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Use Cases for SF Aware Topology Models
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Abstract

This document describes some use cases that benefit from the network topology models that are service and network function aware.

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Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	2
2.	Terminology	3
3.	Exporting SF/NF Information to Network Clients and Other Network SDN Controllers	4
4.	Flat End-to-end SFCs Managed on Multi-domain Networks	5
5.	Managing SFCs with TE Constraints	6
6.	SFC Protection and Load Balancing	7
7.	Network Clock Synchronization	10
8.	Client - Provider Network Slicing Interface	10
9.	Dynamic Assignment of Regenerators for L0 Services	10
10.	Dynamic Assignment of OAM Functions for L1 Services	12
11.	SFC Abstraction and Scaling	13
12.	Dynamic Compute/VM/Storage Resource Assignment	13
13.	Application-aware Resource Operations and Management	14
14.	IANA Considerations	15
15.	Security Considerations	15
16.	Acknowledgements	15
17.	References	15
17.1.	Normative References	15
17.2.	Informative References	16
	Authors' Addresses	16

[1.](#) Introduction

Normally network connectivity services are discussed as a means to inter-connect various abstract or physical network topological elements, such as ports, link termination points and nodes [[I-D.ietf-teas-yang-te-topo](#)] [[I-D.ietf-teas-yang-te](#)]. However, the connectivity services, strictly speaking, interconnect not the network topology elements per-se, rather, located on/associated with the various network and service functions [[RFC7498](#)] [[RFC7665](#)]. In many scenarios it is beneficial to decouple the service/network functions from the network topology elements hosting them, describe them in some unambiguous and identifiable way (so that it would be possible, for example, to auto-discover on the network topology service/network functions with identical or similar functionality and characteristics) and engineer the connectivity between the service/network functions, rather than between their current topological locations. The purpose of this document is to describe some use cases that could benefit from such an approach.

2. Terminology

- o Network Function (NF): A functional block within a network infrastructure that has well-defined external interfaces and well-defined functional behaviour [[ETSI-NFV-TERM](#)]. Such functions include message router, CDN, session border controller, WAN acceleration, DPI, firewall, NAT, QoE monitor, PE router, BRAS, and radio/fixed access network nodes.
- o Network Service: Composition of Network Functions and defined by its functional and behavioural specification. The Network Service contributes to the behaviour of the higher layer service, which is characterized by at least performance, dependability, and security specifications. The end-to-end network service behaviour is the result of the combination of the individual network function behaviours as well as the behaviours of the network infrastructure composition mechanism [[ETSI-NFV-TERM](#)].
- o Service Function (SF): A function that is responsible for specific treatment of received packets. A service function can act at various layers of a protocol stack (e.g., at the network layer or other OSI layers). As a logical component, a service function can be realized as a virtual element or be embedded in a physical network element. One or more service functions can be embedded in the same network element. Multiple occurrences of the service function can exist in the same administrative domain. A non-exhaustive list of service functions includes: firewalls, WAN and application acceleration, Deep Packet Inspection (DPI), server load balancers, NAT44 [[RFC3022](#)], NAT64 [[RFC6146](#)], HTTP header enrichment functions, and TCP optimizers. The generic term "L4-L7 services" is often used to describe many service functions [[RFC7498](#)].
- o Service Function Chain (SFC): A service function chain defines an ordered or partially ordered set of abstract service functions and ordering constraints that must be applied to packets, frames, and/or flows selected as a result of classification. An example of an abstract service function is a firewall. The implied order may not be a linear progression as the architecture allows for SFCs that copy to more than one branch, and also allows for cases where there is flexibility in the order in which service functions need to be applied. The term "service chain" is often used as shorthand for "service function chain" [[RFC7498](#)].
- o Connectivity Service: Any service between layer 0 and layer 3 aiming at delivering traffic among two or more end customer edge nodes connected to provider edge nodes. Examples include L3VPN, L2VPN etc.

- o Link Termination Point (LTP): A conceptual point of connection of a TE node to one of the TE links, terminated by the TE node. Cardinality between an LTP and the associated TE link is 1:0..1 [[I-D.ietf-teas-yang-te-topo](#)].
- o Tunnel Termination Point (TTP): An element of TE topology representing one or several of potential transport service termination points (i.e. service client adaptation points such as WDM/OCh transponder). TTP is associated with (hosted by) exactly one TE node. TTP is assigned with the TE node scope unique ID. Depending on the TE node's internal constraints, a given TTP hosted by the TE node could be accessed via one, several or all TE links terminated by the TE node [[I-D.ietf-teas-yang-te-topo](#)].

3. Exporting SF/NF Information to Network Clients and Other Network SDN Controllers

In the context of Service Function Chain (SFC) orchestration one existing problem is that there is no way to formally describe a Service or Network Function in a standard way (recognizable/understood by a third party) as a resource of a network topology node.

One implication of this is that there is no way for the orchestrator to give a network client even a ball-park idea as to which network's SFs/NFs are available for the client's use/control and where they are located in the network even in terms of abstract topologies/virtual networks configured and managed specifically for the client. Consequently, the client has no say on how the SFCs provided for the client by the network should be set up and managed (which SFs are to be used and how they should be chained together, optimized, manipulated, protected, etc.).

Likewise, there is no way for the orchestrator to export SF/NF information to other network controllers. The SFC orchestrator may serve, for example, a higher level controller (such as Network Slicing Orchestrator), with the latter wanting at least some level of control as to which SFs/NFs it wants on its SFCs and how the Service Function Paths (SFPs) are to be routed and provisioned, especially, if it uses services of more than one SFC orchestrator.

The issue of exporting of SF/NF information could be addressed by defining a model, in which formally described/recognizable SF/NF instances are presented as topological elements, for example, hosted by TE, L3 or L2 topology nodes (see Figure 1). The model could describe whether, how and at what costs the SFs/NFs hosted by a given node could be chained together, how these intra-node SFCs could be connected to the node's Service Function Forwarders (SFFs, entities

dealing with SFC NSHs and metadata), and how the SFFs could be connected to the node's Tunnel and Link Termination Points (TTPs and LTPs) to chain the intra-node SFCs across the network topology.

The figure is available in the PDF format.

Figure 1: SF/NF aware TE topology

4. Flat End-to-end SFCs Managed on Multi-domain Networks

SFCs may span multiple administrative domains, each of which controlled by a separate SFC controller. The usual solution for such a scenario is the Hierarchical SFCs (H-SFCs), in which the higher level orchestrator controls only SFs located on domain border nodes. Said higher level SFs are chained together into higher level SFCs via lower level (intra-domain) SFCs provisioned and controlled independently by respective domain controllers. The decision as to which higher level SFCs are connected to which lower level SFCs is driven by packet re-classification every time the packet enters a given domain. Said packet re-classification is a very time-consuming operation. Furthermore, the independent nature of higher and lower level SFC control is prone to configuration errors, which may lead to long lasting loops and congestions. It is highly desirable to be able to set up and manage SFCs spanning multiple domains in a flat way as far as the data plane is concerned (i.e. with a single packet classification at the ingress into the multi-domain network but without re-classifications on domain ingress nodes).

One way to achieve this is to have the domain controllers expose SF/NF-aware topologies, and have the higher level orchestrator operate on the network-wide topology, the product of merging of the topologies catered by the domain controllers. This is similar in spirit to setting up, coordinating and managing the transport connectivity (TE tunnels) on a multi-domain multi-vendor transport network.

5. Managing SFCs with TE Constraints

Some SFCs require per SFC link/element and end-to-end TE constraints (bandwidth, delay/jitter, fate sharing/diversity. etc.). Said constraints could be ensured via carrying SFPs inside overlays that are traffic engineered with the constraints in mind. A good analogy would be orchestrating delay constrained L3 VPNs. One way to support such L3 VPNs is to carry MPLS LSPs interconnecting per-VPN VRFs inside delay constrained TE tunnels interconnecting the PEs hosting the VRFs.

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Figure 2: L3 VPN with delay constraints

Planning, computing and provisioning of TE overlays to constrain arbitrary SFCs, especially those that span multiple administrative domains with each domain controlled by a separate controller, is a very difficult challenge. Currently it is addressed by pre-provisioning on the network of multiple TE tunnels with various TE characteristics, and "nailing down" SFs/NFs to "strategic" locations (e.g. nodes terminating many of such tunnels) in a hope that an adequate set of tunnels could be found to carry the SFP of a given TE-constrained SFC. Such an approach is especially awkward in the case when some or all of the SFs/NFs are VNFs (i.e. could be instantiated at multiple network locations).

SF/NF-aware TE topology model in combination with TE tunnel model will allow for the network orchestrator (or a client controller) to compute, set up and manipulate the TE overlays in the form of TE tunnel chains (see Figure 3).

Said chains could be dual-optimized compromising on optimal SF/NF locations with optimal TE tunnels interconnecting them. The TE tunnel chains (carrying multiple similarly constrained SFPs) could be adequately constrained both at individual TE tunnel level and at the chain end-to-end level.

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Figure 3: SFC with TE constraints

6. SFC Protection and Load Balancing

Currently the combination of TE topology & tunnel models offers to a network controller various capabilities to recover an individual TE tunnel from network failures occurred on one or more network links or transit nodes on the TE paths taken by the TE tunnel's connection(s). However, there is no simple way to recover a TE tunnel from a failure affecting its source or destination node. SF/NF-aware TE topology model can decouple the association of a given SF/NF with its location on the network topology by presenting multiple, identifiable as mutually substitutable SFs/NFs hosted by different TE topology nodes. So, for example, if it is detected that a given TE tunnel destination node is malfunctioning or has gone out of service, the TE tunnel

could be re-routed to terminate on a different node hosting functionally the same SFs/NFs as ones hosted by the failed node (see Figures 6).

This is in line with the ACTN edge migration and function mobility concepts [[I-D.ietf-teas-actn-framework](#)]. It is important to note that the described strategy works much better for the stateless SFs/NFs. This is because getting the alternative stateful SFs/NFs into the same respective states as the current (i.e. active, affected by failure) are is a very difficult challenge.

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Figure 4: SFC recovery: SF2 on node NE1 fails

At the SFC level the SF/NF-aware TE topology model can offer SFC dynamic restoration capabilities against failed/malfunctioning SFs/NFs by identifying and provisioning detours to a TE tunnel chain, so that it starts carrying the SFC's SFPs towards healthy SFs/NFs that are functionally the same as the failed ones. Furthermore, multiple parallel TE tunnel chains could be pre-provisioned for the purpose of SFC load balancing and end-to-end protection. In the latter case said parallel TE tunnel chains could be placed to be sufficiently disjoint from each other.

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Figure 5: SFC recovery: SFC SF1-SF2-SF6 is recovered after SF2 on node N1 has failed

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Figure 6: SFC recovery: SFC SF1-SF2-SF6 is recovered after node N1 has failed

7. Network Clock Synchronization

Many current and future network applications (including 5g and IoT applications) require very accurate time services (PTP level, ns resolution). One way to implement the adequate network clock synchronization for such services is via describing network clocks as NFs on an NF-aware TE topology optimized to have best possible delay variation characteristics. Because such a topology will contain delay/delay variation metrics of topology links and node cross-connects, as well as costs in terms of delay/delay variation of connecting clocks to hosting them node link and tunnel termination points, it will be possible to dynamically select and provision bi-directional time-constrained deterministic paths or trees connecting clocks (e.g. grand master and boundary clocks) for the purpose of exchange of clock synchronization information. Note that network clock aware TE topologies separately provided by domain controllers will enable multi-domain network orchestrator to set up and manipulate the clock synchronization paths/trees spanning multiple network domains.

8. Client - Provider Network Slicing Interface

3GPP defines network slice as "a set of network functions and the resources for these network functions which are arranged and configured, forming a complete logical network to meet certain network characteristics" [[I-D.defoy-netslices-3gpp-network-slicing](#)] [[3GPP.28.801](#)]. Network slice could be also defined as a logical partition of a provider's network that is owned and managed by a tenant. SF/NF-aware TE topology model has a potential to support a very important interface between network slicing clients and providers because, on the one hand, the model can describe holistically and hierarchically the client's requirements and preferences with respect to a network slice functional, topological and traffic engineering aspects, as well as of the degree of resource separation/ sharing between the slices, thus allowing for the client (up to agreed upon extent) to dynamically (re-)configure the slice or (re-)schedule said (re-)configurations in time, while, on the other hand, allowing for the provider to convey to the client the slice's operational state information and telemetry the client has expressed interest in.

9. Dynamic Assignment of Regenerators for L0 Services

On large optical networks, some of provided to their clients L0 services could not be provisioned as single OCh trails, rather, as chains of such trails interconnected via regenerators, such as 3R regenerators. Current practice of the provisioning of such services requires configuration of explicit paths (EROs) describing identity

and location of regenerators to be used. A solution is highly desirable that could:

- o Identify such services based, for example, on optical impairment computations;
- o Assign adequate for the services regenerators dynamically out of the regenerators that are grouped together in pools and strategically scattered over the network topology nodes;
- o Compute and provision supporting the services chains of optical trails interconnected via so selected regenerators, optimizing the chains to use minimal number of regenerators, their optimal locations, as well as optimality of optical paths interconnecting them;
- o Ensure recovery of such chains from any failures that could happen on links, nodes or regenerators along the chain path.

NF-aware TE topology model (in this case L1 NF-aware L0 topology model) is just the model that could provide a network controller (or even a client controller operating on abstract NF-aware topologies provided by the network) to realize described above computations and orchestrate the service provisioning and network failure recovery operations (see Figure 7).

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Figure 7: Optical tunnel as TE-constrained SFC of 3R regenerators.
Red trail (not regenerated) is not optically reachable, but blue
trail (twice regenerated) is

10. Dynamic Assignment of OAM Functions for L1 Services

OAM functionality is normally managed by configuring and manipulating TCM/MEP functions on network ports terminating connections or their segments over which OAM operations, such as performance monitoring, are required to be performed. In some layer networks (e.g. Ethernet) said TCMs/MEPs could be configured on any network ports. In others (e.g. OTN/ODUK) the TCMs/MEPs could be configured on some (but not all network ports) due to the fact that the OAM functionality (i.e. recognizing and processing of OAM messages, supporting OAM protocols and FSMs) requires in these layer networks certain support in the data plane, which is not available on all network nodes. This makes TCMs/MEPs good candidates to be modeled as NFs. This also makes TCM/MEP aware topology model a good basis for placing dynamically an ODUK connection to pass through optimal OAM locations without mandating the client to specify said locations explicitly.

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Figure 8: Compute/storage resource aware topology

11. SFC Abstraction and Scaling

SF/NF-aware topology may contain information on native SFs/NFs (i.e. SFs/NFs as known to the provider itself) and/or abstract SFs/NFs (i.e. logical/macro SFs/NFs representing one or more SFCs each made of native and/or lower level abstract SFs/NFs). As in the case of abstracting topology nodes, abstracting SFs/NFs is hierarchical in nature - the higher level of SF/NF-aware topology, the "larger" abstract SFs/NFs are, i.e. the larger data plane SFCs they represent. This allows for managing large scale networks with great number of SFs/NFs (such as Data Center interconnects) in a hierarchical, highly scalable manner resulting in control of very large number of flat in the data plane SFCs that span multiple domains.

12. Dynamic Compute/VM/Storage Resource Assignment

In a distributed data center network, virtual machines for compute resources may need to be dynamically re-allocated due to various reasons such as DCI network failure, compute resource load balancing, etc. In many cases, the DCI connectivity for the source and the destination is not predetermined. There may be a pool of sources and a pool of destination data centers associated with re-allocation of compute/VM/storage resources. There is no good mechanism to date to capture this dynamicity nature of compute/VM/storage resource reallocation. Generic Compute/VM/Storage resources can be described and announced as a SF, where a DC hosting these resources can be modeled as an abstract node. Topology interconnecting these abstract nodes (DCs) in general is of multi-domain nature. Thus, SF-aware topology model can facilitate a joint optimization of TE network resources and Compute/VM/Storage resources and solve Compute/VM/Storage mobility problem within and between DCs (see Figure 8).

13. Application-aware Resource Operations and Management

Application stratum is the functional grouping which encompasses application resources and the control and management of these resources. These application resources are used along with network services to provide an application service to clients/end-users. Application resources are non-network resources critical to achieving the application service functionality. Examples of application resources include: caches, mirrors, application specific servers, content, large data sets, and computing power. Application service is a networked application offered to a variety of clients (e.g., server backup, VM migration, video cache, virtual network on-demand, 5G network slicing, etc.). The application servers that host these application resources can be modeled as an abstract node. There may be a variety of server types depending on the resources they host. Figure 9 shows one example application aware topology for video cache server distribution.

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Figure 9: Application aware topology

14. IANA Considerations

This document has no actions for IANA.

15. Security Considerations

This document does not define networking protocols and data, hence is not directly responsible for security risks.

16. Acknowledgements

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