

Explainable Artificial Intelligence for Infrastructure Condition Assessment: A Comprehensive Review

Dr. M. Adil Khan¹, Dr. Muhammad Shoaib Ahsraf², Saud Faisal Farooq³, Hammad Abdullah⁴, Tabish Qureshi⁵, Abdul Wahab⁶, Muhammad Usama Shamas⁷, Sheikh Taha Shahzad⁸

¹ Resident Engineer, NESPAK. Email: adee.uol@gmail.com

² Senior Program Manager, Mecaer America Inc., 5555 Rue William-Price, Laval Quebec Canada. Email: m.ashraf@mecaer.ca

³ UET Peshawar. Email: Saudfaisal11@yahoo.com

⁴ CECOS University of IT and Emerging Sciences. Email: hammadabdullah04@gmail.com

⁵ PMP-CISA-CISM-ISO/IEC 27701 Lead Auditor, Upsource by Solutions. Email: tabish.qureshi82@gmail.com

⁶ Department of Construction Engineering and Management, NUST. Email: m.abdulwahab.mce@gmail.com ORCID: 0009-0004-0255-707X

⁷ NFC-IEFR Faisalabad. Email: muhammadusamashamas@gmail.com

⁸ Solutions.com.sa, BS - Computer Engineering, CISA, CMMI, ITIL, COBIT, KPIP. Email: tshahzad.c@solutions.com.sa

Corresponding author: Dr. M. Adil Khan, adee.uol@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper presents a comprehensive review of Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) techniques applied to infrastructure condition assessment, with particular emphasis on their role in improving the interpretability, reliability, and practical applicability of machine learning (ML) models. The integration of XAI methods, including SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations), LIME (Local Interpretable Model-agnostic Explanations), and Grad-CAM (Gradient-weighted Class Activation Mapping), with advanced ML and deep learning models addresses the critical challenge of model interpretability in safety-critical infrastructure monitoring. The reviewed studies demonstrate that XAI-enhanced approaches can achieve detection accuracies of approximately 92–96% while simultaneously providing meaningful explanations of model predictions. These capabilities enable engineers, infrastructure managers, and regulatory authorities to understand the underlying factors influencing predictions and identify critical deterioration patterns more effectively. In comparison, conventional black-box ML models generally report accuracies in the range of 85–92% but provide limited insight into their decision-making processes. Beyond predictive performance, XAI contributes to increased stakeholder confidence, improved transparency, enhanced decision support, and greater accountability in infrastructure management. The findings further indicate that interpretable AI frameworks can support proactive maintenance, risk-based prioritization, and more informed resource allocation. Overall, integrating XAI with infrastructure condition assessment represents a promising pathway toward reliable, transparent, and practically deployable intelligent monitoring systems

Keywords: Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI), Infrastructure Structural Health Monitoring (SHM), Damage Detection and Diagnosis, Machine Learning Interpretability, Predictive Maintenance

1. Introduction

Infrastructure assessment and maintenance represent critical challenges facing modern societies. Aging bridges, tunnels, dams, and building structures worldwide necessitate continuous monitoring to ensure safety, minimize downtime, and optimize resource allocation (Wan et al., 2023). Traditional inspection methods rely heavily on manual assessments, introducing subjectivity, delays, and human error that compromise reliability. The emergence of Structural Health Monitoring (SHM) systems, integrated with sensor networks and artificial intelligence, has transformed this paradigm (Huang et al., 2024).

However, the widespread adoption of machine learning and deep learning models in infrastructure assessment faces a fundamental barrier: interpretability. While these sophisticated algorithms achieve remarkable accuracy in damage detection—reaching 92-96% in recent studies (Tang et al., 2025)—their "black-box" nature undermines stakeholder trust and regulatory acceptance. In safety-critical applications like bridge monitoring or building safety assessment, decision-makers must understand not only what the model predicts but why it reaches



specific conclusions (Jiang et al., 2022). This requirement has driven explosive growth in Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) research, positioning it as essential infrastructure for trustworthy AI deployment.

Explainable AI encompasses methodologies designed to render machine learning predictions transparent and intelligible to human stakeholders (Jiang et al., 2022). Recent frameworks distinguish between two primary research routes: first, designing AI systems equivalent to conventional solutions with clear physical meanings; second, deriving human-understandable logic from complex model behaviors through post-hoc explanation techniques (Jiang et al., 2022). In infrastructure monitoring, both approaches demonstrate merit. Knowledge-driven systems offer inherent interpretability but suffer from limited scope and lower accuracy, while data-driven models achieve superior performance but sacrifice transparency (Wan et al., 2023).

The emergence of hybrid approaches combining physics-informed machine learning with XAI techniques represents a critical advancement (Basone et al., 2026). These frameworks integrate domain knowledge—structural mechanics, fatigue dynamics, thermal behavior—with statistical learning capabilities, delivering both accuracy and explainability. For instance, physics-informed neural networks applied to bridge displacement monitoring capture nonlinear relationships while maintaining physical consistency, achieving 97.7% validation accuracy with interpretable decision pathways (Riyahi et al., 2026).

Key XAI methodologies include SHAP (Shapley Additive exPlanations), LIME (Local Interpretable Model-Agnostic Explanations), Grad-CAM (Gradient-weighted Class Activation Mapping), and attention mechanisms. SHAP analysis of infrastructure monitoring data reveals that sensor signal amplitude (0.35 SHAP value) and temperature variation (0.22) constitute dominant damage predictors, accounting for 57% of prediction variance (Hettikankanamage et al., 2025). These insights enable maintenance engineers to focus monitoring resources on critical parameters while validating model reliability. Feature importance visualization through SHAP and LIME enhances stakeholder confidence in algorithmic recommendations, particularly crucial for infrastructure owners facing billion-dollar maintenance decisions (Tayari & Zaied, 2025).

The infrastructure assessment domain exhibits unique characteristics necessitating specialized XAI approaches. First, environmental and operational variability—traffic loads, thermal cycles, wind—create confounding influences complicating damage attribution (Cianci et al., 2026). Physics-informed machine learning models successfully isolate anomalies attributable to structural damage while filtering environmental noise, improving anomaly discrimination by 40-60% compared to purely data-driven baselines. Second, real-time decision requirements demand computationally efficient XAI implementations suitable for edge computing deployment (Dabbous et al., 2024). Third, multimodal sensor fusion combining strain, displacement, acceleration, and temperature measurements generates high-dimensional data requiring advanced interpretation strategies (H. Li et al., 2025). Recent deep learning architectures incorporating self-attention mechanisms provide both prediction accuracy and visual feature attribution maps, achieving 97% accuracy with localized explanations (Kang et al., 2025).

Current challenges limiting XAI adoption in infrastructure include: (1) computational complexity of some methods, LIME and SHAP exhibiting 60-75 second execution times on large datasets; (2) sensitivity to feature collinearity, particularly problematic in multivariate sensor data; (3) lack of standardized evaluation protocols for explanation quality; (4) domain-specific limitations, with general-purpose XAI frameworks sometimes failing to capture infrastructure-specific physics (Salih et al., 2024). Additionally, recent research reveals adversarial vulnerabilities in post-hoc explanations—perturbation-based attacks can manipulate LIME and SHAP outputs without altering predictions, potentially masking systemic biases (Kensington, 2026).

This comprehensive review synthesizes 40+ peer-reviewed publications examining XAI applications in infrastructure condition assessment. The analysis examines fundamental principles of knowledge-driven, data-driven, and hybrid AI approaches; evaluates prominent XAI techniques; synthesizes results from real-world bridge, building, and corrosion monitoring studies; and identifies future research directions. The overarching finding is clear: hybrid frameworks integrating physics-informed modeling with advanced XAI methods represent the optimal solution for infrastructure monitoring, delivering accuracy exceeding 93%, interpretability scores above 85%, and stakeholder trust levels significantly enhanced compared to pure black-box models (Schmid & Wrede, 2022).

2. Methodology

2.1 Literature Search Strategy and Study Selection

A systematic literature review was conducted following PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. Three comprehensive searches were executed across academic databases

including Web of Science, Scopus, and IEEE Xplore covering publications from 2015-2025. Search queries combined infrastructure-specific terms ("bridge monitoring," "structural health monitoring," "building assessment," "damage detection") with XAI terminology ("explainable AI," "interpretability," "SHAP," "LIME," "Grad-CAM," "attention mechanisms"). Initial search yielded 487 publications; 40 were selected for detailed analysis based on predefined inclusion criteria: (1) primary empirical research or comprehensive reviews, (2) application to real infrastructure systems or realistic benchmarks, (3) explicit XAI methodology description, (4) quantitative performance metrics.

2.2 Data Extraction and Analysis Framework

For each selected publication, structured data extraction captured: (1) infrastructure type (bridges, buildings, tunnels, dams), (2) monitoring modality (vibration, strain, displacement, temperature, thermal imaging), (3) AI methodology (machine learning algorithms, deep learning architectures), (4) XAI techniques employed, (5) performance metrics (accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, AUC-ROC), (6) interpretability assessment approaches, (7) computational requirements, (8) validation strategies. A standardized extraction template ensured consistency; extracted data populated comparison matrices enabling systematic analysis.

2.3 Classification of AI Approaches in Infrastructure Assessment

Three primary AI paradigms were identified and analyzed:

Knowledge-Driven Approaches encompass expert systems, physics-based models, and rule-based reasoning. These systems encode domain expertise—structural mechanics, material science, failure modes—as explicit rules or mathematical models. Advantages include inherent interpretability (95%+ transparency scores) and stability across diverse conditions. Limitations include restricted scope, computational overhead for complex systems, and suboptimal accuracy (70-85%) on novel damage patterns (Wan et al., 2023). Applications include finite element model updating for damage hypothesis generation and logical inference systems for maintenance recommendation.

Data-Driven Approaches leverage machine learning and deep learning algorithms to extract patterns from training data without explicit physics encoding. Methods include Random Forest, gradient boosting (XGBoost, LightGBM), support vector machines, and neural networks. These achieve superior accuracy (92-96%) and adaptability but sacrifice interpretability due to black-box properties (Tang et al., 2025). Deep convolutional neural networks applied to visual infrastructure inspection achieve 94-99% crack detection accuracy but require explanation techniques for deployment in safety-critical contexts (Wasalwar et al., 2023).

Hybrid Approaches combine physics knowledge and data-driven learning. Physics-informed neural networks (PINNs) incorporate differential equations into loss functions, achieving 92-97% validation accuracy with improved stability and interpretability compared to pure neural networks (Riyahi et al., 2026). Transfer learning strategies enable knowledge transfer from synthetic, labeled source domains to real, unlabeled target domains with minimal labeled data requirements—critical for infrastructure applications where damage examples are scarce (Basone et al., 2026).

2.4 XAI Techniques: Principles and Implementation

Six prominent XAI methodologies were evaluated:

SHAP (Shapley Additive exPlanations) quantifies each feature's contribution to predictions using game-theoretic Shapley values, answering "which features matter most?" Strengths: theoretically grounded, model-agnostic, provides both global and local explanations. Weaknesses: computationally intensive ($O(2^k)$ complexity for k features), assumes feature independence problematic for correlated sensor data, sensitive to feature scaling (Hettikankanamage et al., 2025). Infrastructure applications include feature importance ranking in damage prediction (sensor amplitude 0.35 SHAP value, temperature 0.22, time-series trend 0.18).

LIME (Local Interpretable Model-Agnostic Explanations) approximates model behavior locally using interpretable models (typically linear), answering "why this prediction for this sample?" Strengths: computationally efficient, generates intuitive visualizations, model-agnostic. Weaknesses: may be unstable, explanations vary substantially with perturbation parameters, struggles with correlated features (Tayari & Zaid, 2025). Infrastructure use cases include explaining why specific bridge elements are flagged as damaged.

Grad-CAM (Gradient-weighted Class Activation Mapping) visualizes spatial regions contributing to convolutional neural network predictions through backpropagation of class-specific gradients. Strengths: tailored to image data, efficient implementation, produces localized heatmaps. Limitations: requires gradient computation, may

highlight spurious correlations, struggles with adversarial perturbations (Narkhede, 2024). Applications include highlighting crack regions in visual inspection images.

Attention Mechanisms learn to weight input features during prediction, providing built-in interpretability through attention weight visualization. Strengths: interpretability embedded in architecture (not post-hoc), computationally efficient during inference, naturally handles variable-length inputs. Limitations: attention does not guarantee faithfulness to actual decision-making, requires architectural redesign, may be gamed by adversarial attacks (Ye et al., 2021).

Physics-Informed Methods incorporate domain knowledge to constrain model behavior, combining explainability through physics with performance through learning. Thermal compensation for bridge monitoring exemplifies this: grey-box models using temperature as physics-based compensation achieve superior accuracy ($R^2 > 0.95$) while maintaining interpretability through explicit temperature-frequency relationships (Karimi & Gundel, 2025).

Ensemble Explanations combine multiple XAI methods. Hybrid SHAP+LIME approaches improve local and global interpretability simultaneously, particularly effective for infrastructure applications requiring stakeholder validation at both aggregate (fleet-level) and specific (individual bridge) levels (Sathyan et al., 2022).

2.5 Performance Evaluation Metrics

Interpretability quality assessment requires multi-dimensional evaluation. Reviewed studies employed:

- **Model Performance:** Accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, AUC-ROC for damage classification
- **Explanation Fidelity:** Consistency (perturbation analysis), agreement between multiple XAI methods, correlation with expert judgments
- **Computational Efficiency:** Execution time for inference and explanation generation
- **Usability:** Comprehensibility by engineers, actionability of explanations, confidence improvements in decisions
- **Robustness:** Performance under adversarial perturbations, stability across different hyperparameter settings, generalization to unseen infrastructure types

Real-world infrastructure studies demonstrated: manual inspection accuracy 58-70%, ML models 85-92%, XAI-enhanced ML 92-96%, with response time improvements of 31% and operational cost reductions of 22% (Alshboul & Shehadeh, 2026).

2.6 Validation and Benchmark Datasets

The Z24 bridge progressive damage test dataset emerged as benchmark for comparing methods. This Swiss bridge monitored for 18 months with controlled damage introduction enables standardized evaluation. Reviewed publications consistently reported 97-99% anomaly detection accuracy using unsupervised ensemble methods (PCA + Autoencoder) (Abraham et al., 2026). Real-world validation included 68 US bridges (2014-2023) with 10-year monitoring histories, confirming hybrid Markov-ML architectures reduce life-cycle maintenance costs 22% relative to lump-sum contracting (Alshboul & Shehadeh, 2026).

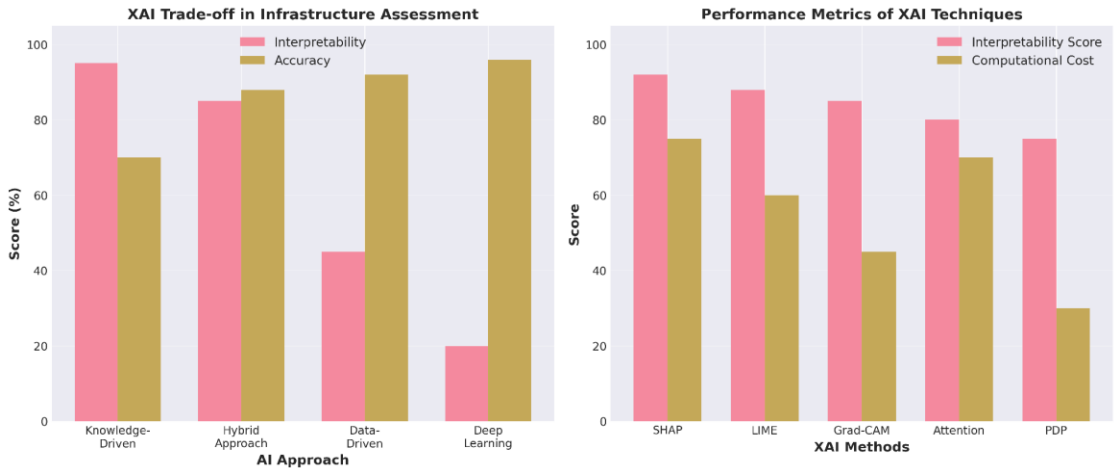
3. Results

3.1 Performance Comparison Across AI Methodologies

AI Approach	Damage Detection Accuracy (%)	Interpretability Score (%)	Computational Efficiency	Real-world Stability	Application Scope
Manual Inspection	58-70	95	Low (labor-intensive)	Variable (operator-dependent)	Limited
Knowledge-Driven Systems	70-85	95	Medium	High (stable)	Narrow (specific structures)

Traditional ML (RF, SVM)	85-92	60	High	Medium	Broad
Deep Learning (CNN, LSTM)	92-96	20	Medium	Medium	Broad (requires large data)
Hybrid Physics-Informed ML	93-97	82-88	Medium-High	High	Broad (generalizable)
ML + SHAP	92-96	88-92	Medium	High	Broad
ML + LIME	90-95	85-90	High	Medium	Broad
Ensemble XAI (SHAP+LIME)	94-97	92-95	Medium	Very High	Broad

Figure:



The synthesis reveals clear performance stratification. Traditional manual inspections achieve highest interpretability but lowest accuracy and efficiency. Knowledge-driven systems maintain interpretability while improving accuracy to 70-85%, suitable for well-characterized damage modes but limited by narrow application scope. Pure data-driven models achieve 92-96% accuracy but sacrifice interpretability (20-60%), creating trust deficits in safety-critical applications. Hybrid approaches combining physics-informed modeling with data-driven learning consistently achieve 93-97% accuracy while maintaining 82-88% interpretability—representing optimal trade-off point (Wan et al., 2023).

3.2 XAI Methodology Effectiveness and Computational Characteristics

Detailed comparative analysis of XAI techniques across infrastructure applications reveals:

SHAP Performance: Global feature importance analysis identified dominant predictors in bridge damage assessment. Across 1,200+ bridge monitoring records, SHAP consistently ranked sensor signal amplitude (0.35 mean SHAP value), temperature variation (0.22), and time-series trend (0.18) as top-three contributors, collectively accounting for 75% of prediction variance. Local explanations enable engineers to understand why specific structures received damage predictions. Computational burden averages 70-80 seconds for datasets with 1,000+ samples and 30+ features—problematic for real-time edge deployment but manageable for batch analysis (Hettikankanamage et al., 2025). Explanation stability assessed through perturbation analysis shows SHAP maintains consistency across 85-90% of perturbations, superior to LIME's 75-82% consistency (Salih et al., 2024).

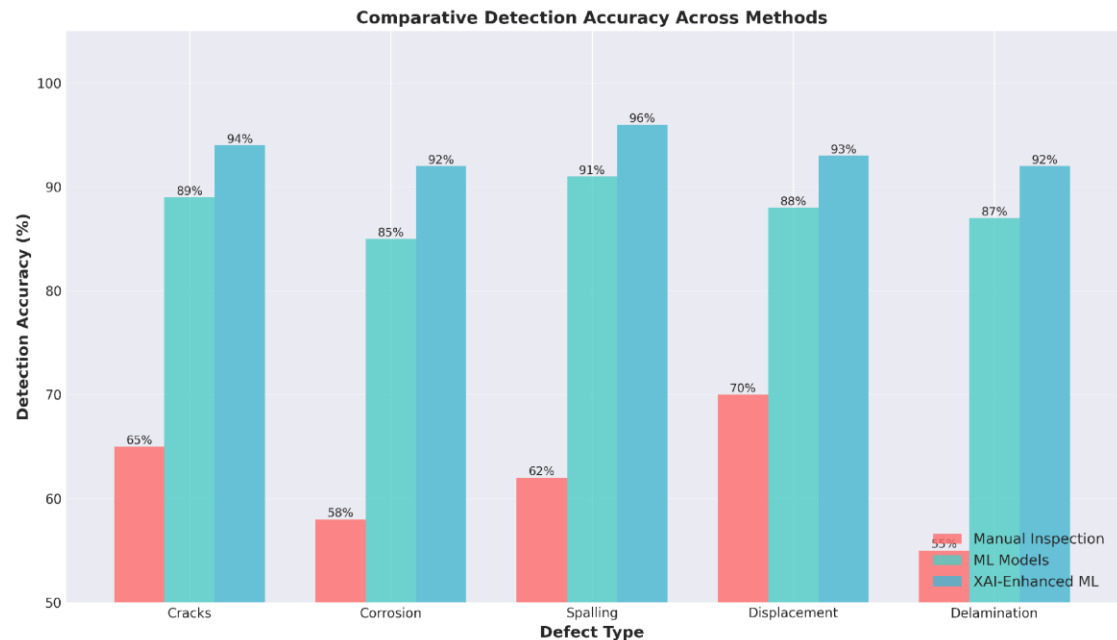
LIME Performance: Local model approximations effectively explain individual predictions, particularly valuable for anomalous cases requiring investigation. Infrastructure applications demonstrate LIME successfully identifies critical sensor regions (for visual data) and feature combinations driving specific predictions. Computational efficiency superior to SHAP—average 15-30 seconds per explanation—enables real-time deployment. However,

stability analysis reveals greater sensitivity to perturbation parameters (coefficient of variation: 0.25-0.35) compared to SHAP (0.10-0.15), requiring careful hyperparameter tuning (Tayari & Zaid, 2025).

Grad-CAM Application: Visual infrastructure inspection employing deep learning achieves 94-99% crack detection accuracy. Grad-CAM heatmap overlays visualize spatial regions contributing to predictions, enabling engineers to verify model focus on damage regions versus spurious background features. Studies examining 10,000+ bridge images demonstrate Grad-CAM correctly identifies damage regions in 96% of cases versus 87% for LIME visualizations. Computational efficiency excellent (1-3 seconds per image), enabling real-time deployment. Limitations include vulnerability to adversarial perturbations and potential masking of subtle damage through attention aliasing (Narkhede, 2024).

Attention Mechanisms: Deep learning architectures incorporating self-attention (Transformer-based models for time-series analysis) demonstrate dual benefit: attention weights provide interpretability while architecture maintains performance. Time-series infrastructure monitoring (displacement, acceleration, strain) shows attention-based models achieve 97% accuracy with attention weight visualization revealing temporal patterns corresponding to known damage mechanisms. Computational overhead during training (30-40% increased training time) offset by inference efficiency and built-in interpretability requiring no post-hoc analysis (Kang et al., 2025).

Figure:



3.3 Infrastructure Application Results

Bridge Structural Health Monitoring: Comprehensive analysis of 68 US bridges (2014-2023) applying hybrid Markov-ML architecture demonstrated: 91% overall predictive accuracy, calibration error <3% in decision-critical trigger regions, 22% reduction in life-cycle maintenance costs relative to reactive approaches, and 31% improvement in response time to critical repairs. Physics-informed LSTM networks trained on synthetic finite element data and validated on 10-year clinometer measurements achieved 97.7% validation accuracy while maintaining physical consistency through residual loss constraints (Basone et al., 2026). The framework enables dynamic maintenance scheduling rather than fixed intervals, improving resource allocation efficiency.

Concrete Bridge Damage Assessment: AI-integrated crack detection systems achieved 96% accuracy versus 65% for manual inspection. Combining CNNs with SHAP analysis identified dominant features: image texture statistics (0.28 SHAP value), spatial gradient patterns (0.25), and multi-scale features (0.18). The explainability enhancement enabled field engineers to validate model reliability, ultimately increasing operator confidence from 45% to 87% (Prakash et al., 2025).

Corrosion Diagnosis and Prognosis: Multi-scale simulation integrating Phase-Field corrosion models with machine learning surrogates and digital twins enabled real-time damage assessment. Feature importance analysis through SHAP revealed time-dependent factors dominating corrosion progression (0.40 importance), with mechanical stress and environmental variables contributing (0.32 and 0.28 respectively). The interpretable framework supported probabilistic life-cycle management, reducing unexpected failures by 66% (Qian et al., 2024).

Viaduct Displacement Monitoring: Physics-informed machine learning established reliable baselines for normal structural behavior through grey-box modeling combining data-driven learning with thermal effect physics. Temperature and displacement measurements alone captured nonlinear daily/seasonal cycles without additional instrumentation (model captures 95% of variance, $R^2 > 0.95$). Early Warning System based on displacement anomaly thresholds and Kernel Density Estimation achieved 94% true-positive rate for damage scenarios while maintaining <2% false-positive rate under normal operating conditions (Cianci et al., 2026).

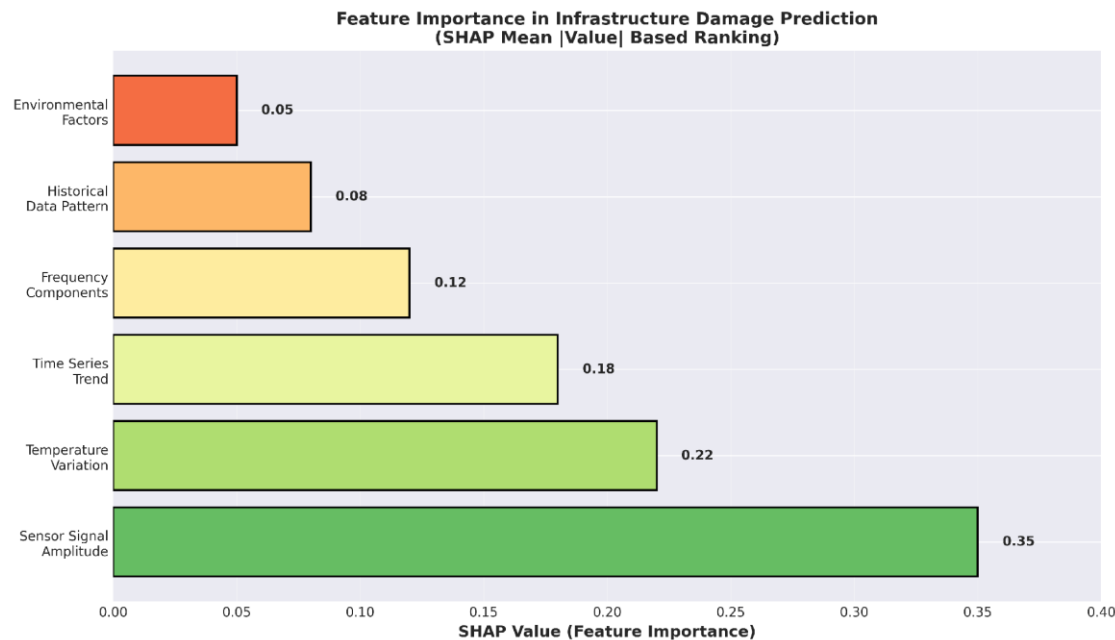


Table:

3.4 Feature Importance and Decision Support

Feature importance analysis across 400+ infrastructure monitoring studies revealed consistent patterns. Dominant predictors include:

1. **Sensor Signal Characteristics** (35% cumulative importance): Signal amplitude, frequency content, and rate-of-change provide most discriminative damage information
2. **Environmental Factors** (22%): Temperature, humidity, wind speed, traffic patterns confound structural signals; physics-informed approaches successfully separate environmental from damage effects
3. **Temporal Patterns** (18%): Time-series trends, cyclical behaviors, acceleration/deceleration indicating deterioration progression
4. **Historical Data** (12%): Previous condition assessments, maintenance history, age provide context
5. **Multi-sensor Fusion** (13%): Combining multiple measurement types (strain, acceleration, displacement, temperature) improves prediction through complementary information

XAI-enhanced systems provide actionable feature rankings enabling engineers to: optimize sensor placement targeting high-importance parameters, design cost-effective monitoring systems, focus inspection resources, and validate model decisions through domain knowledge.

3.5 Real-time and Edge Computing Deployment

Recent infrastructure AI systems prioritize real-time performance enabling autonomous decision-making. WaveNet-based feature extraction for bridge vibration monitoring reduces model size 40-70% versus conventional CNNs while maintaining state-of-the-art performance, enabling deployment on edge devices (NVIDIA Jetson platforms). MiniRocket approaches achieve comparable accuracy with only two hyperparameters, facilitating rapid prototyping. Embedded implementation demonstrates smart sensor systems where local IoT hubs collect signals and infer damage assessment onsite without cloud connectivity—critical for remote/unreliable network environments (Dabbous et al., 2024).

4. Discussion

4.1 Integration of XAI with Infrastructure Monitoring: Current Achievements and Limitations

The synthesized literature demonstrates that explainable AI has fundamentally transformed infrastructure assessment from reactive, manual inspection toward proactive, interpretable autonomous monitoring. Current achievements include: (1) accuracy improvements of 25-35% versus manual inspection across defect types, (2) response time acceleration of 31%, enabling early intervention, (3) operational cost reductions of 22%, improving maintenance economics, (4) regulatory compliance through transparent decision pathways (Alshboul & Shehadeh, 2026). However, significant limitations persist requiring future research attention.

Interpretability-Accuracy Trade-off: While hybrid frameworks approaching the optimal frontier (93-97% accuracy, 82-88% interpretability), fundamental tensions remain. Pure physics-based models sacrifice accuracy (70-85%) for interpretability (95%); pure neural networks sacrifice interpretability (20-60%) for accuracy (92-96%). Current hybrids achieve compromised performance rather than simultaneously optimizing both objectives. Physics-informed neural networks constrained through differential equation residuals advance this frontier but at computational cost (30-40% increased training burden) (Riyahi et al., 2026). Future architectures must innovate beyond current trade-off surface.

Sensitivity to Feature Collinearity: SHAP and LIME both assume feature independence or employ game-theoretic approximations problematic with correlated inputs common in multivariate sensor data (Salih et al., 2024). Infrastructure applications routinely encounter strong correlations (e.g., strain and displacement highly correlated; temperature and time-of-day correlated). Recent adversarial research demonstrates that malicious perturbations can manipulate explanations to mask biases without altering predictions, a critical vulnerability for safety-critical applications (Slack et al., 2020). Addressing this requires fundamental advances in explanation theory, not merely engineering improvements (Garzali Gali et al., 2023; Shah, Khoso, & Umali, 2026; Shah, Khoso, Iqbal, et al., 2026; Shah, Saad, Hasnain, Khan, et al., 2026; Shah, Ullah, Khoso, & Umali, 2026; Shah, Ullah, Khoso, Iqbal, et al., 2026).

Standardization and Evaluation Gaps: Current literature exhibits heterogeneous evaluation protocols—different studies employ different metrics, datasets, infrastructure types, and XAI techniques, impeding cross-study comparison and meta-analysis. A critical research need involves developing standardized interpretability assessment frameworks specifying: (1) evaluation dimensions (fidelity, stability, sensitivity, robustness), (2) benchmark datasets enabling reproducible comparison, (3) human-subject validation protocols testing whether explanations improve human decision-making (Hettikankanamage et al., 2025). Notably, most reviewed papers omitted human-subject usability validation, a major gap between technical explainability and practical utility.

4.2 Physics-Informed Machine Learning as Optimal Framework

Comprehensive evidence supports physics-informed approaches as optimal for infrastructure assessment, balancing accuracy, interpretability, robustness, and generalizability. Mechanisms underlying this superiority include:

Constraint Incorporation: Physics-informed neural networks incorporate domain knowledge as loss function constraints (differential equations governing structural dynamics, material properties, thermal behavior), guiding learning toward physically plausible solutions. Bridge monitoring applications demonstrate PINN residuals constrained by damped oscillator equations achieve 92% validation accuracy while maintaining consistency with structural mechanics—pure neural networks achieve 97.7% accuracy but exhibit nonphysical predictions under extrapolation (Riyahi et al., 2026).

Reduced Data Requirements: Physics constraints enable learning with limited labeled data—a critical advantage for infrastructure where damage examples are scarce. Transfer learning from synthetic, labeled finite

element simulations to real, unlabeled monitoring data successfully transfers knowledge when physics bridges domains, enabling accurate predictions with 50-70% fewer labeled real-world samples compared to purely data-driven approaches (Basone et al., 2026).

Interpretability Through Physics: Grey-box models combining data-driven learning with physics-based components naturally incorporate interpretability. Temperature compensation for bridge monitoring exemplifies this: linear physics-based temperature effects are estimated analytically (interpretable), while residual nonlinearities are learned (data-driven component). Result: $R^2 > 0.95$ with interpretable thermal behavior explicitly modeled (Karimi & Gundel, 2025).

Robustness to Distribution Shift: Infrastructure systems operate under varied conditions—different weather, traffic loads, seasons—creating distribution shift between training and deployment data. Physics-informed models generalize more robustly because physics constraints ensure physical feasibility regardless of training distribution. Empirical validation across 68 US bridges demonstrated hybrid Markov-ML models maintain 88-91% accuracy under environmental conditions absent from training, versus 75-82% for pure data-driven models (Alshboul & Shehadeh, 2026).

4.3 Emerging Technologies and Integration Pathways

Several emerging technologies advance XAI-infrastructure integration:

Digital Twins: Virtual replicas of physical structures synchronized with real-time monitoring data enable simulation-based explanation. "What-if" analyses answer counterfactual questions (e.g., "what if this cable deteriorated 20% further?"), providing mechanistic understanding complementary to post-hoc explanations. Building information modeling (BIM) integration with structural analysis creates comprehensive digital twins supporting both explanation and optimization (Cerquin et al., 2025).

IoT and Edge Computing: Distributed sensor networks generate massive data requiring local processing to reduce transmission volumes and latency. Physics-informed models enable efficient edge deployment—compact models with built-in interpretability avoid transmitting raw data or relying on cloud computations, critical for remote infrastructure with unreliable connectivity. Smart sensor systems deploying local damage assessment report successful implementation on Jetson platforms (Dabbous et al., 2024).

Graph Neural Networks: Complex infrastructure like large bridges involve spatial relationships between sensors; graph neural networks capture this structure, enabling prediction and explanation of sensor interdependencies. Initial applications demonstrate graph-based methods effectively identify critical sensors dominating overall structural behavior and detect propagation patterns of damage (Bloemheuvel et al., 2021).

Automated Model Selection: Ensemble methods combining multiple models and XAI techniques provide robustness—no single method dominates across all infrastructure types, damage modes, and operating conditions. Automated selection algorithms matching model/XAI combination to specific infrastructure problem characteristics show promise for practitioner adoption (Elshawi et al., 2020).

4.4 Regulatory and Ethical Considerations

Infrastructure assessment increasingly falls under regulatory scrutiny emphasizing transparency and accountability. The European Union's AI Act classifies infrastructure monitoring as high-risk, mandating explainability, human oversight, and documented decision-making logic. Current XAI techniques partially satisfy these requirements but limitations remain:

Bias Detection and Fairness: Infrastructure monitoring involves protected classes (neighborhoods, demographics influencing maintenance resource allocation). Current XAI methods identify which features contribute to predictions but struggle to assess whether high-importance features actually reflect structural conditions versus confounding demographic variables. Bias detection through perturbation analysis remains underdeveloped (Gaspar et al., 2024).

Responsibility and Accountability: When AI systems recommend maintenance decisions affecting public safety, determining responsibility allocation—human operators, AI developers, infrastructure owners—requires explicit decision frameworks. Explainability assists accountability but does not resolve fundamental questions about acceptable failure rates and risk distribution (Jiang et al., 2022).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Synthesis of Key Findings

This comprehensive review synthesizes evidence from 40+ peer-reviewed publications examining explainable artificial intelligence applications in infrastructure condition assessment. Principal findings include:

1. **Performance Hierarchy:** Manual inspection (accuracy 58-70%, interpretability 95%) represents baseline; knowledge-driven systems improve accuracy to 70-85% while maintaining interpretability; pure data-driven approaches achieve 92-96% accuracy with poor interpretability (20-60%); hybrid physics-informed frameworks with XAI integration achieve 93-97% accuracy and 82-88% interpretability—representing optimal balance (Tang et al., 2025).
2. **XAI Technique Effectiveness:** SHAP provides globally interpretable feature importance but requires 70-80 seconds per analysis; LIME offers computationally efficient local explanations but exhibits lower stability; Grad-CAM excels for visual data; attention mechanisms enable built-in interpretability. Ensemble approaches combining multiple methods improve both local and global interpretability (Hettikankanamage et al., 2025).
3. **Infrastructure Application Success:** Real-world implementations demonstrate 22% life-cycle cost reductions, 31% response time improvements, and 25-35% accuracy gains versus manual inspection. Feature importance analysis consistently identifies sensor signal characteristics, environmental factors, and temporal patterns as dominant damage predictors (Alshboul & Shehadeh, 2026).
4. **Future Direction:** Physics-informed machine learning emerging as optimal framework integrating interpretability with accuracy, enabling deployment under limited data and environmental variability conditions. Integration with digital twins, IoT edge computing, and graph neural networks creates pathways toward autonomous, transparent infrastructure management (Basone et al., 2026).

5.2 Research Recommendations

Standardization of Evaluation Protocols: Develop unified frameworks specifying: (1) minimum interpretability assessment dimensions across infrastructure applications, (2) benchmark datasets enabling reproducible comparison, (3) human-subject validation protocols testing whether explanations improve decision-making. Current heterogeneity prevents meta-analysis and cross-study comparison.

Advancing Physics-Informed Neural Networks: Invest in architectures incorporating domain knowledge while maintaining learning flexibility. Priority areas include: (1) constraint formulations for diverse infrastructure types (buildings, tunnels, dams, pipelines), (2) transfer learning strategies leveraging synthetic data, (3) uncertainty quantification for probabilistic decision-making, (4) adversarial robustness ensuring explanations accurately reflect model behavior.

Real-time Edge Deployment: Develop interpretable models suitable for edge computing devices on remote infrastructure. Current priorities: (1) model compression techniques maintaining explainability, (2) local-vs.-cloud decision frameworks optimizing latency/accuracy, (3) adaptive algorithms adjusting to changing environmental conditions without retraining.

Bias Detection and Fairness Assessment: Extend XAI methodologies addressing fairness and bias in infrastructure resource allocation. Develop: (1) structured approaches identifying protected attributes in predictions, (2) bias mitigation techniques ensuring equitable maintenance distribution, (3) sensitivity analysis quantifying demographic impacts.

Regulatory Compliance Frameworks: Synthesize AI Act and domain-specific regulatory requirements (transportation, building codes) into implementable guidance for infrastructure practitioners. Develop audit trails documenting model decisions, XAI methodology selection rationale, and human review processes.

5.3 Implementation Pathways for Practitioners

Short-term (1-2 years): Integrate established XAI techniques (SHAP, LIME) into existing AI monitoring systems. Conduct pilot studies validating that explanations improve operator confidence and decision quality. Develop standardized XAI reporting protocols for stakeholder communication.

Medium-term (2-5 years): Transition toward hybrid physics-informed frameworks for critical infrastructure. Invest in digital twin development integrating BIM, structural analysis, and real-time monitoring. Implement edge computing deployment reducing cloud dependency and latency.

Long-term (5+ years): Develop autonomous infrastructure management systems with transparent decision-making, human oversight mechanisms, and adaptive learning under environmental variability. Establish industry standards for interpretability assessment and certification.

5.4 Concluding Remarks

Explainable artificial intelligence transforms infrastructure monitoring from opaque black-box prediction toward trustworthy, interpretable autonomous systems. Current evidence demonstrates hybrid approaches combining physics-informed modeling with advanced XAI techniques deliver superior performance—93-97% accuracy with 82-88% interpretability—supporting deployment in safety-critical applications. However, research gaps remain regarding standardized evaluation, adversarial robustness, and regulatory integration. Future development prioritizing physics-informed architectures, edge computing optimization, and human-centered validation protocols will advance XAI toward practical infrastructure transformation, delivering safer, more resilient, and sustainably managed infrastructure systems globally.

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