Advocating for public policy change

Because y'all have "superpowers"

We have a unique skill set and way of thinking

- Maybe 20-30 million people in the world can program

- You are solidly in the top 1%

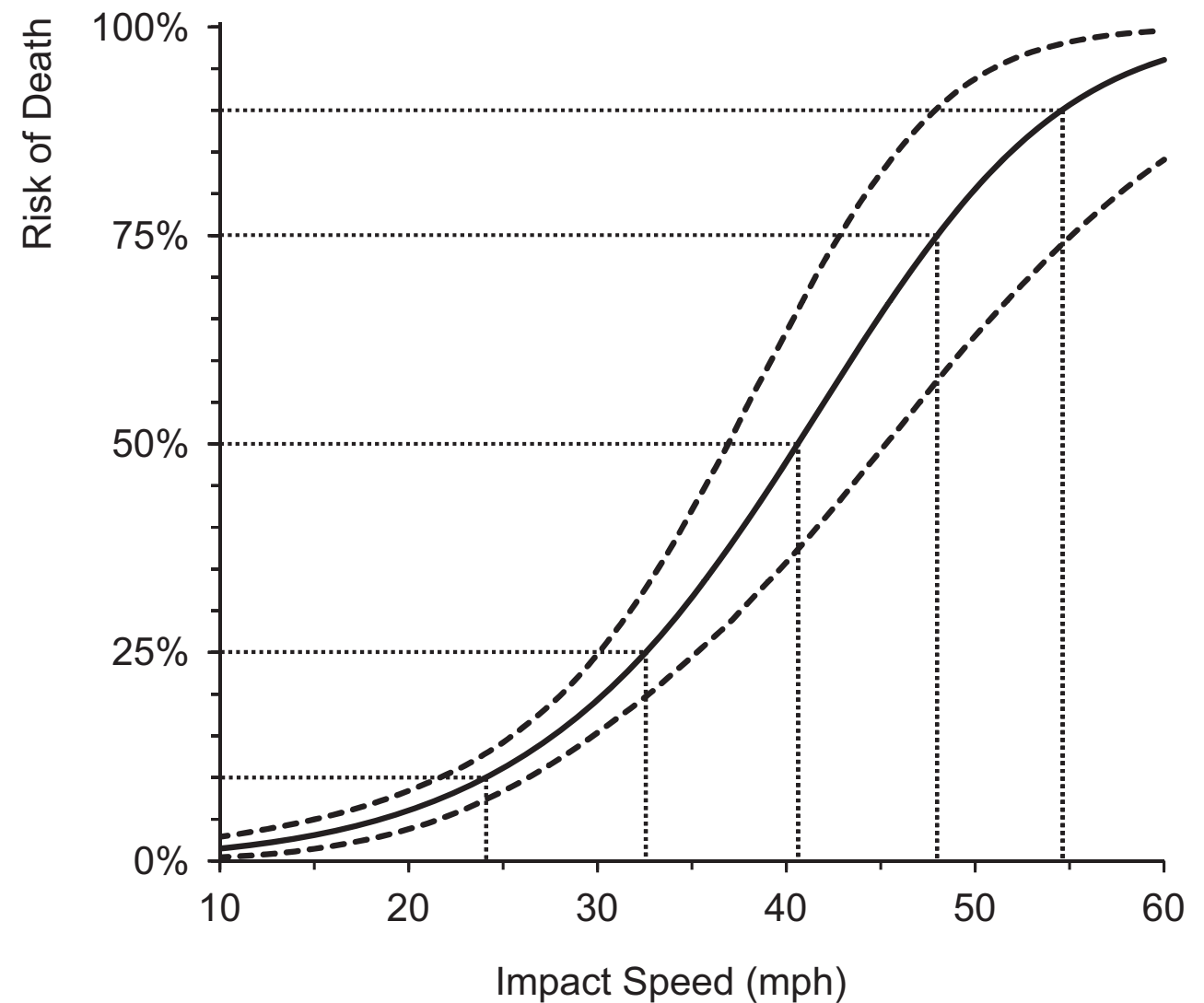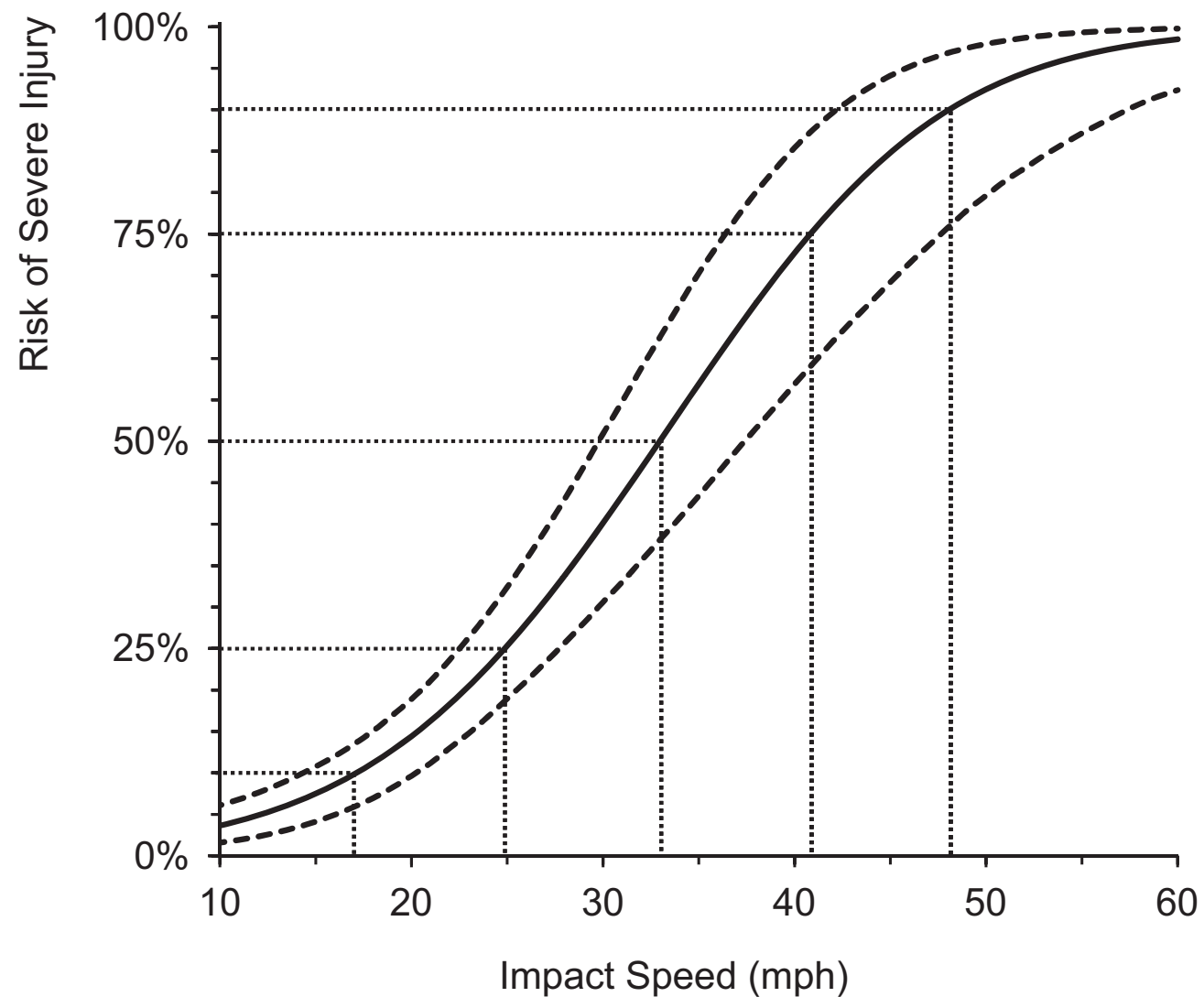- The talks, presentations, and posters this week have been incredible

In other words…

Y'all have superpowers!

The problem

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

October 24, 2015, 2:01AM | 82°

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Woman killed in bicycle-car accident in Oak

MADASYN CZEBINIAK

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NEWS

2 pedestrians killed after exiting Port Authority bus in Oakland

MEGAN GUZA • Monday, Oct. 26, 2015, 2:48 p.m.

On everyone's mind: speeding

Frustration

- City and University didn't seem to be taking action

- Improvements were two-three years out

- Community was up in arms — lots of talk about speed…

- But nobody knew if speed was a factor

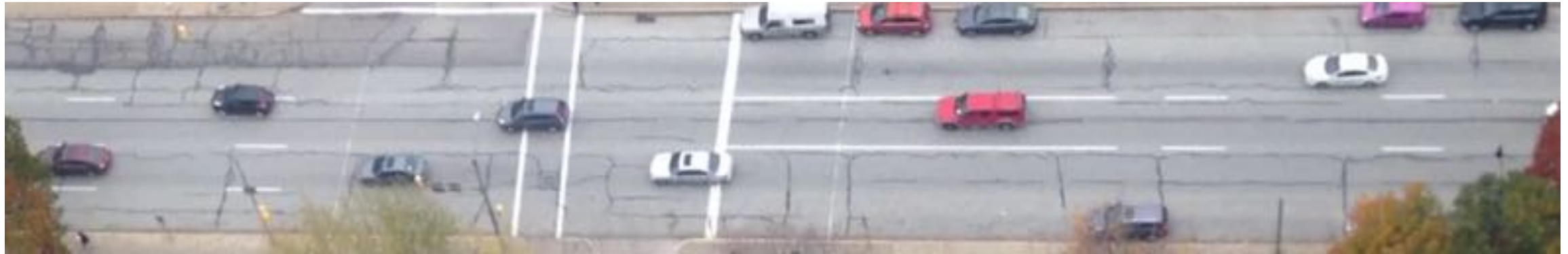- Could I collect empirical data to help light a fire?

The Cathedral of Learning

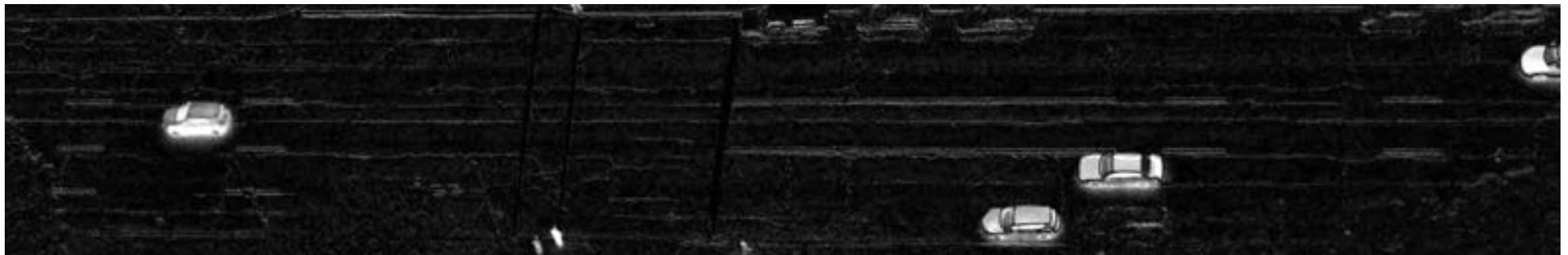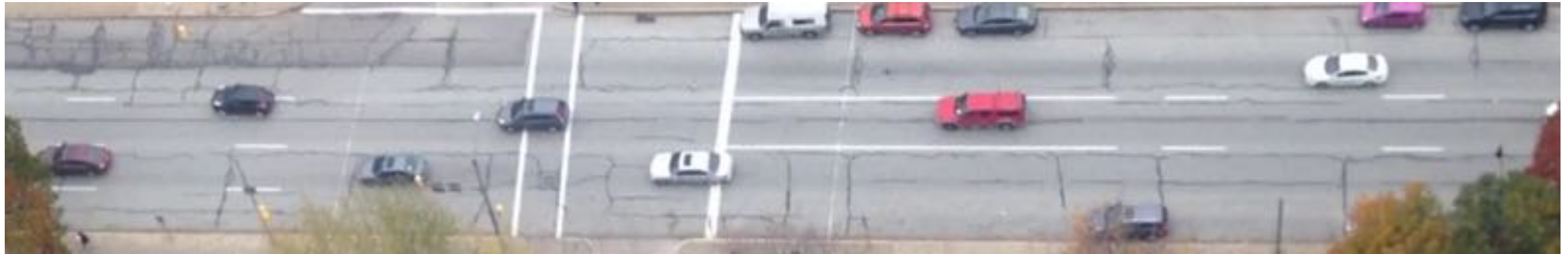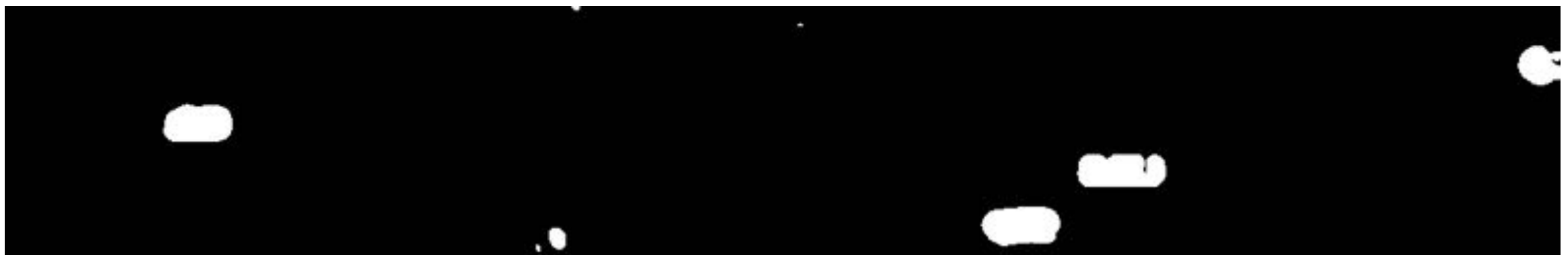# Could I use Julia to process video and extract speeds?

Primitive 'pipeline'

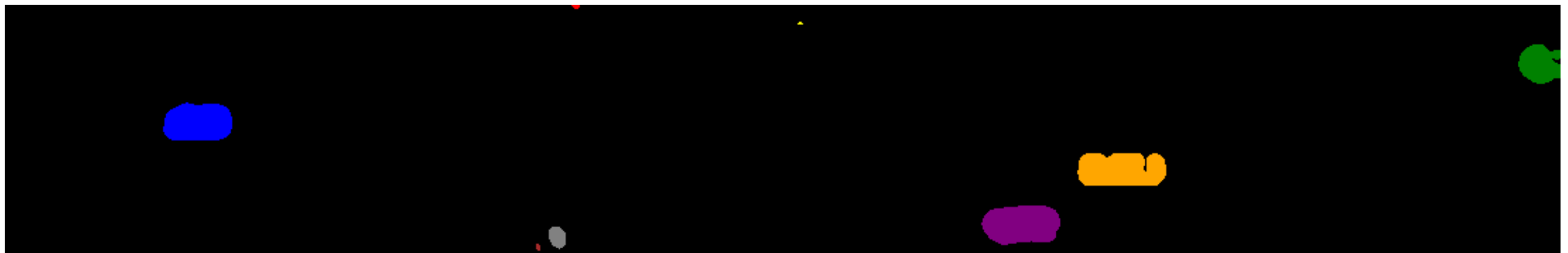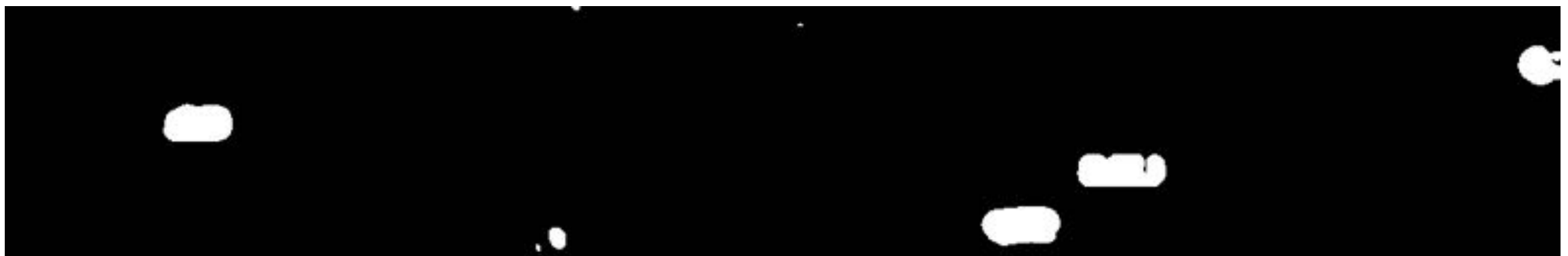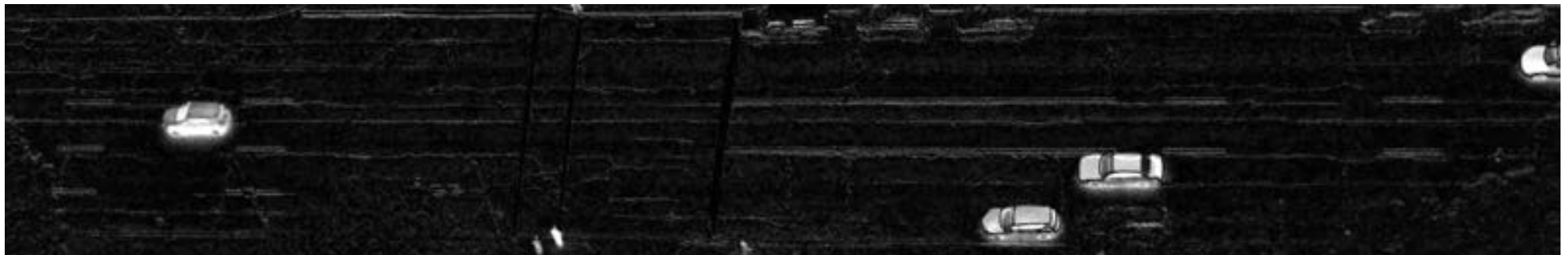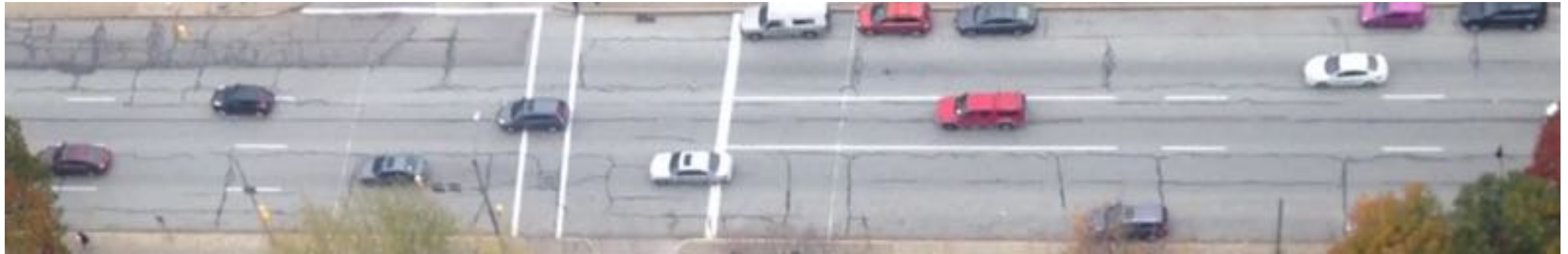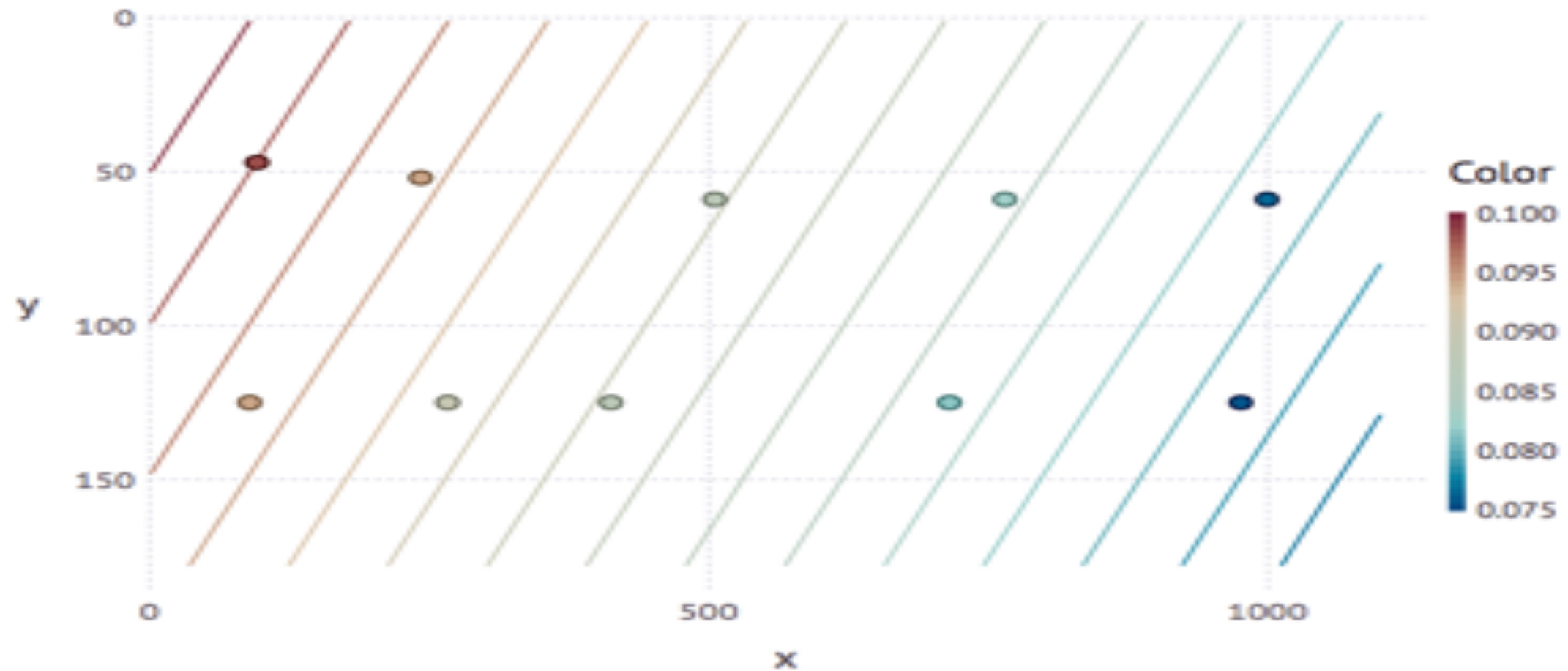# Primitive 'pipeline'

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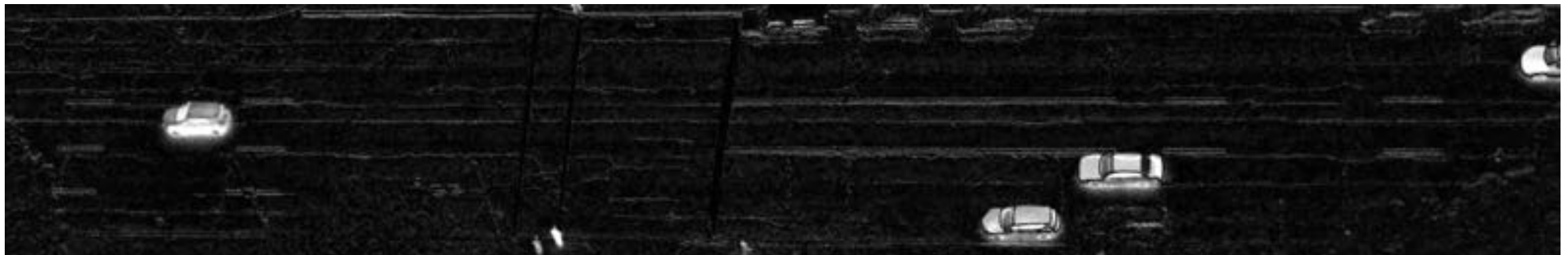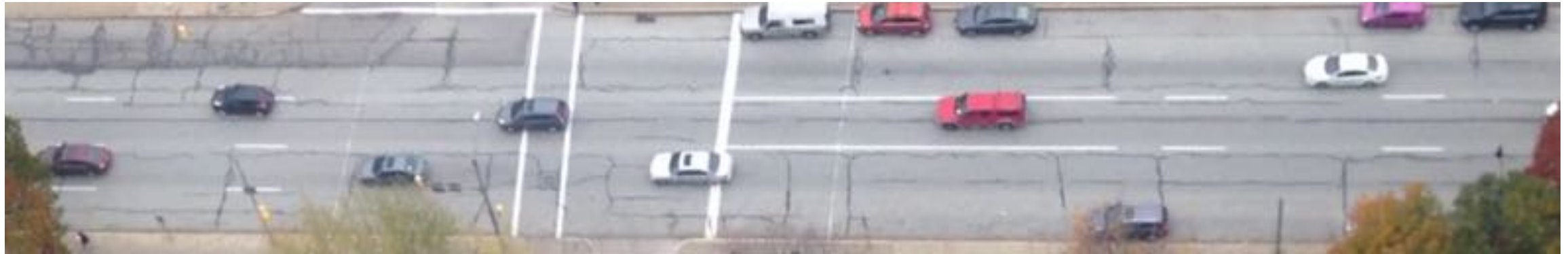
Primitive 'pipeline'

Scale?

Scale?

Approximately 30.63 meters, or 100.5 feet

Approximately 22.86 meters, or 75.02 feet

Final answer*

max_speed
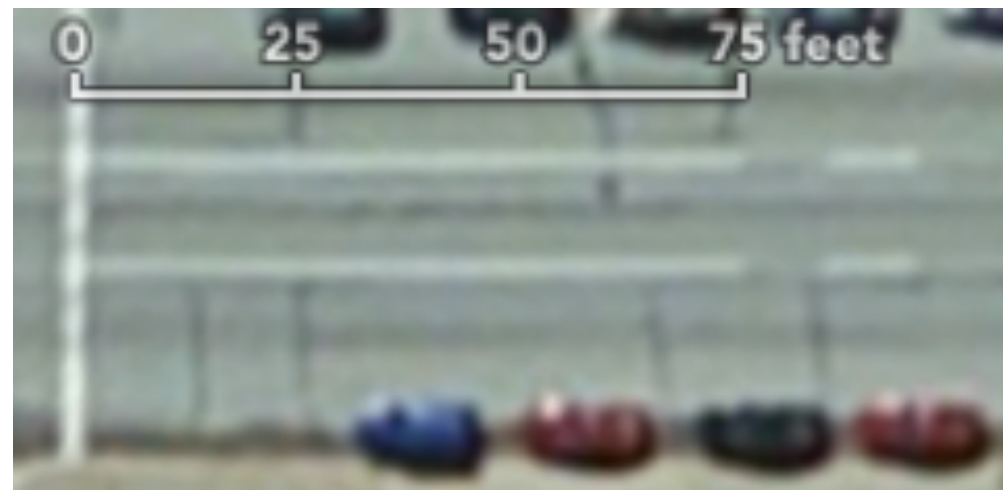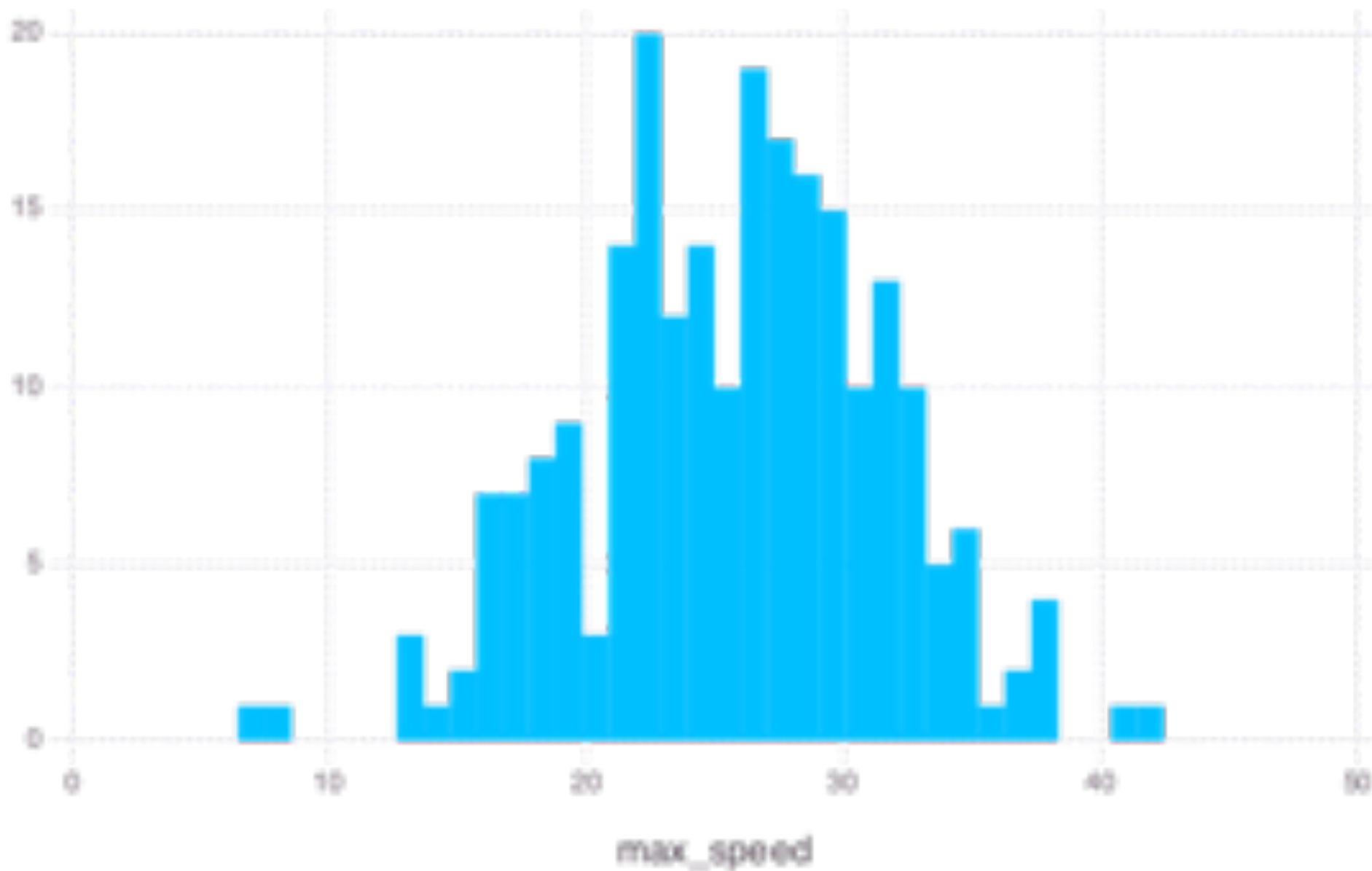
So what happened?

- I sent a cold email to a local advocacy group that had already been pushing for change

- They loved it; posted their own story about it

- Picked up traction in local newspaper, radio, coding groups

No need for speed

Pitt student's study on traffic patterns in Oakland sparks citywide safety effort

ideas" for controlling traffic in the short term. The results of Mr. Bauman's study shouldn't be a surprise to anyone, she said.

The road has been redesigned... three years later as planned

What worked?

- The connection to the non-profit **advocacy** group

- An **existing energy**/interest/appetite

- Bare minimum product — but **animations** sold it

- News loved that this **wasn't my day job**

- They loved that it was **open source** and that I just used my **phone** to collect data

- I think the **mid-size city** also helped

The challenges

- Data, data, data

- Often the most interesting/useful data is locked up: private, personal, and protected

- Rising above the noise

- Time and energy

- Finding a clear message and visualization

Collaborations

- Check in your local area for open data meetups

- My guess is that many non-profit advocacy groups don't know what's possible… but connecting there can be a challenge

Finding open data

- Open portals are often limited and have been stripped of the most impactful/interesting things… and what is there is often already being worked on!

- Collect it yourself (but be careful)

- One potential option: FOIA

  - This takes work, but really anyone can submit a FOIA. Treat it like a database and count on failures. First ask about the existence of a database. Then ask for its tables. Pick an interesting sounding one and ask for its columns and data types. Then its size. Then (finally!) ask for a subset of the rows.

What ways can we creatively examine issues we care about?

https://github.com/mbauman/TrafficSpeed