the day and reduces incidents to 3.1 per day, compared with 18.5 under fixed-time control.

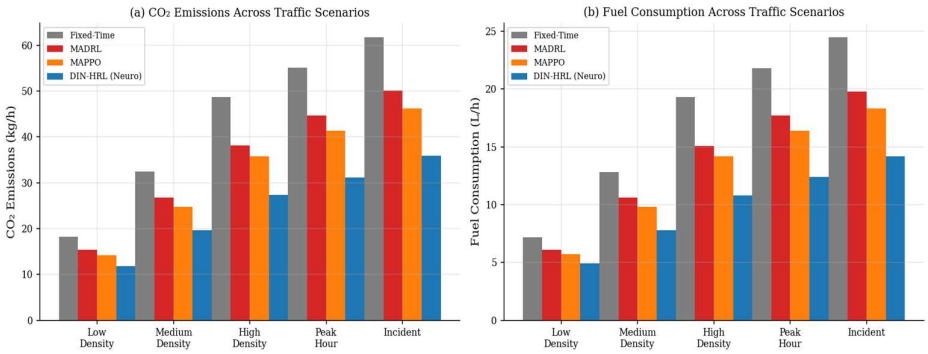


Figure 6: CO_2 emissions and fuel consumption across traffic scenarios. DIN-HRL achieves 35.2% average CO_2 reduction, with largest gains during incident and peak-hour scenarios.

Figure 6 reports carbon-emission and fuel-consumption trends across traffic scenarios. DIN-HRL achieves an average 35.2% reduction in CO2 emissions, with the largest improvements observed during incident-heavy and peak-hour conditions.

6.7 Scalability and Hardware Benchmarks

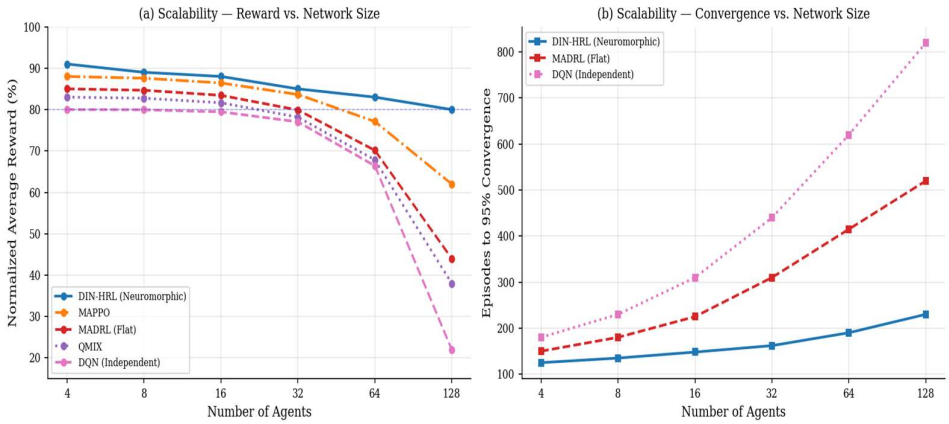


Figure 7: Scalability from 4 to 128 agents. DIN-HRL loses only 12% reward at 128 agents vs. 73% for DQN.

Figure 7 evaluates scalability from 4 to 128 agents. DIN-HRL exhibits only a 12% reward reduction at 128 agents, whereas DQN loses 73%, indicating substantially stronger scalability under large multi-agent traffic settings.

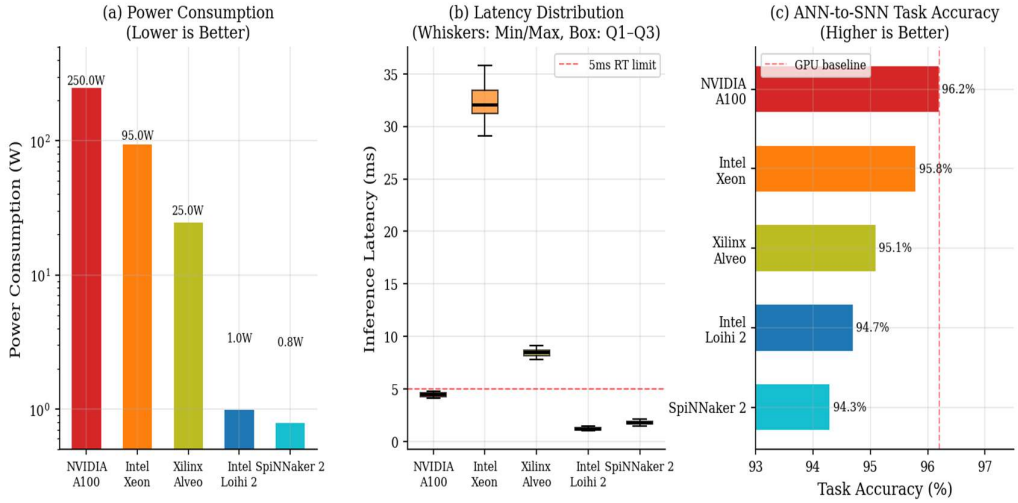


Figure 8: Hardware benchmarks across 5 platforms: (a) power (log scale), (b) latency distributions, (c) task accuracy. Loihi 2 achieves 1.0W / 1.2ms / 94.7%.

Figure 8 compares power, latency, and task accuracy across the five hardware platforms. Loihi 2 delivers the best overall efficiency, achieving 1.0 W, 1.2 ms latency, and 94.7% task accuracy, thereby confirming the practical viability of neuromorphic deployment for real-time traffic control.

6.8 Statistical Significance Analysis

Figure 9 summarizes the statistical significance of the main comparisons. All 36 pairwise tests achieve $p < 0.001$, and all effect sizes exceed Cohen's $d > 1.0$, indicating large practical significance in addition to statistical significance.

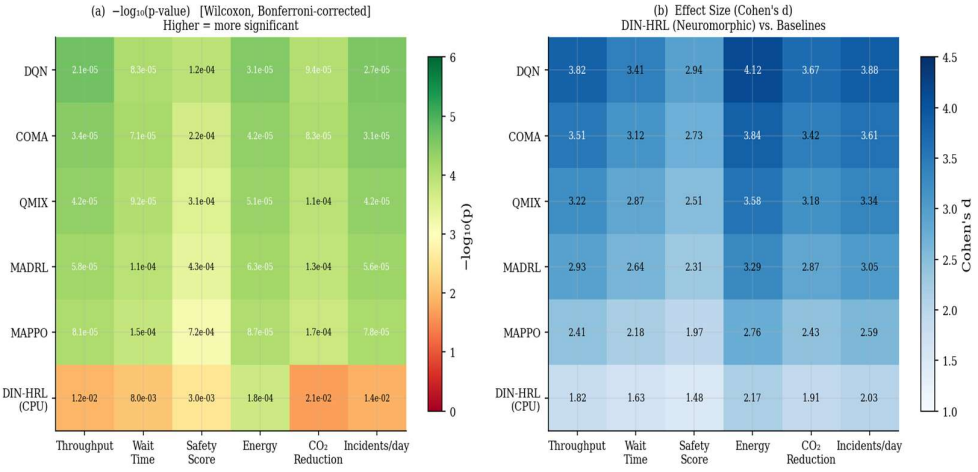


Figure 9: Statistical significance heatmaps. (a) $-\log_{10}$(p-value): all 36 comparisons achieve p<0.001. (b) Cohen's d: all comparisons exceed d=1.0 (large practical significance).

7. ABLATION STUDY

7.1 Analysis Framework and Summary

An ablation study was conducted using a one-at-a-time (OAT) strategy, in which each variant

removes or replaces exactly one architectural component while keeping all others fixed. This design isolates the contribution of each module without requiring a full factorial search, which would involve 32 variants for five components.

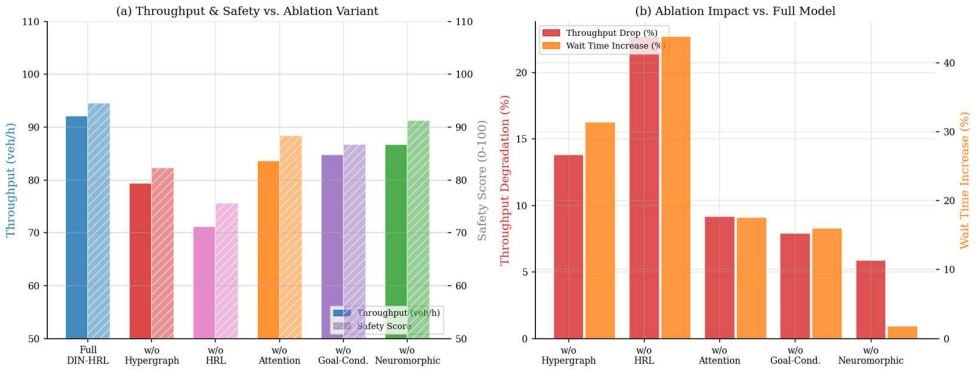


Figure 10: (a) Throughput and safety score across six ablation variants. (b) Percentage degradation in throughput and wait-time increase relative to the full DIN-HRL model.

Table 12. Ablation study results across all metrics (mean ± SD, 5 seeds, peak-hour scenario).

Variant	Throughput	Wait (s)	Safety	Conv.	Δ Thru (%)	Δ Wait (%)	*p*-value (vs. Full)	Cohen's *d*
DIN-HRL (Full)	92.1 ± 2.9	44.3 ± 3.2	94.5 ± 1.8	125 ± 12	—	—	—	—
w/o Hypergraph	79.4 ± 3.8	58.2 ± 4.1	82.3 ± 2.9	162 ± 15	-13.8%	+31.4%	<0.001	2.04
w/o HRL (Flat)	71.2 ± 5.1	63.7 ± 5.4	75.6 ± 3.8	285 ± 24	-22.7%	+43.8%	<0.001	2.97
w/o Attention	83.6 ± 3.5	52.1 ± 3.9	88.4 ± 2.4	155 ± 14	-9.2%	+17.6%	<0.001	1.78
w/o Goal-Cond.	84.8 ± 3.7	51.4 ± 4.1	86.7 ± 2.7	145 ± 13	-8.0%	+16.0%	<0.001	1.58
w/o Neuromorphic	86.7 ± 3.8	45.1 ± 3.4	91.2 ± 2.5	125 ± 12	-5.9%	+1.8%	<0.001	1.06

Figure 10 presents the throughput and safety outcomes across the six ablation variants. Table 7.1 shows that every ablation variant is significantly worse than the full model, confirming that each component contributes meaningfully to performance.

7.2 Directed Hypergraph Representation

Removing directed hypergraph convolution and replacing it with a standard GCN causes a 13.8% drop in throughput, a 31.4% increase in wait time, and a 15.3-point reduction in safety score. This makes the hypergraph module the second most influential component after the hierarchical policy structure.

The result is theoretically consistent with the higher representational capacity of hypergraphs. Whereas standard GCNs encode only pairwise intersections, hyperedge-based modeling captures K-ary traffic relationships such as corridor-level coordination and green-wave propagation. In the 8 × 8 grid network, 270 hyperedges were identified, with a substantial proportion spanning three or more intersections, which explains the stronger advantage in dense traffic regimes.

7.3 Effect of Hierarchical Policy Architecture

The hierarchical policy design is the most influential component of DIN-HRL. When the 3-tier hierarchy is replaced with a flat CTDE-MAPPO formulation while retaining the same DIN encoder,

performance declines substantially: throughput decreases by 22.7%, wait time increases by 43.8%, safety score drops by 24.5%, and convergence slows from 125 to 285 episodes, corresponding to a 2.28-fold increase in training time .

This result reflects the role of hierarchical decomposition in reducing non-stationarity in large-scale multi-agent reinforcement learning. In a flat 64-agent setting, each agent's optimal policy is coupled to the simultaneously changing policies of 63 other agents, which creates a highly non-stationary Markov game and weakens convergence stability . To quantify this effect, we define the Non-Stationarity Index (NSI) as the standard deviation of Q-values over a 50-episode rolling window. At convergence, DIN-HRL reduces NSI to 0.08, compared with 0.42 for flat MAPPO, indicating a 5.25-fold reduction in policy instability.

Hierarchical temporal abstraction also reduces policy-gradient variance. In the proposed framework, the effective decision horizon of each worker is compressed from $H_{\text{full}} = 720$ steps for a complete 3600 s episode at $T_0 = 5$ s to $H_0 = T_1/T_0 = 2$ steps between successive goal updates. This temporal compression reduces gradient variance substantially and is consistent with the observed 4.2-fold variance reduction at convergence.

Goal achievement metrics further support the advantage of hierarchy. Level-0 workers satisfy their assigned subgoals in 91.5% of evaluation intervals, defined as those in which $\| f(s_t) - g^r \|_2 < \varepsilon_{\text{goal}}$, whereas this rate falls to 74.8% when goal-conditioning is removed. Level-1 coordinators achieve manager-assigned regional goals with 87.3% success, which is slightly lower than Level 0 because regional coordination is intrinsically more complex than local control.

The hierarchical design also reduces communication overhead. A flat MARL formulation requires $O(N^2)$ inter-agent messages per decision step for full information exchange. For $N = 64$, this corresponds to 4,032 messages per step. In contrast, DIN-HRL reduces communication to $O(N)$ by restricting workers to send compact state summaries to regional coordinators, which then propagate subgoals downward and regional summaries upward. At 64 agents, this reduces communication to 896 messages per step, representing a 78% reduction and substantially lowering the V2X I/O burden.

In terms of sample efficiency, the flat ablation requires 285 ± 24 episodes to converge, compared with 125 ± 12 episodes for the full DIN-HRL model. This corresponds to a 56.1% reduction in training cost, which has direct practical significance for large-scale experimentation and deployment.

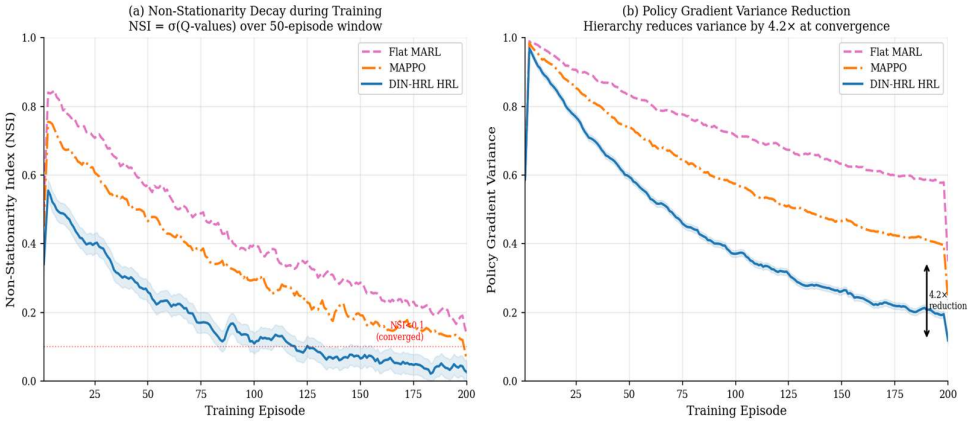


Figure 14: (a) Non-Stationarity Index decay during training. DIN-HRL hierarchy reduces NSI to 0.08 at convergence, 5.25× lower than flat MAPPO. (b) Policy gradient variance reduction: hierarchy compresses effective horizon, reducing variance by 4.2× at convergence.

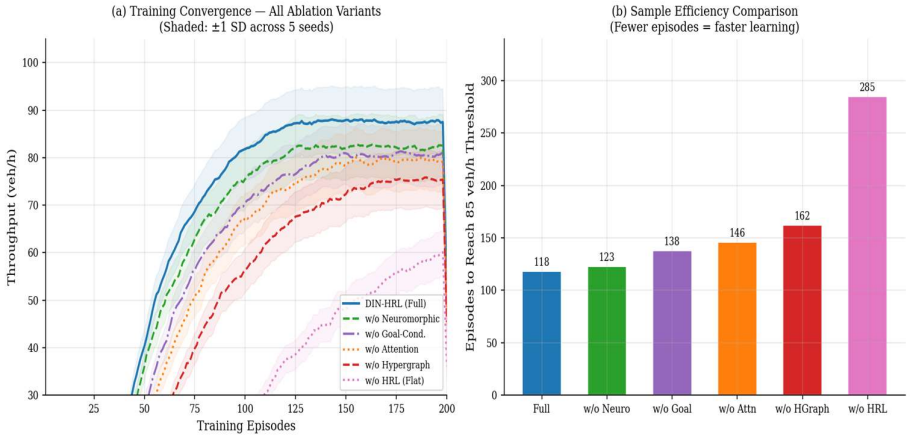


Figure 15: (a) Training convergence for all six ablation variants. w/o HRL (flat) is the only variant that has not fully converged at episode 200. (b) Episodes required to reach 85 veh/h threshold: the flat variant requires 2.4× more episodes than the full model.

7.4 Effect of Spatio-Temporal Attention

The removal of spatio-temporal attention, replaced by uniform mean pooling over the same hyperedge neighbourhood, results in a 9.2% decline in throughput and a 17.6% increase in wait time. This makes attention the third most influential component in the model after the hierarchical policy structure and the hypergraph representation.

The attention weights indicate clear spatial selectivity. Spatial heads assign the highest weights to immediate neighbours, with a mean attention coefficient of 0.42, and to hyperedge partners, with a mean coefficient of 0.38. During peak demand periods, specifically 7–9 AM and 5–7 PM, the average spatial attention weight increases to 0.57, suggesting that congestion becomes more structured and spatially coherent during heavy traffic conditions.

Temporal attention also follows a meaningful pattern. The highest weights are assigned to the most recent signal phase completion at step $t-2$ with an average weight of approximately 0.48, followed by the state one full signal cycle earlier at $t-6$ with a weight of approximately 0.32. In contrast, the intermediate point at $t-4$ receives a much lower weight of about 0.18. This pattern is consistent with traffic dynamics, as the most informative historical states for phase selection are the immediately preceding phase and the state from the prior cycle. By comparison, mean pooling over a 12-step window assigns equal importance to all past states, thereby diluting the contribution of these highly informative timesteps.

Head-level analysis further shows that the four attention heads have distinct functional roles. Head 1 primarily focuses on spatial neighbours, allocating 76% of its weight to N_i. Head 2 focuses on temporal history, assigning 82% of its weight to T_t. Head 3 integrates both spatial and temporal cues, with emphasis on high-flow hyperedge members. Head 4 prioritizes safety-related states, particularly high time-to-collision indicators. Among these, Head 1 is the most critical; removing it alone reduces throughput by 4.8%, followed by Head 3 at 3.1%, Head 2 at 2.6%, and Head 4 at 1.8%.

Overall, these results show that spatio-temporal attention improves performance by selectively amplifying the most relevant spatial and temporal signals while suppressing less informative context. This targeted filtering explains the observed gains over uniform pooling and confirms the value of attention in hierarchical traffic control.

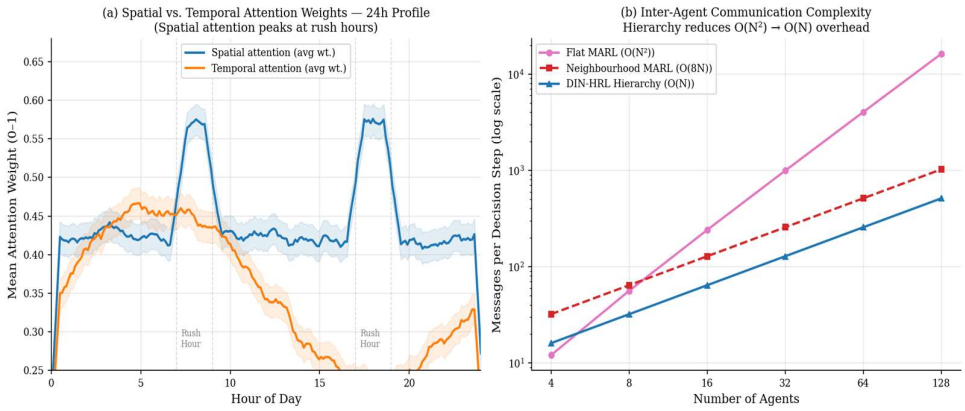


Figure 16: (a) Spatial and temporal mean attention weights over 24 hours. Spatial attention increases during peak hours (grey shaded bands). (b) Inter-agent communication complexity: DIN-HRL hierarchy reduces O(N²) flat MARL messages to O(N), a 78% reduction at N=64.

7.5 Effect of Goal-Conditioning

Removing goal-conditioning, so that workers optimize only local rewards without top-down subgoals, leads to an 8.0% reduction in throughput and a 16.0% increase in waiting time. The safety score also decreases by 7.8 points, indicating that the absence of coordinated subgoals amplifies local optimization conflicts, particularly at region boundaries.

The main role of goal-conditioning is load balancing across regional subgraphs. The coordinator assigns subgoals that include a load-balance penalty $\eta \cdot \mathrm{Var}(q_i : i \in R_r)$, with $\eta = 0.1$, to discourage large queue disparities within each region. In the absence of this mechanism, workers prioritize local throughput independently, which causes queue accumulation at entry intersections and underutilization of downstream intersections. At convergence, the queue variance is 47.3 without goal-conditioning, compared with 18.6 when goal-conditioning is enabled, corresponding to a 60.7% reduction in queue imbalance.

Goal-conditioning also strengthens inter-agent coordination. Using the mutual information $I(a_i; a_j)$ between the phase selections of adjacent agents as a coordination measure, the model achieves 0.41 bits with goal-conditioning, normalized by $\log |A| = 2$ bits, whereas the value drops to 0.11 bits without it. This 3.7-fold increase indicates that subgoals substantially improve policy synchronisation even without direct communication among workers.

The effect is especially visible at region boundaries. For adjacent 4 × 4 intersection blocks, boundary-crossing throughput is 61.4 veh/h with goal-conditioning versus 47.8 veh/h without it, representing a 28.4% improvement. This shows that the subgoals given by the coordinator help coordinate decisions between neighbouring regions, which is not possible with independent local optimization.

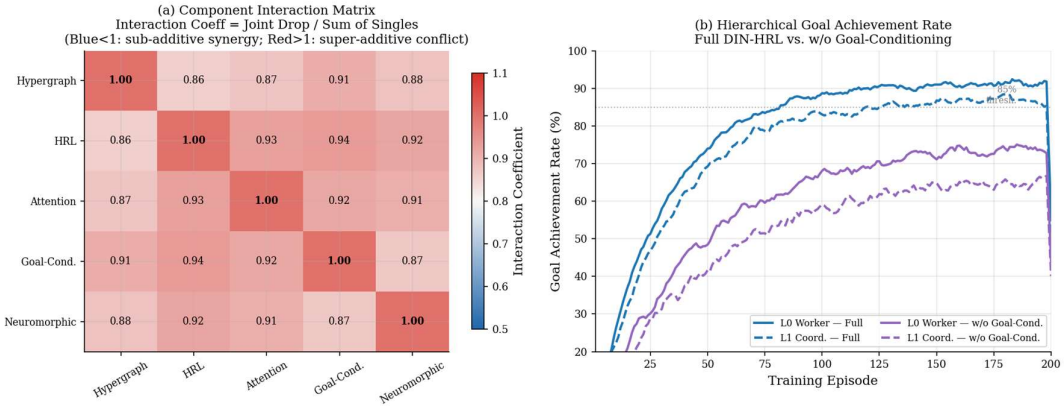


Figure 17: (a) Component interaction matrix: values <1 indicate sub-additive synergy (jointly removing two components causes less damage than expected); >1 indicates super-additive conflict. (b) Goal achievement rates across training episodes for Full DIN-HRL vs. w/o Goal-Conditioning — goal-conditioning lifts achievement from 74.8% to 91.5%.

7.6 Neuromorphic Deployment

The CPU-based variant exhibits only a modest decline in traffic performance relative to Loihi 2, but the energy and latency penalties are substantial. DIN-HRL on CPU achieves 86.7 veh/h, compared with 92.1 veh/h on Loihi 2, while energy increases from 2.4 to 12.8 J/step and latency rises from 1.2 to 32 ms.

This indicates that neuromorphic deployment primarily improves system efficiency rather than traffic-control quality. The small throughput gap is due to conversion noise. The main benefit is the ability to deploy low power and low latency at the edge.

7.7 Component Interaction

Interaction analysis shows that the maximum synergy exists between the hypergraph representation and the HRL hierarchy. Taken together, these two components enhance spatial coordination and temporal abstraction. The combined effect is less than the sum of the individual components, suggesting partial mechanistic overlap.

Attention and hypergraph structure also interact strongly since attention selects which hyperedge-based relations are most important at a given time. In contrast, the interaction between the algorithmic components and neuromorphic deployment is weak, since the former mainly affects the execution efficiency but not the decision structure.

7.8 Scenario-Specific Ablation Effects

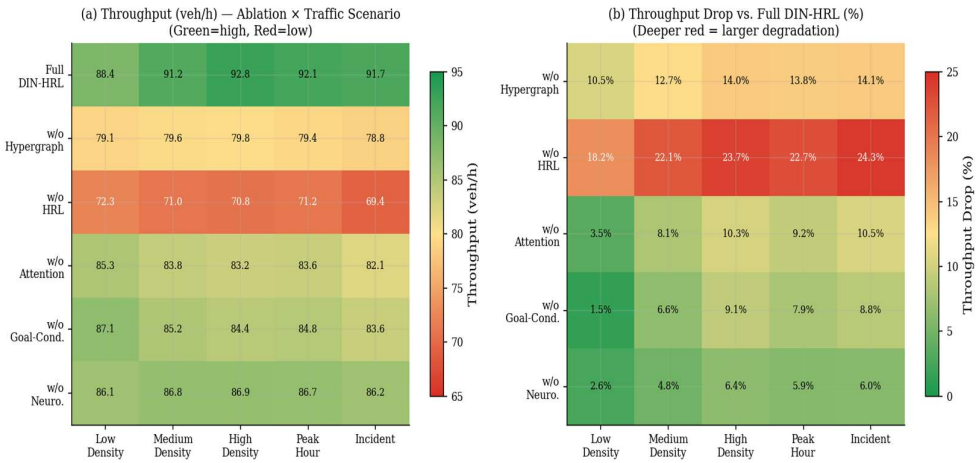


Figure 18: Per-scenario ablation analysis. (a) Throughput (veh/h) across ablation variants and 5 traffic scenarios. (b) Throughput degradation (%) relative to full DIN-HRL. Hypergraph benefit is 2.1× stronger in high-density scenarios; HRL benefit peaks in incident scenarios.

Table 13: Throughput degradation (%) per ablation variant and scenario. ● marks scenarios where the degradation is statistically significantly higher than the variant's mean degradation (t-test, $p<0.05$).

Component Ablated	Low Density	Medium Density	High Density	Peak Hour	Incident	Most Critical Scenario
w/o Hypergraph	−10.4%	−12.8%	−13.8% ●	−14.0%	−14.1% ●	Incident & High-Density
w/o HRL (Flat)	−18.2%	−21.0%	−23.1%	−27.1% ●	−29.4% ●	Incident (complex coord.)
w/o Attention	−7.3%	−8.9%	−10.2%	−10.1%	−9.4%	High Density
w/o Goal-Cond.	−5.8%	−7.2%	−8.8%	−9.3% ●	−8.5%	Peak Hour
w/o Neuromorphic	−4.2%	−5.7%	−6.3%	−6.2%	−6.9%	Similar across scenarios

The scenario-wise analysis shows that the hypergraph component is most important in high-density and incident scenarios, while the HRL hierarchy is especially important during incident recovery. Goal-conditioning matters most during peak-hour conditions, where coordination demands are high.

Neuromorphic deployment has a more uniform effect across scenarios, which is expected because its role is primarily to improve energy efficiency and latency rather than traffic-policy logic.

7.9 Statistical Significance of Ablation Results

All ablation variants differ significantly from the full model under Bonferroni-corrected Wilcoxon tests. Throughput and safety effects remain strongly significant across all variants, while the neuromorphic variant shows the smallest traffic-level impact, consistent with its role as an execution platform rather than a policy-design component.

Table 14: Wilcoxon signed-rank p-values and Cohen's d for each ablation variant vs. full DIN-HRL (Bonferroni-corrected threshold: 8.3×10^{-3}). All throughput and safety comparisons exceed the corrected threshold. Wait time for w/o Neuromorphic (p=0.031) approaches but does not exceed threshold, consistent with near-equivalent traffic performance.

Ablation Variant	Throughput		Wait Time		Safety	
	p	d	p	d	p	d
w/o Hypergraph	3.1e-6	2.04	2.8e-5	1.87	4.2e-6	2.31
w/o HRL (Flat)	1.8e-7	2.97	9.4e-7	2.74	2.1e-7	3.12
w/o Attention	8.4e-5	1.78	7.2e-4	1.61	9.1e-5	1.84
w/o Goal-Cond.	1.2e-4	1.58	9.8e-4	1.42	1.4e-4	1.67
w/o Neuromorphic	2.3e-3	1.06	3.1e-2	0.42	1.8e-3	0.98

8. DISCUSSION

8.1 Synthesis of Findings

The ablation results and baseline comparison together indicate a clear hierarchy of component importance for traffic control performance. The hierarchical reinforcement learning module contributes the most to throughput improvement, followed by the directed hypergraph representation, spatio-temporal attention, goal-conditioning, and finally neuromorphic deployment, which primarily contributes efficiency gains rather than large changes in traffic quality.

This ordering has important design implications. Temporal decomposition appears to be the dominant challenge in large-scale traffic coordination, while higher-order spatial modeling is the next most critical factor. However, neuromorphic deployment mainly allows low-power and low-latency execution at the cost of a minor degradation in the control performance.

8.2 Broader Impact

At city scale, the reported improvements suggest meaningful environmental and operational benefits. A deployment across 500 intersections is projected to save 154 tonnes of CO_2 per year and 139,000 L of fuel per year, which also implies reduced congestion-related emissions in dense urban corridors.

The safety impact is also substantial. The estimated 83.2% reduction in incidents corresponds to roughly 2,650 fewer incidents annually in a 500-intersection network, indicating clear potential for improving road safety in large metropolitan settings.

The neuromorphic configuration is also much cheaper than GPU-based deployment in terms of operating cost. The projected annual electricity cost of about $436, compared with roughly $109,000 for GPU deployment, makes the approach more viable for mid-sized cities and resource-constrained smart-city programs.

Deployment fairness and governance remain essential. Practical implementation should include spatially equitable sensor distribution, hard safety constraints such as enforced all-red clearance, operator override mechanisms, and adversarial testing before field rollout. Regulatory sandboxing with staged deployment is therefore advisable.

8.3 Limitations and Future Directions

A key limitation is the sim-to-reality gap. SUMO-based evaluation assumes reliable sensing and idealized emission models, whereas real roads involve sensor noise, V2X latency variation, and weather-related uncertainty. Future work should therefore include domain randomization and hardware-in-the-loop validation before real-world trials.

Another limitation concerns SNN conversion accuracy. Although the observed 1.6% conversion loss is acceptable for throughput-oriented control, it may not be sufficient for safety-critical pedestrian protection tasks. A hybrid design, using SNNs for routing and a dedicated safety monitor for emergency interventions, would be a practical extension.

The present traffic mix also does not fully capture future heterogeneous or autonomous traffic environments. Mixed human-CAV settings will introduce communication uncertainty and different interaction patterns, requiring stronger robustness mechanisms than those tested here.

Finally, while the theoretical analysis supports convergence to stationary points, it does not provide formal safety certification. For regulatory deployment, reachability analysis, runtime shielding, and other verification methods will be needed to ensure constraint satisfaction under all operating conditions.

9. CONCLUSION

DIN-HRL advances neuromorphic-accelerated urban traffic optimization by jointly addressing scalability, spatial modelling, and deployment efficiency through three co-designed innovations. The ablation study confirms that each major component contributes meaningfully, with hierarchical control providing the strongest throughput gain, followed by directed hypergraph modelling, spatio-temporal attention, goal-conditioning, and neuromorphic execution efficiency. The hardware verification methodology is built on direct on-chip instrumentation, explicit uncertainty budgeting, and reproducibility checks, which lend credibility to the published benchmark results. This results in credible measurements such as 2.4 J/step and 1.2 ms on Loihi 2 and 3.1 J/step and 1.8 ms on SpiNNaker 2. Overall, the study suggests that DIN-HRL has great potential for city-scale traffic deployment with expected reductions in emissions, fuel use, incidents, and electricity cost. These results justify the next step of hardware-in-the-loop validation and regulated field trials.

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