

Prediction of Asphalt Pavement Surface Layer Modulus using the Long-Term Pavement Performance (LTPP) Falling Weight Deflectometer Data



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Introduction

- Accurate estimation of asphalt surface layer modulus is essential for structural evaluation and network-level pavement management.
- FWD testing offers non-destructive pavement characterization.
- Conventional modulus backcalculation software is sensitive to material property assumptions, temperature, and structural configuration.
- Data-driven methods can bypass backcalculation sensitivities by learning directly from FWD response - yet have not been comprehensively benchmarked for surface modulus prediction using LTPP data.

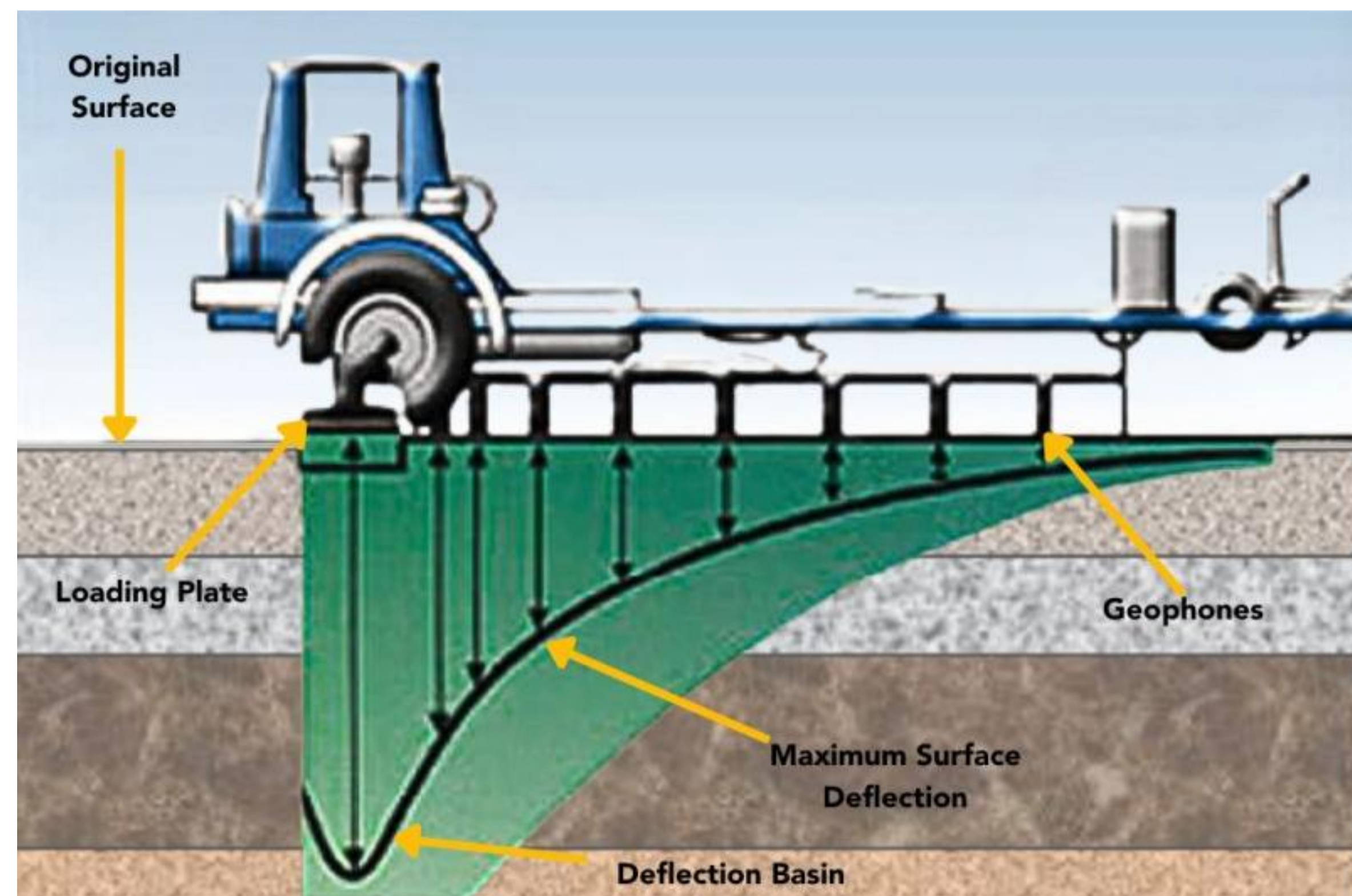


Figure 1. Falling Weight Deflectometer Test Setup

Objectives

- To develop a prediction model for evaluating the asphalt surface layer modulus.
- To integrate key influential parameters such as surface layer thickness, drop load, air and base temperatures, peak deflections, surface curvature index (SCI), and lane type.
- To capture complex interactions among the key influential parameters.

Dataset Description

- Data sourced from Long Term Pavement Performance Program (LTPP).
- All General Pavement Study (GPS) and Specific Pavement Study (SPS) sections from Texas.
- Dataset include:
 - ✓ Peak deflections in microns (PEAK_DEFL_1 to PEAK_DEFL_3)
 - ✓ Lane number and drop load in kPa
 - ✓ Surface and base temperatures in °F
 - ✓ Surface Curvature Index (SCI)
 - ✓ Thickness of asphalt surface layer in inches (Thickness_L1)
- To ensure uniformity, only records with complete deflection basins and valid modulus records were retained.

Methodology

- Developed a predictive modeling framework to determine asphalt pavement surface layer modulus (Modulus_L1).
- Implemented and compared the following models:
 - a) Multiple Linear Regression
 - b) Random forest Model
 - c) Gradient Boosting Model
 - d) Artificial Neural Network

Correlation Analysis

- To understand if the selected features are non-redundant and improve model stability.
- SCI highly correlated with D1 & D2 - redundant variable.
- Raw deflections (D1–D3) retained for mechanistic relevance.
- Surface & base temperature are highly correlated but physically distinct.
- Thickness_L1 shows negative correlation with modulus.

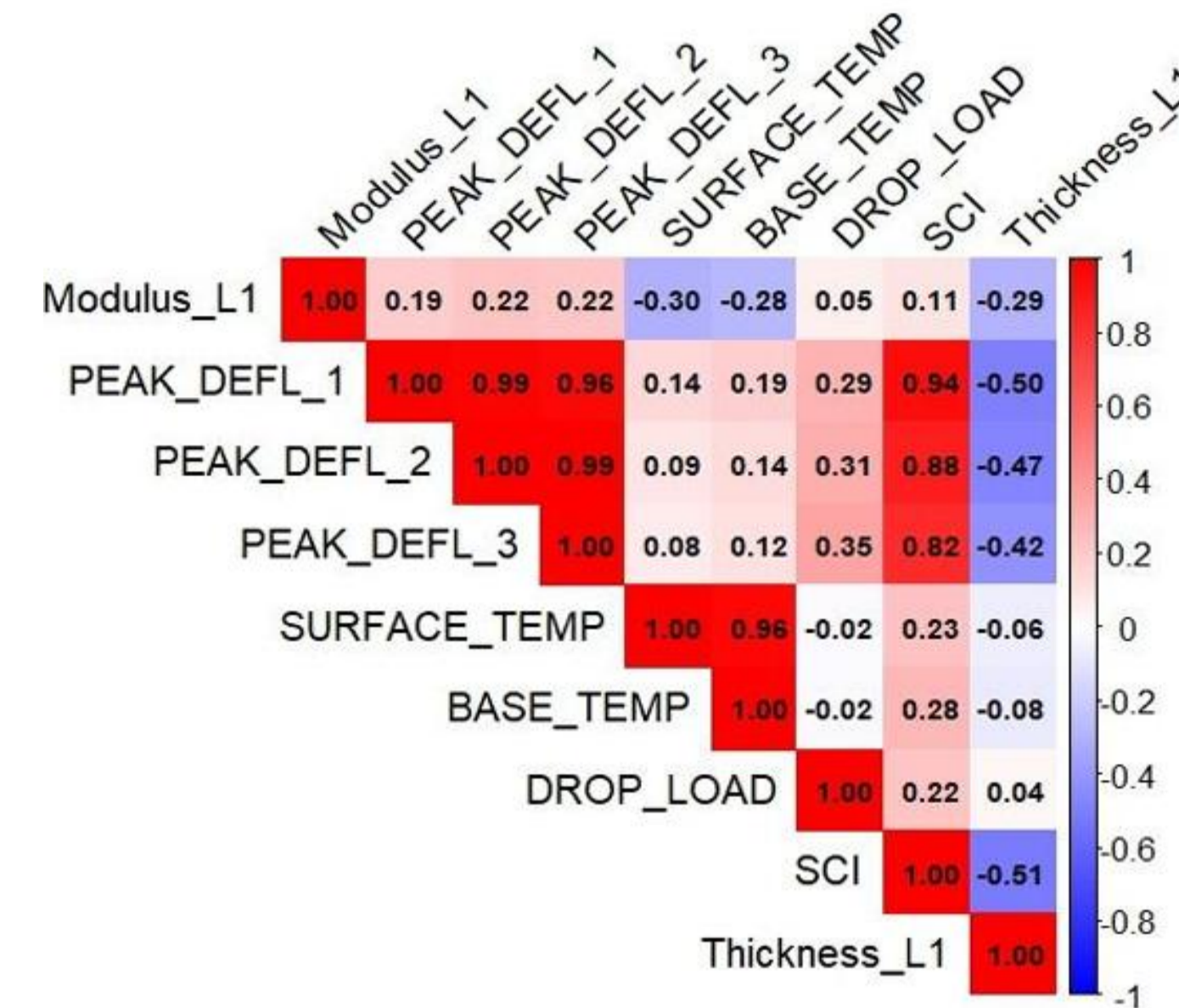


Figure 2. Correlation matrix

Model implementation

a) Multiple Linear Regression

- To establish an interpretable relationship between asphalt surface layer modulus and various predictor variables derived from FWD test.

$$\text{Asphalt surface layer modulus} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{PEAK_DEFL_1} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{PEAK_DEFL_2} + \beta_3 \cdot \text{PEAK_DEFL_3} + \beta_4 \cdot \text{Lane} + \beta_5 \cdot \text{Drop load} + \beta_6 \cdot \text{Surface_temp} + \beta_7 \cdot \text{Base_temp} + \beta_8 \cdot \text{Thickness_L1} + \epsilon$$

b) Random Forest Model

- Captures nonlinear relationships between FWD variables and modulus.
- Resistant to multicollinearity and noise in data.

c) Gradient Boosting Model

- This model was used to capture complex non-linear relationships beyond the limitations of the regression model.
- Target variable: Asphalt surface layer modulus
- Objective function: $L(\phi) = \sum_{i=1}^n l(y_i, \hat{y}_i^{(t)}) + \sum_{k=1}^t \Omega(f_k)$
- Regularization term: $\Omega(f) = Y^T + \frac{1}{2} \lambda \|w\|^2$
- The predicted value is updated iteratively as: $\hat{y}_i^{(t)} = \hat{y}_i^{(t-1)} + f_t(x_i)$ where (x_i) represents the input features.

d) Artificial Neural Network

- A feedforward neural network model was developed with 7 input neurons, 20 hidden neurons, and 1 output neuron as shown in Figure 3.

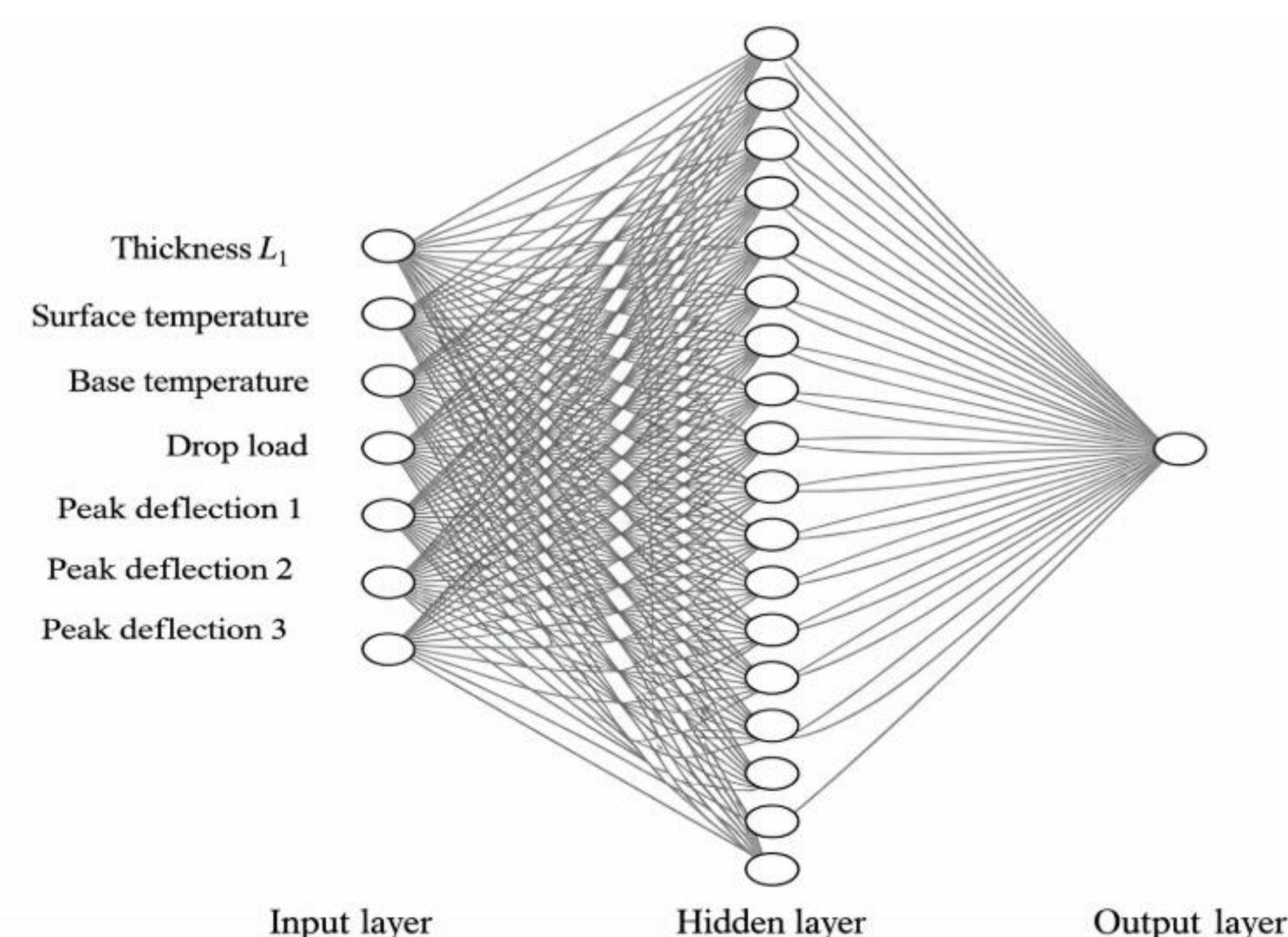


Figure 3. Architecture of Neural Network

Results & Discussion

a) Multiple Linear Regression

Accuracy: 23.9%

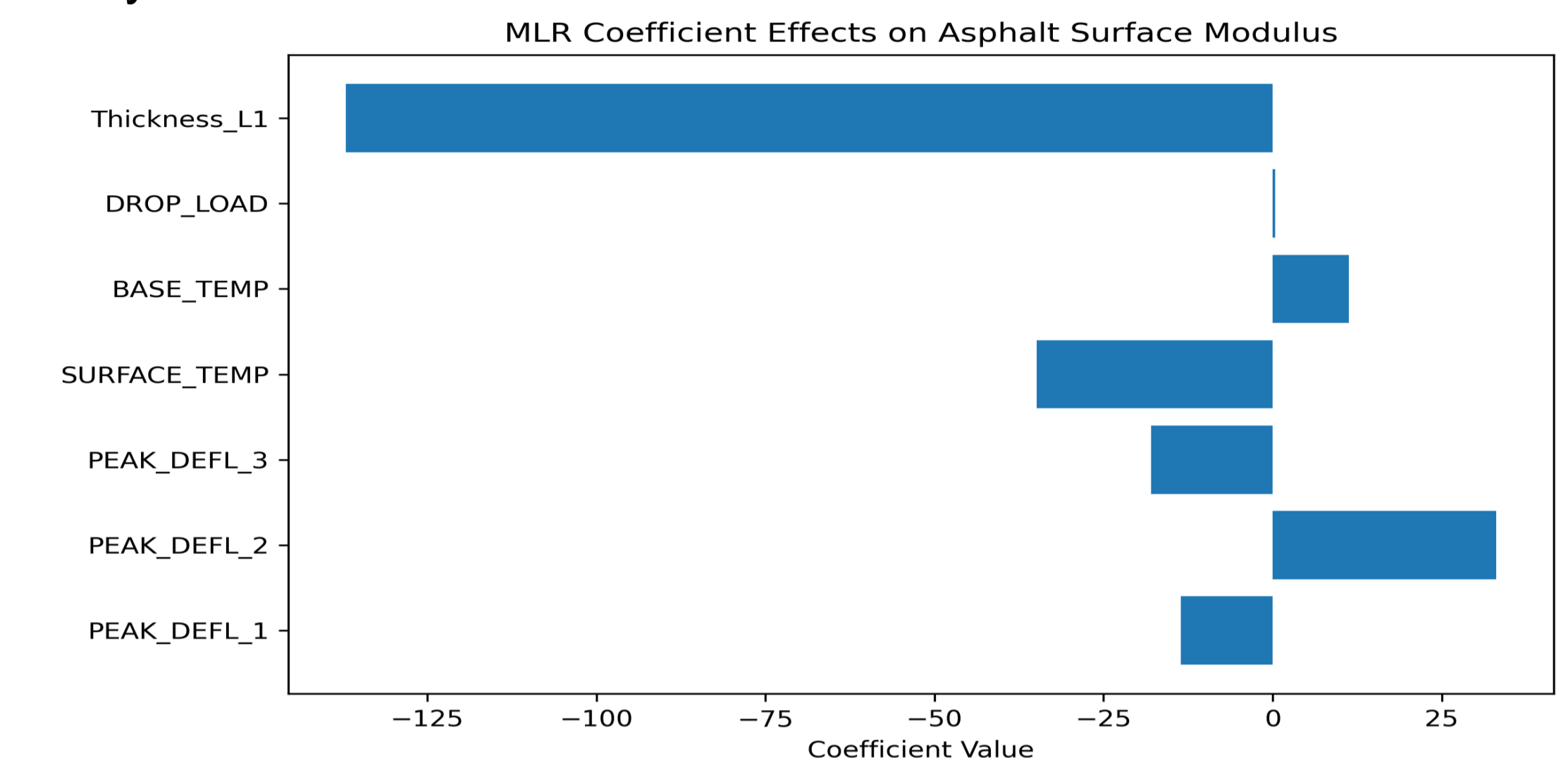


Figure 4. MLR Coefficient Plot

b) Random Forest Model

- Training accuracy: 98.6% and testing accuracy: 94.9%.

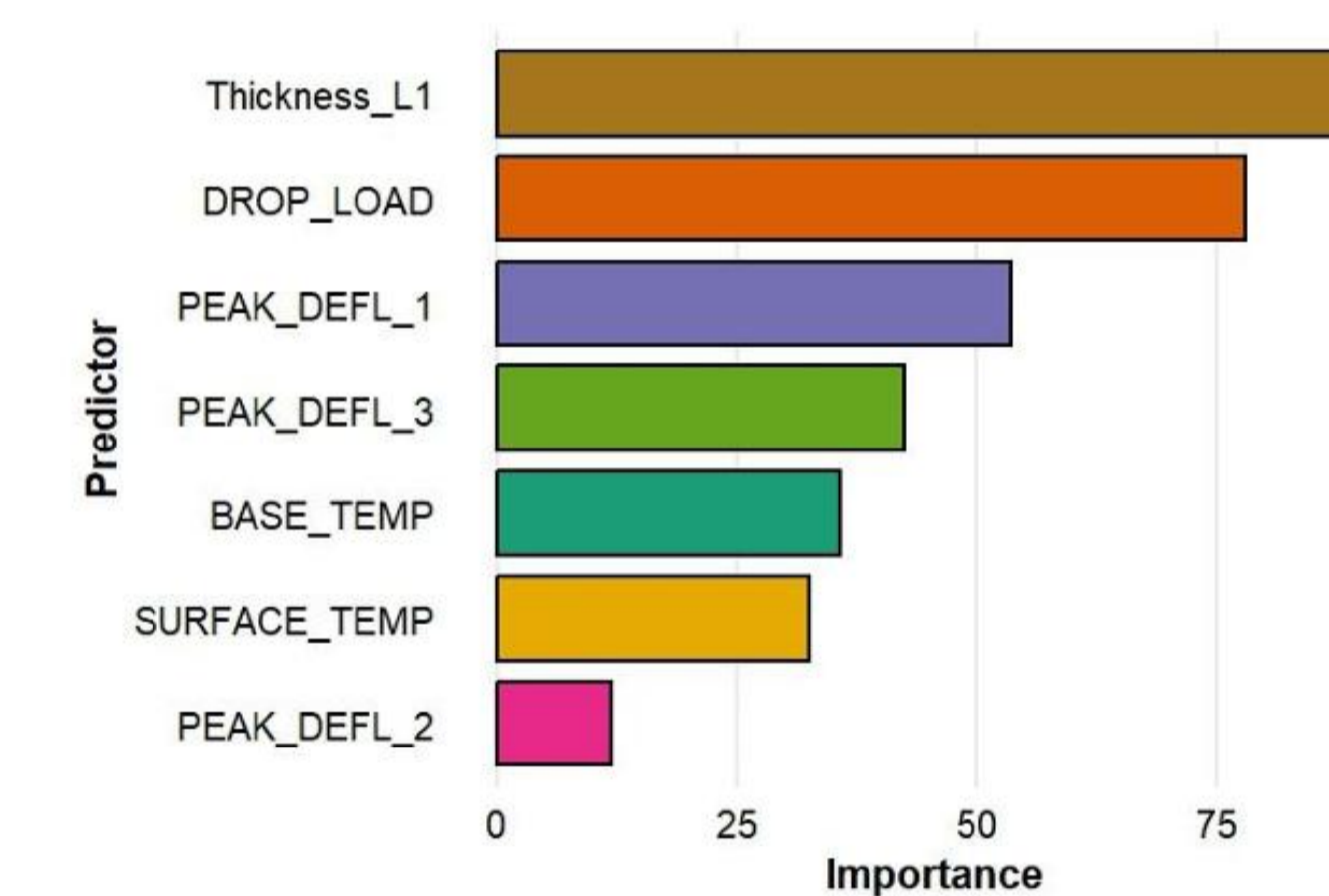


Figure 5. Random Forest Variable Importance

c) Gradient Boosting Model

- Training accuracy: 95.9% and testing accuracy: 92.9%.

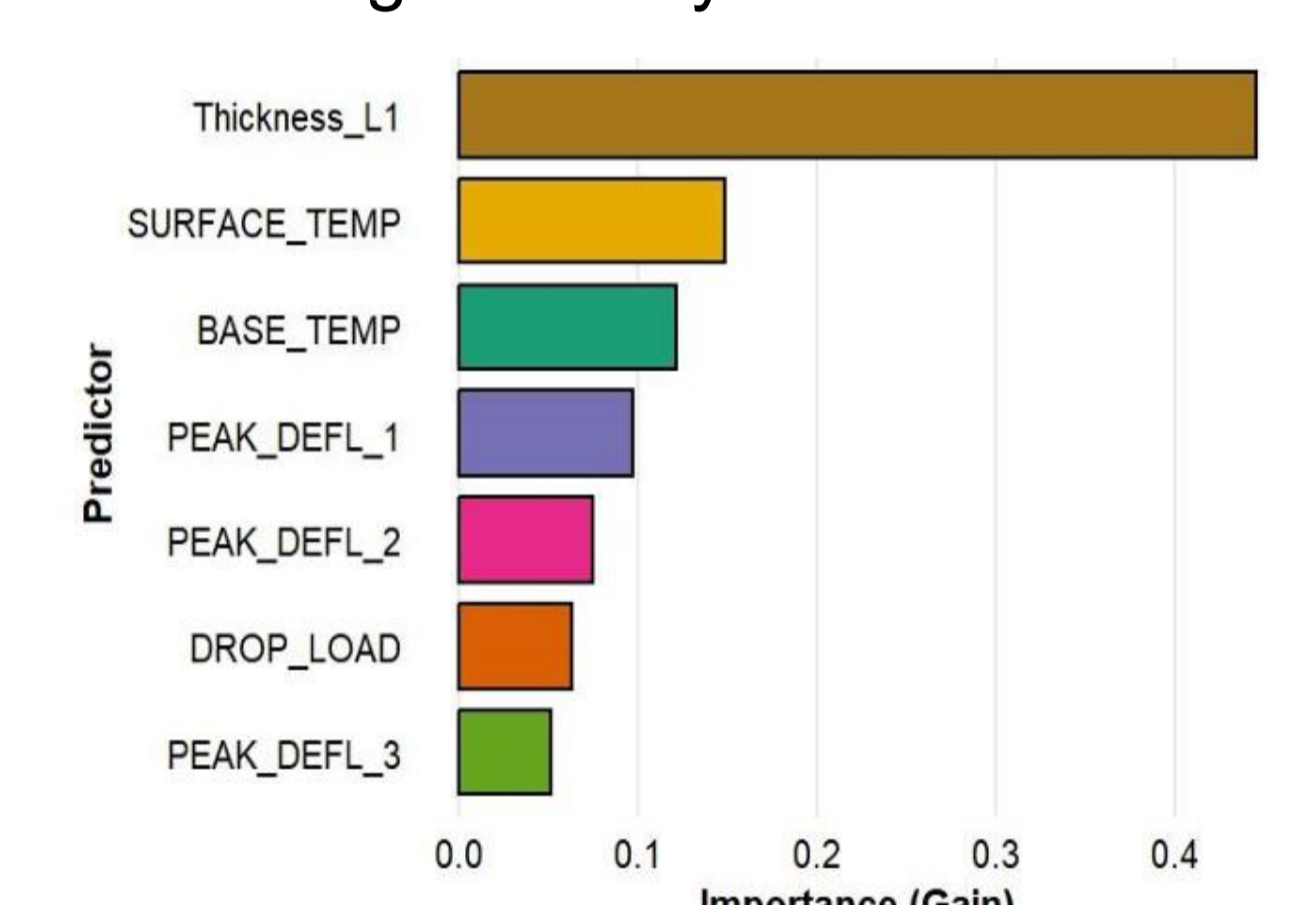


Figure 6. Gradient Boosting Model Variable Importance

d) Artificial Neural Network

- Training accuracy: 85.7% and testing accuracy: 85.3%

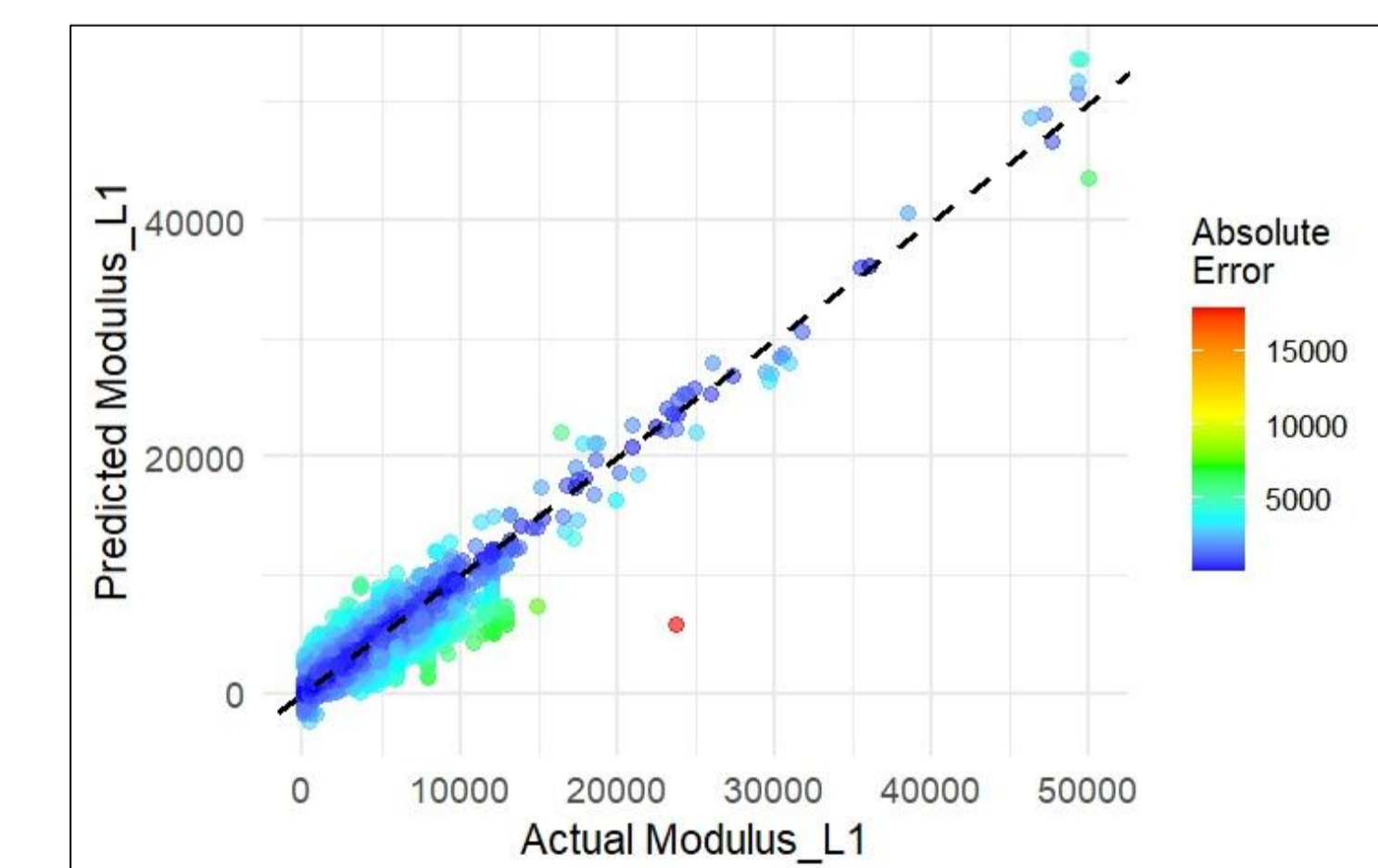


Figure 7. ANN model (Predicted vs Actual)

Conclusions

- The ML-based models for predicting the modulus of asphalt surface layers give high accuracy and provide a fast, efficient alternative to traditional backcalculation methods.
- Asphalt layer thickness, surface temperature, followed by deflections were the strongest predictors.
- The developed models would be evaluated using additional FWD datasets outside the LTPP database.

Acknowledgements

- The authors acknowledge the use of LTPP data, administered by the Federal Highway Administration and travel funding support from CREATE University Transportation Center: Texas State University.