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The vehicle routing problem with time windows: minimizing route duration
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The vehicle routing problem with time windows: 
minimizing route duration

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We investigate the implementation of edge-exchange improvement methods for the vehicle routing problem with time windows with minimization of route duration as the objective. The presence of time windows as well as the chosen objective cause verification of the feasibility and profitability of a single edge-exchange to require an amount of computing time that is linear in the number of vertices. We show how this effort can, on the average, be reduced to a constant.

1. Introduction
Over the past ten years, operations researchers interested in vehicle routing and scheduling have emphasized the development of algorithms for real-life problems. The size of the problems solved has increased and practical side constraints are no longer ignored. One such constraint is the specification of time windows at customers, i.e., time intervals during which they must be served. These lead to mixed routing and scheduling problems.

Obviously, the introduction of time windows at customers makes it harder to construct and maintain a feasible set of routes. Savelsbergh [1986] shows that in the special case of a single vehicle, i.e., the traveling salesman problem with time windows, constructing a feasible route is already NP-hard. As a result, most of the research in this area has been directed towards controlling the feasibility of a set of routes.

However, the introduction of time windows at customers also allows the specification of more realistic objective functions, compared to minimizing distance, such as minimizing waiting time, minimizing completion time, and minimizing route duration.

Edge-exchange improvement methods form an important and popular class of algorithms in the context of vehicle routing problems. Recently a number of papers have been published that study efficient implementations of edge-exchange improvement methods for the vehicle routing problem with time windows, such as Savelsbergh [1986, 1990] and Solomon e.a. [1988]. However, they concentrate solely on the feasibility aspect, neglecting the fact that identifying profitable exchanges for realistic objective functions can be as difficult as identifying feasible exchanges.

This paper studies efficient implementations of edge-exchange improvement methods when the objective is to minimize route duration and the departure time of a vehicle at the depot is not fixed, but has to fall within a time window, as is the case in many real-life situations.

We will generalize and extend the techniques presented in Savelsbergh [1990], that enable incorporation of time window constraints in edge-exchange improvement methods without increasing their complexity, and show that minimizing route duration, with variable departure times at the depot, can also be handled without increasing the complexity. As in Savelsbergh [1990], the key to
achieve this is the use of the lexicographic search strategy and the choice of an appropriate set of global variables to maintain the necessary information. Note that the techniques presented in Solomon e.a. [1988] are futile when minimizing route duration is the objective.

2. Edge-exchanges for the traveling salesman problem

In the TSP [Lawler, Lenstra, Rinnooy Kan, Shmoys 1985], we are given a complete graph on a set V of vertices and a travel time \( t_{ij} \) for each edge \( \{i, j\} \in V \times V \). A solution to the TSP is a route, i.e., a cycle which visits each vertex exactly once. The objective is to find a route minimizing the sum of the travel times of the edges contained in it. Let \( n = |V| \) indicate the number of vertices. We assume that a given vertex, say vertex 0, will serve as the first and last vertex of any route (the depot in vehicle routing and scheduling problems) and that the matrix \((t_{ij})\) is symmetric and satisfies the triangle inequality.

A 2-exchange involves the substitution of two edges, say \( \{i, i+1\} \) and \( \{j, j+1\} \), with two other edges \( \{i, j\} \) and \( \{i+1, j+1\} \). Figure 1 illustrates a 2-exchange.

![Figure 1. A 2-exchange.](image)

Note that the orientation of the path \((i+1, ..., j)\) is reversed in the new route. Such an exchange results in a local improvement if and only if

\[
t_{i,j} + t_{i+1,j+1} < t_{i,i+1} + t_{j,j+1}.
\]

Therefore, testing improvement involves only local information and can be done in constant time.

In contrast with a 2-exchange, where the two edges \( \{i, i+1\} \) and \( \{j, j+1\} \) that will be deleted, uniquely identify the two edges \( \{i, j\} \) and \( \{i+1, j+1\} \) that will replace them, in a 3-exchange, where three edges are deleted, there are several ways to construct a new route from the remaining segments. Figure 2 shows two possible 3-exchanges that can be performed by deleting the edges \( \{i, i+1\} \), \( \{j, j+1\} \) and \( \{k, k+1\} \) of a route. For all possibilities, conditions for improvement are easily derived and again only involve local information and can thus be verified in constant time. There is one important difference between the two 3-exchanges shown above: in the latter the orientation of the paths \((i+1, ..., j)\) and \((j+1, ..., k)\) is preserved whereas in the former this orientation is reversed.

Because the computational requirement to verify 3-optimality may become prohibitive as the number of vertices increases, proposals have been made to take only a subset of all possible 3-exchanges into account. Or [1976] proposes to restrict attention to those 3-exchanges in which a string of one, two or three consecutive vertices (a path) is relocated between two others. An Or-
exchange is depicted in Figure 3. The path \((i_1, ..., i_2)\) is relocated between \(j\) and \(j+1\). Note that no paths are reversed in this case and that there are only \(O(n^2)\) exchanges of this kind.

There are two possibilities for relocating the path \((i_1, ..., i_2)\); we can relocate it earlier (backward relocation) or later (forward relocation) in the current route. The cases of backward relocation \((j < i_1)\) and forward relocation \((j > i_2)\) will be handled separately below.
3. Edge-exchanges for constrained traveling salesman problems

The main problem with the use of edge-exchange procedures in the TSP with side constraints is testing the feasibility of an exchange. A 2-exchange, for instance, will reverse the path \((i+1, \ldots, j)\), which means that one has to check the feasibility of all the vertices on the new path with respect to those constraints. In a straightforward implementation this requires \(O(n)\) time for each 2-exchange, which results in a time complexity of \(O(n^3)\) for the verification of 2-optimality.

The basic idea of our proposed approach is the use of a specific search strategy in combination with a set of global variables such that testing the feasibility of a single exchange and maintaining the set global variables requires no more than constant time. Because the search strategy is of crucial importance, we present it first.

In the sequel, we will assume that the current route is given by a sequence \((0, \ldots, i, \ldots, n)\), where \(i\) represents the \(ith\) vertex of the route and where we have split the vertex that serves as first and last vertex of any route (vertex 0) in an 'origin' (vertex 0) and a 'destination' (vertex \(n\)). We also assume that we are always examining the exchange that involves the substitution of edges \({i, i+1}\) and \({j, j+1}\) with \({i, j}\) and \({i+1, j+1}\) in case of a 2-exchange, and the substitution of \({i_1-1, i_1}, {i_2, i_2+1}\) and \({j, j+1}\) with \({i_1-1, i_1+1}, {j, j_1}\) and \({i_2, j_2+1}\) in case of an Or-exchange.

**Lexicographic search for 2-exchanges.** We choose the edges \({i, i+1}\) in the order in which they appear in the current route starting with \({0, 1}\); this will be referred to as the outer loop. After fixing an edge \({i, i+1}\), we choose the edge \({j, j+1}\) to be \({i+2, i+3}, \ldots, {n-1, n}\) in that order (see Figure 4); this will be referred to as the inner loop.

![Figure 4. The lexicographic search strategy for 2-exchanges.](image)

Now consider all possible exchanges for a fixed edge \({i, i+1}\). The ordering of the 2-exchanges given above implies that in the inner loop in each newly examined 2-exchange the path \((i+1, \ldots, j-1)\) of the previously considered 2-exchange, i.e., the substitution of \({i, i+1}\) and \({j-1, j}\) with \({i, j-1}\) and \({i+1, j}\), is expanded by the edge \({j-1, j}\).

**Lexicographic search for backward Or-exchanges.** We choose the path \((i_1, \ldots, i_2)\) in the order of the current route starting with \(i_1\) equal to 2. After the path \((i_1, \ldots, i_2)\) has been fixed, we choose the edge \({j, j+1}\) to be \({i_1-2, i_1-1}, \ldots, {0, 1}\) in that order. That is, the edge \({j, j+1}\) 'walks backward' through the route. Note that in the inner loop in each newly examined exchange the path \((j+2, \ldots, i_1-1)\) of the previously considered exchange is expanded with the edge \({j+1, j+2}\).

**Lexicographic search for forward Or-exchanges.** We choose the path \((i_1, \ldots, i_2)\) in the order of the
current route starting with \( i_1 \) equal to 1. After the path \((i_1, ..., i_2)\) has been fixed, we choose the edge \(\{j, j+1\}\) to be \(\{i_2+1, i_2+2\}, \{i_2+2, i_2+3\}, \ldots, \{n-1, n\}\) in that order. That is, the edge \(\{j, j+1\}\) 'walks forward' through the route. Note that in each newly examined exchange the path \((i_2+1, ..., j-1)\) of the previously considered exchange is expanded with the edge \(\{j-1, j\}\).

Now that we have presented the search strategy, let us return to the feasibility question. In order to test the feasibility of a single 2-exchange, we have to check all the vertices on the path \((i+1, ..., j)\), and in order to test the feasibility of a single forward (or backward) 2-exchange, we have to check all the vertices on the path \((i_2+1, ..., j)\) (or \((j+1, ..., i_1-1)\), respectively). In a straightforward implementation this takes \(O(n)\) time for each single exchange. We will present an implementation that requires only constant time per exchange.

The idea is to define an appropriate set of global variables, which will of course depend on the constrained variant of the TSP we are considering, in such a way that:

- first, the set of global variables makes it possible to test the feasibility of an exchange, i.e., to check the feasibility of all the vertices on the path in question, in constant time, and
- second, the lexicographic search strategy makes it possible to maintain the correct values for the set of global variables, i.e., update them when we go from one exchange to the next one, in constant time.

To see how these ideas work out in actual implementations, we show the pseudo-code of a general framework for a 2-exchange procedure.

```
procedure TwoExchange
(* input: a route given as (0,1,...,n) *)
(* output: a route that is 2-optimal *)
begin
START:
    for \(i:=0\) to \(n-3\) do
        begin
            InitGlobal(\(i,G\))
            for \(j:=i+2\) to \(n-1\) do
                if \(t_{i,j} + t_{i+1,j+1} < t_{i,i+1} + t_{j,j+1}\) and FeasibleExchange(\(i,j,G\)) then
                    begin
                        PerformExchange(\(i,j\))
                        goto START
                    end
            UpdateGlobal(\(i,j,G\))
        end
end
```

Although the above pseudo-code looks rather simple, defining a set of global variables in such a way that, in combination with the (lexicographic) search strategy, the functions \(\text{InitGlobal}(), \text{FeasibleExchange}(), \text{and UpdateGlobal}()\) do what they are supposed to do and take only constant time, is often
4. The traveling salesman problem with time windows

In the TSP with time windows, we are given in addition to the travel times between vertices, for each vertex \( i \) a time window on the departure time, denoted by \([e_i, l_i]\), where \( e_i \) specifies the earliest service time and \( l_i \) the latest service time. Arriving earlier than \( e_i \) does not lead to infeasibility but introduces waiting time at vertex \( i \). We will use the following notation: \( A_i \) will denote the arrival time at vertex \( i \), \( D_i \) will denote the departure time at vertex \( i \), and \( W_i \) will denote the waiting time at vertex \( i \). It is convenient to assume \( A_0 = D_0 \) and \( D_n = A_n \).

The standard objective is to minimize the total travel time, i.e., \( \sum_{k \leq m} t_{k,k+1} \). However, this objective totally ignores possible waiting time at vertices. In this paper, we consider the problem of minimizing route duration, i.e., the difference \( D_n - D_0 \) between the arrival time at the depot and the departure time at the depot. In case the departure time at the depot is fixed, this corresponds to minimizing the completion time. The basic assumption underlying the current work is that the departure time of a vehicle at the depot is not fixed but has to fall within a given time window, which is the case in many real-life situations. Therefore, the departure time of a vehicle at the depot can be chosen in such a way that route duration is minimal. Actually, for a given route this corresponds to choosing the departure in such a way that the total waiting time of a route is minimal.

Given a route, choosing the departure time that minimizes route duration is rather easy. However, manipulating a route, for instance relocating a vertex or applying iterative improvement methods to it, becomes more complicated since we have to take into account that some vertices may now be shift backward in time as well as forward in time.

5. Forward time slack

Under the assumption that a vehicle always departs at a vertex as early as possible, which is the best choice from a feasibility point of view, a route can be completely specified by giving the sequence in which the vertices are visited and the departure time at the depot.

Taking the departure time at the depot as early as possible, i.e., \( D_0 = e_0 \), we define for each vertex \( i \) a forward time slack \( F_i \), indicating how far the departure time of this vertex can be shifted forward in time without causing the route to become infeasible as follows:

\[
F_i := \min_{k \leq m} \{ k - (D_i + \sum_{k \leq l} t_{p,p+1}) \}.
\]

More general, we define \( F^{(i \ldots j)} \) to be the forward slack time at vertex \( i \) relative to the path \((i, \ldots, j)\) and the departure times \( D_i, \ldots, D_j \), which can be formally expressed as:

\[
F^{(i \ldots j)} := \min_{k \leq j} \{ k - (D_i + \sum_{k \leq l} t_{p,p+1}) \}.
\]

The main tool in controlling feasibility in edge-exchange methods is this forward time slack. However, it turns out that it is also of crucial importance in identifying profitable, with respect to minimizing route duration, edge-exchanges. It is not hard to see that postponing the departure at the depot by the minimum of the forward time slack at the depot and the total waiting time on the route, i.e., \( D_0 \leftarrow e_0 + \min \{ F_0, \sum_{0 < p < n} W_p \} \), results in a feasible route without unnecessary waiting time. An example is given in Table 1. Consequently, the route duration can be expressed as follows:

\[
D_n - (e_0 + \min \{ F_0, \sum_{0 < p < n} W_p \}).
\]
Therefore, to be able to tell whether or not an edge-exchange results in a feasible route, we have to compute the forward time slack at the depot of the resulting route, and to be able to tell whether or not an edge-exchange results in a route with smaller duration, we have to compute the arrival time at the depot and the total waiting time on the route as well.

The following concatenation theorem that shows that if two given paths, with associated forward time slacks for the first vertices, are concatenated, the forward time slack for the first vertex of the resulting path can easily be compute, turns out to be very useful.

**Theorem.** If two feasible paths \((i_1, \ldots, j_1)\) and \((i_2, \ldots, j_2)\), with associated forward time slacks \(F_{i_1} \ldots j_1\) and \(F_{i_2} \ldots j_2\) for the first vertices, are concatenated, the forward time slack for the first vertex of the resulting path is given by:

\[
F_{i_1, \ldots, j_1, i_2, \ldots, j_2} = \min\{F_{i_1, \ldots, j_1}, F_{i_2, \ldots, j_2} + \sum_{i_1 < s < j_1} W_s + D_j - (D_i + t_{i, j_2})\}
\]

**Proof:**

\[
\begin{align*}
F_{i_1, \ldots, j_1, i_2, \ldots, j_2} &= \min\{\min_{i_1 < s < j_1} \{k - (D_i + \sum_{i < s < j} t_{i, s})\}, \\
&\quad \min_{i_1 < s < j_1} \{k - (D_i + \sum_{i < s < j} t_{i, s} + t_{i, j}) + \sum_{i < s < j} t_{i, s}\}\} = \\
&\min\{F_{i_1, \ldots, j_1}, \min_{i_1 < s < j_1} \{k - (D_i + \sum_{i < s < j} t_{i, s}) + D_j - t_{i, j} - (D_i + \sum_{i < s < j} t_{i, s})\}\} = \\
&\min\{F_{i_1, \ldots, j_1}, \min_{i_1 < s < j_1} \{k - (D_i + \sum_{i < s < j} t_{i, s}) + D_j - t_{i, j} - (D_i + \sum_{i < s < j} t_{i, s})\}\} = \\
&\min\{F_{i_1, \ldots, j_1}, F_{i_2, \ldots, j_2} + \sum_{i_1 < s < j_2} W_s + D_j - (D_i + t_{i, j_2})\}\}
\end{align*}
\]

For a given route \((0, 1, \ldots, n)\), the above theorem gives us two ways to compute the forward time slack at the depot, i.e., \(F^{(0, 1, \ldots, n)}\). First, through forward recursion as follows:

\[
F^{(0, \ldots, j+1)} = \min\{F^{(0, \ldots, j)}, l_{i+1} - D_{i+1} + \sum_{0 < s < l_{i+1}} W_s + W_{i+1}\}
\]

Secondly, through backward recursion as follows:
\[ F_i^{(i+1,\ldots,n)} = \min\{ l_i - D_i, F_{i+1}^{(i+1,\ldots,n)} + W_{i+1} \} \]

6. Iterative improvement methods
The analysis of iterative improvement methods is split in two parts. First, we will show how to test the feasibility of an exchange efficiently, i.e., constant time per exchange. Secondly, we will show how to test the profitability of an exchange with respect to minimizing route duration efficiently.

6.1. Feasibility
For both the 2-exchanges and the Or-exchanges, we split the resulting route in paths and use the concatenation theorem to show that the forward slack time at the depot can be computed in constant time, i.e., the feasibility can be tested in constant time.

2-exchanges. Consider the 2-exchange that involves the substitution of \( \{i, i+1\} \) and \( \{j, j+1\} \) with \( \{i, j\} \) and \( \{i+1, j+1\} \). The resulting route can be divided in the following three paths: \((0, \ldots, i)\), \((j, \ldots, i+1)\), and \((j+1, \ldots, n)\). Now observe that the forward and backward recursion schemes given above show that in \( O(n) \) time it is possible to compute \( F_{0}^{(\ldots, i)} \) and \( F_{j+1}^{(\ldots, n)} \) for all \( i \) and \( j+1 \) from 0 to \( n \). In addition, \( \Sigma_{0 < k < i} W_k \) can also be computed in advance in \( O(n) \) time. Furthermore, \( F_{i+1}^{(\ldots, i+1)} \) and \( \Sigma_{j < k < i+1} W_k \) can easily be maintained, i.e., initialized and updated in constant time, in the inner loop. It is easy to see that the above quantities are precisely the ones needed to determine the forward slack time at the depot when the three paths are concatenated. In the terminology of the implementation technique described in Section 3, all the above quantities are maintained as global variables.

Or-exchanges. Consider the backward-Or-exchange where the path \((i_1, \ldots, i_2)\) is relocated between \( j \) and \( j+1 \). The resulting route can be divided in four paths: \((0, \ldots, j)\), \((i_1, \ldots, i_2)\), \((j+1, \ldots, i_1-1)\), and \((i_2+1, \ldots, n)\). We can compute \( F_{0}^{(\ldots, j)} \), \( \Sigma_{0 < k < j} W_k \), and \( F_{i_2}^{(\ldots, n)} \) in advance in \( O(n) \) time, \( F_{i_1}^{(i_1, \ldots, i_2)} \) and \( \Sigma_{i_1 < k < i_2} W_k \) can be maintained efficiently in the outer loop, and \( F_{j+1}^{(\ldots, i_1-1)} \), and \( \Sigma_{j+1 < k < i_1-1} W_k \) can be maintained efficiently in the inner loop. For the forward-Or-exchange a similar argument can be presented.

6.2. Profitability
Our objective is to minimize the route duration, which can be expressed as:

\[ D_n = (e_0 + \min\{ F_0, \Sigma_{0 < k < n} W_k \}). \]

As we have shown above, the lexicographic search strategy in combination with a suitable set of global variables allows the efficient computation, (constant time per edge-exchange) of the forward time slack at the depot. What remains is to show that we can also compute \( D_n \) and \( \Sigma_{0 < k < n} W_k \) efficiently.

The efficiency of the computation of the forward time slack is based on a concatenation theorem that shows that it takes only constant time to compute the forward slack time of a concatenated path using the forward slack times of the original paths. In this section, we present a similar concatenation argument, in this case to compute the waiting time on a concatenated path, to show that \( D_n \) and \( \Sigma_{0 < k < n} W_k \) can also be computed efficiently.
Observe that for a given path \((i, \ldots, j)\) and a given departure time \(D_i\), the departure time \(D_j\) can be computed as

\[
D_j \leftarrow D_i + \sum_{k < j} t_{k, k+1} + \sum_{i < k < j} W_k.
\]

The above relation shows that for the computation of \(D_n\) it is also of crucial importance to be able to compute the total waiting time on the route.

Consider the concatenation of the paths \((i_1, \ldots, j_1)\) and \((i_2, \ldots, j_2)\). In the following analysis, we show that the sum of the waiting times on the concatenated path can be computed in constant time using the waiting times on the original paths. We distinguish four different cases based on whether or not the change \(\Delta\) in the departure time at \(i_2\), i.e., \(D_j + t_{j, j} - D_i\), is nonnegative and on whether or not the sum of the waiting times on the path \((i_2, \ldots, j_2)\) is zero. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(\Delta \geq 0)</th>
<th>(\Delta &lt; 0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(\Sigma W = 0)</td>
<td>(W_i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\Sigma W &gt; 0)</td>
<td>(W_i + \max{0, W_2 - \Delta, 0})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.** Computation of the waiting time on a concatenated path.

In case the change in the departure time at \(i_2\) is nonnegative and the sum of the waiting times on the path \((i_2, \ldots, j_2)\) is zero, the waiting on the concatenated path is just the waiting time of the first path.

In case the change in the departure time at \(i_2\) is nonnegative and the sum of the waiting times on the path \((i_2, \ldots, j_2)\) is positive, some or all of the increase in the departure time \(D_i\) will be 'absorbed' and used to reduce the waiting time along the path. Therefore, we have

\[
\sum_{i < k < j} W_k = \sum_{i < k < j} W_k + \max\{0, \sum_{i < k < j} W_k - \Delta\}.
\]

In case the change in the departure time at \(i_2\) is negative and the sum of the waiting times on the path \((i_2, \ldots, j_2)\) is positive, the decrease in departure time \(D_i\) only introduces additional waiting time either somewhere along the path or at \(i_2\) itself. Therefore, we have

\[
\sum_{i < k < j} W_k = \sum_{i < k < j} W_k + \sum_{i < k < j} W_k + \Delta.
\]

In case the change in the departure time at \(i_2\) is negative and the sum of the waiting times on the path \((i_2, \ldots, j_2)\) is zero, some or all of the decrease in the departure time \(D_i\) may introduce additional waiting time. To determine how much of the decrease introduces additional waiting time, we define \(B_{(i_2, \ldots, j_2)}\) to be the backward time slack at vertex \(i\) relative to the path \((i, \ldots, j)\), which indicates how far the departure time of this vertex can be shifted backward in time without introducing waiting time. The backward time slack can easily be computed and expressed as follows:

\[
B_{(i, \ldots, j)} = \min_{i < k < j} \{D_k - e_k\}.
\]

Consequently, we have

\[
\sum_{i < k < j} W_k = \sum_{i < k < j} W_k + \max\{0, \Delta - B_{(i_2, \ldots, j_2)}\}.
\]

**2-Exchanges.** Consider the 2-exchange that involves the substitution of \(\{i, i+1\}\) and \(\{j, j+1\}\) with
\{i,j\} and \{i+1,j+1\}. The resulting route can be divided in the following three paths: (0, ..., i),
(j, ..., i+1), and (j+1, ..., n). Observe that \(D_i\) does not change, \(\Sigma_{0 \leq k \leq i} W_k\), \(\Sigma_{i+1 \leq k \leq n} W_k\) and \(B_{j+1}^{i+1} \cdots \) can be computed in advance in \(O(n)\) time, and \(B_j^{i+1} \cdots i+1\) and \(\Sigma_{j \leq k \leq i+1} W_k\) can be maintained efficiently in the inner loop. It is easy to see that the above quantities allow the determination of \(D_n\) and the total waiting on the route in constant time if the paths are concatenated.

Or-exchanges. Consider the backward-Or-exchange where the path \((i_1, \ldots, i_2)\) is relocated between \(j\) and \(j+1\). The resulting route can be divided in four paths: (0, ..., j), \((i_1, \ldots, i_2), (j+1, \ldots, i_1-1)\), and \((i_2+1, \ldots, n)\). Observe that \(D_j\) does not change, \(\Sigma_{0 \leq k \leq j} W_k\), \(\Sigma_{i_1+1 \leq k \leq n} W_k\), and \(B_{i_2+1}^{i+1} \cdots \) can be computed in advance in \(O(n)\) time, \(B_j^{i_1 \cdots i_2}\) and \(\Sigma_{i_1, i_2} W_k\) can be maintained efficiently in the outer loop, and \(B_{j+1}^{i_2 \cdots i_1-1}\) and \(\Sigma_{j \leq k \leq i_1-1} W_k\) can be maintained efficiently in the inner loop. It is not hard to see that the above quantities allow the determination of both \(D_n\) and the total waiting time on the route in constant time if the paths are concatenated. For the forward-Or-exchange a similar argument can be presented.


After analyzing iterative improvement methods for the TSP, we now turn to the VRP. We will describe three \(k\)-exchange neighborhoods for the VRP, that relocate vertices between two routes. The neighborhoods are chosen such that testing for optimality over the neighborhood requires \(O(n^2)\) time. As we are dealing with two routes, we will sometimes refer to the route that currently contains the vertices we want to relocate as the origin route and the other as the destination route. In addition, for presentational convenience, we will only describe relocations of single vertices. It is straightforward to extend the presented techniques to the case where paths are relocated instead of single vertices.

As the neighborhoods can be completely described in terms of the substitutions that are considered, we will use the following notation to describe a neighborhood:

\[
\text{Relocate: } \{\text{(pre}_i, i), (i, \text{suc}_i), (j, \text{suc}_j)\} \rightarrow \{\text{pre}_i, \text{suc}_i), (j, i), (i, \text{suc}_j)\}
\]

Relocate tries to insert a vertex from one route into another. A relocation is pictured in Figure 8.

\[
\text{Exchange: } \{\text{(pre}_i, i), (i, \text{suc}_i), (\text{pre}_j, j), (j, \text{suc}_j)\} \rightarrow \{\text{pre}_i, j), (j, \text{suc}_i), (\text{pre}_j, i), (i, \text{suc}_j)\}
\]

A slight modification of the previously described relocate-neighborhood leads to what we will call the exchange-neighborhood. Here we look simultaneously at two vertices from different routes and try to insert them into the other routes. An exchange is pictured in Figure 9.

\[
\text{Cross: } \{(i, \text{suc}_i), (j, \text{suc}_j)\} \rightarrow \{(i, \text{suc}_j), (j, \text{suc}_i)\}
\]

Cross tries to remove crossing links and turns out to be very powerful. As a special case, if the
constraints allow it, it can combine two routes into one. A cross-change is pictured in Figure 10. Note that if a cross-change is actually performed, the last part of either route will become the last part of the other.

The extension of the lexicographic search strategy to these three neighborhoods is straightforward. We choose $i$ in reverse order of the origin route. More precisely, $i=n-1,\ldots,1$ for the relocate and exchange neighborhoods and $i=n-1,\ldots,0$ for the cross neighborhood. After $i$ has been fixed, we choose $j$ in reverse order of the destination route. More precisely, $i=n-1,\ldots,0$ for the relocate and cross neighborhoods and $i=n-1,\ldots,1$ for the exchange neighborhood.

To test the feasibility and profitability of an exchange, we split the resulting routes in paths and use the concatenation ideas to show that the forward slack time at the depot and the total waiting can be computed in constant time.
Relocate. The resulting origin route can be divided in the two paths \((0, ..., pre_i)\) and \((suc_i, ..., n)\) and is trivially feasible since customers were deleted only. Note that \(F_0^{(0,...,pre_i)}\) and \(F_j^{(suc_i,...,n)}\) can be computed in advance for all \(i\) from 1 to \(n-1\) in \(O(n)\) time. The resulting destination route can be divided in the three paths \((0, ..., j), \(i, ..., l\), and \((suc_j, ..., n)\). Note that \(F_0^{(0,...,j)}\) and \(F_j^{(suc_j,...,n)}\), as well as \(\Sigma_{0<k<suc_j}W_k\), can be computed in advance for all \(j\) from 0 to \(n-1\) in \(O(n)\) time. Furthermore, \(F_i^{(i,...,j)}\) can easily be maintained during the lexicographic search. It is easy to see that the above quantities are precisely the ones needed to determine the feasibility and the profitability of an exchange.

Exchange. The resulting origin route can be divided in the following three paths \((0, ..., pre_i), (j, ..., f)\), and \((suc_j, ..., n)\). Note that \(F_0^{(0,...,pre_i)}\) and \(F_{suc_i}^{(suc_i,...,n)}\), as well as \(\Sigma_{0<k<suc_i}W_k\), can be computed in advance for all \(i\) from 1 to \(n-1\) in \(O(n)\) time. Furthermore, \(F_j^{(j,...,f)}\) can easily be maintained during the lexicographic search. The resulting destination route can be divided in the following three paths: \((0, ..., pre_j)\), \((i, ..., l)\), and \((suc_j, ..., n)\). Note that \(F_0^{(0,...,pre_j)}\) and \(F_{suc_j}^{(suc_j,...,n)}\), as well as \(\Sigma_{0<k<suc_j}W_k\), can be computed in advance for all \(j\) from 1 to \(n-1\) in \(O(n)\) time. Furthermore, \(F_i^{(i,...,l)}\) can easily be maintained during the lexicographic search. It is easy to see that the above quantities are precisely the ones needed to determine the feasibility and the profitability of an exchange.

Cross. The resulting origin route can be divided in the two paths \((0, ..., i)\) and \((suc_j, ..., n)\). Note that \(F_0^{(0,...,i)}\), as well as \(\Sigma_{0<k<suc_j}W_k\), for all \(i\) from 0 to \(n\) and \(F_{suc_j}^{(suc_j,...,n)}\) for all \(j\) from 0 to \(n-1\) can be computed in advance in \(O(n)\) time. The resulting destination route can be divided in the two paths \((0, ..., j)\) and \((suc_i, ..., n)\). Note that \(F_0^{(0,...,j)}\), as well as \(\Sigma_{0<k<suc_i}W_k\), for all \(j\) from 0 to \(n\) and \(F_{suc_i}^{(suc_i,...,n)}\) for all \(i\) from 0 to \(n-1\) can be computed in advance in \(O(n)\) time. It is easy to see that the above quantities are precisely the ones needed to determine the feasibility and the profitability of an exchange.

The above described iterative improvement methods can easily be extended to larger neighborhoods by the introduction of paths instead of vertices. The paths have to be checked but that involves only local information. Figure 11 illustrates some possible extensions.

8. Empirical analysis
The objective of our empirical analysis is twofold. First, to investigate the effect of different objective functions. Second, to evaluate the efficiency of the proposed methods.

Test problems are randomly generated using the following scheme. There are four control parameters: \(n, l, w,\) and \(p\). The locations of the \(n\) customers are uniformly distributed in \([1, ..., 100] \times [1, ..., 100]\); the depot is located at \((50, 50)\). The coordinates of the locations of the customers are used to compute the intercity Euclidean distances. The loads of the customers are uniformly distributed in \([1, ..., l]\). Time windows of \(w\) minutes are generated for \(p\) percent of the customers. The other customers and the depot have the time window \([480, 1200]\), i.e., a period of 10 hours (times will always be given in minutes). There is a homogeneous set of vehicles with capacity 500. Vehicles are assumed to travel at an average speed of 40 km/h.

The iterative improvement methods were embedded in a two phase approximation algorithm for the VRPTW. In the first phase, an initial set of routes is constructed with the parallel insertion heuristic described in Savelsbergh [1991]. In the second phase, an improved set of routes is obtained through the use of the exchange procedures. First, the relevant iterative improvement methods are...
applied to all possible combinations of two routes. Second, the relevant iterative improvement methods are applied to all separate routes. As long as feasible and profitable exchanges have been found, the process is repeated. Although this is clearly an unsophisticated brute-force approach, it is suitable for our purposes.

To investigate the effect of different objective functions, we have compared the solutions obtained with minimizing route duration as objective to those obtained with minimizing travel time and minimizing completion time as objective for a set of 10 randomly generated problem instances ($n=100, l=50, w=120, p=50$). The results shown in Table 3 clearly indicate the importance of being able to handle different objective functions.

To evaluate the efficiency of the described methods, we have compared the running times of our proposed implementation of iterative improvement techniques with a straightforward
Table 3. The effect of different objective functions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Minimizing Route Duration</th>
<th>Minimizing Travel Time</th>
<th>Minimizing Completion Time</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Route</td>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2758</td>
<td>2695</td>
<td>6236</td>
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<td>3086</td>
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<td>7345</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>2383</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>2482</td>
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<td>3135</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>2622</td>
<td>2612</td>
<td>7584</td>
</tr>
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Table 4. CPU times (in seconds) for the two implementations.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Problem Parameters</th>
<th>Straightforward Implementation</th>
<th>Proposed Implementation</th>
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<tr>
<td>(100,50,0,0)</td>
<td>10.60</td>
<td>7.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>(100,50,120,50)</td>
<td>22.61</td>
<td>13.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>(300,25,0,0)</td>
<td>135.97</td>
<td>55.21</td>
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<tr>
<td>(300,25,120,50)</td>
<td>234.05</td>
<td>68.82</td>
</tr>
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</table>

9. Conclusion
The growing importance of side constraints as well as realistic objectives in practical distribution management and the need for fast implementations of algorithms in the context of interactive planning systems justify the current research. The main contribution of this paper lies in the fact that we have concentrated on more realistic objective functions. The relative ease with which the general framework presented in Savelsbergh [1990] could be generalized and extended to accommodate these objective functions exemplifies the robustness of this framework.

References
I. Or (1976). Traveling Salesman-Type Combinatorial Problems and Their Relation to the Logistics
of Blood Banking, Ph.D. thesis, Department of Industrial Engineering and Management Sciences, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.


List of COSOR-memoranda - 1991

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