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Z. Cao
China Mobile
X. He
Hitachi (China) Research and
Development Corporation
M. Kovatsch
ETH Zurich
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Energy Efficient Implementation of IETF Protocols on Constrained Devices
[draft-hex-lwig-energy-efficient-00](#)

Abstract

This document summarizes the problems and current practices of energy efficient protocol implementation on constrained devices, mostly about how to make the protocols within IETF scope behave energy friendly.

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Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	3
1.1.	Conventions used in this document	3
1.2.	Terminology	3
2.	Overview	4
3.	MAC and Radio Duty Cycling	5
4.	IP Adaption and Transport Layer	6
5.	Routing Protocols	6
6.	Application Layer	7
7.	Cross Layer Optimization	7
8.	Summary	7
9.	IANA Considerations	8
10.	Security Considerations	8
11.	References	8
11.1.	Normative References	8
11.2.	Informative References	9
	Authors' Addresses	9

1. Introduction

In many scenarios of embedded systems, the networked system is composed of many battery-powered devices. For example, in an environmental monitoring system or a temperature and humidity monitoring system in the data center, there are no always-on and handy sustained power supplies for the large number of small devices. In such deployment environments, it is necessary to optimize the energy consumption of the entire system, including computing, application layer behavior, and lower layer communication.

Various research efforts have been spent on this "energy efficiency" problem. Most of this research has focused on how to optimize the system's power consumption regarding a certain deployment scenario or how could an existing network function such as routing or security be more energy-efficient. Only few efforts were spent on energy-efficient designs for IETF protocols and standardized network stacks for such constrained devices [[I-D.kovatsch-lwig-class1-coap](#)].

The IETF has developed a suite of Internet protocols suitable for such small devices, including 6LoWPAN [[RFC6282](#)], 6LoWPAN-ND [[RFC6775](#)], RPL[RFC6550], and CoAP[I-D.ietf-core-coap]. This document tries to summarize the design considerations of making the IETF protocol suite as energy-efficient as possible. While this document does not provide detailed and systematic solutions to the energy efficiency problem, it summarizes the design efforts and analyzes the design space of this problem.

After reviewing the energy-efficient design of each layer, an overall conclusion is summarized. Though the lower layer communication optimization is the key part of energy efficient design, the protocol design at the network and application layers is also important to make the device battery-friendly.

1.1. Conventions used in this document

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in [[RFC2119](#)]

1.2. Terminology

The terminologies used in this document can be referred to [[I-D.bormann-lwig-terms](#)].

2. Overview

The IETF has developed multiple protocols to enable end-to-end IP communication between constrained nodes and fully capable nodes. This work has witnessed the evolution of the traditional Internet protocol stack to a light-weight Internet protocol stack. As show in Figure 1 below, the IETF has developed CoAP as the application layer and 6LoWPAN as the adaption layer to run IPv6 over IEEE 802.15.4 and Bluetooth Low-Energy, with the support of routing by RPL and efficient neighbor discovery by 6LoWPAN-ND.

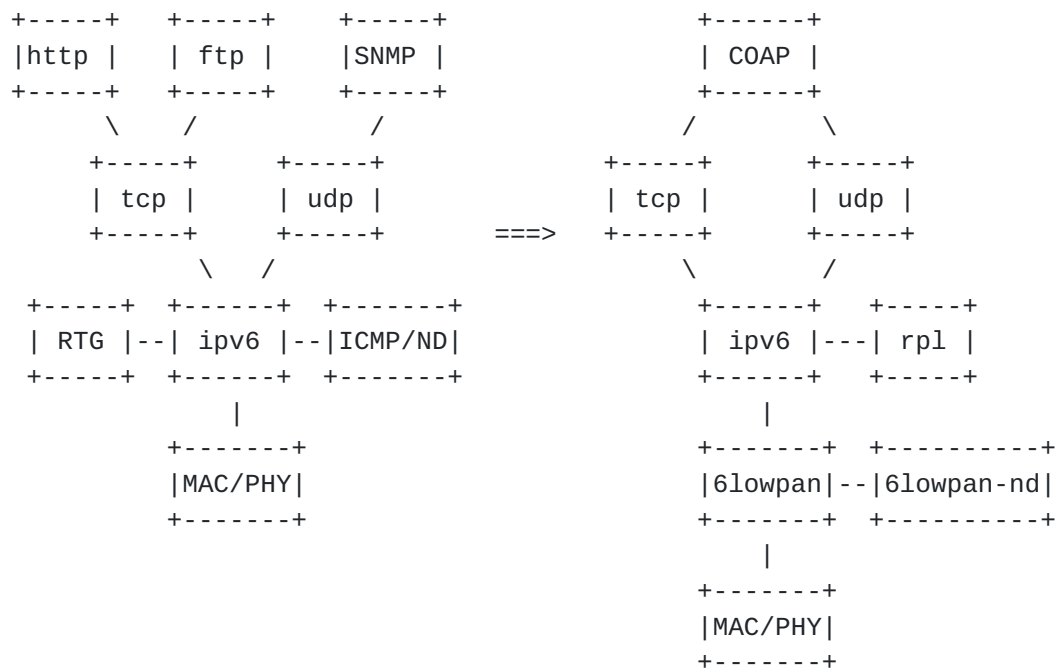


Figure 1: Traditional and Lightweight Internet Protocol Stack

There are comprehensive measurements of wireless communication [[Powertrace](#)]. Below we list the energy consumption profile of the most common atom operations on a prevalent sensor node platform. The measurement was based on the Tmote Sky with ContikiMAC as the radio duty cycling algorithm. From the measurement, we can see that optimized transmissions and reception consume almost the same amount of energy. For IEEE 802.15.4 and UWB radios, transmitting is actually even cheaper than receiving. Only for broadcast and non-synchronized communication transmissions become costly in terms of energy because they need to flood the medium for a long time.

Activity	Energy (uJ)
Broadcast reception	178
Unicast reception	222
Broadcast transmission	1790
Non-synchronized unicast transmission	1090
Synchronized unicast transmission	120
Unicast TX to awake receiver	96

Figure 2: Power consumption of atom operations on the Tmote Sky with ContikiMAC

3. MAC and Radio Duty Cycling

In low-power wireless networks, communication and power consumption are intertwined. The communication device is typically the most power-consuming component, but merely refraining from transmissions is not enough to attain a low power consumption: the radio consumes as much power in listen mode as when actively transmitting, as show in Figure 2 . To reduce power consumption, the radio must be switched completely off -- duty-cycled -- as much as possible. ContikiMAC is a very typical Radio Duty Cycling protocol [[ContikiMAC](#)].

From the perspective of MAC&RDC, all upper layer protocols, such as routing, RESTful communication, adaption, and management flows, are all applications. Since the duty cycling algorithm is the key to energy-efficiency of the wireless medium, it synchronizes the TX/RX request from the higher layer.

The MAC&RDC are not in the scope of the IETF, yet lower layer designers and chipset manufactures take great care of the problem. For the IETF protocol designers, however, it is good to know the behaviors of lower layers so that the designed protocols can work perfectly with them.

Once again, the IETF protocols we are going to talk about in the following sections are the customers of the lower layer. If they want to get better service in a cooperative way, they should be considerative and understand each other.

4. IP Adaption and Transport Layer

6LoWPAN is the adaption layer to run IPv6 over IEEE 802.15.4 MAC&PHY. It was born to fill the gap that the IPv6 layer does not support fragmentation and assembly of <1280-byte packets while IEEE 802.15.4 only supports a MTU of 127 bytes.

IPv6 is the basis for the higher layer protocols, including both TCP/UDP transport and applications. So they are quite ignorant of the transmission and reception behaviors, and are almost neutral to the energy-efficiency problem.

What the network stack can optimize is to save the computing power. For example the Contiki implementation has multiple cross layer optimizations for buffers and energy management, e.g., the computing and validation of UDP/TCP checksums without the need of reading IP headers from a different layer. These optimizations are software implementation techniques, and out of the scope of IETF and the LWIG working group.

The 6LoWPAN contributes to the energy-efficiency problem in two ways. First of all, it swaps computing with communication. 6LoWPAN applies compression of the IPv6 header. This means less amount of data will be handled by the lower layer, but both the sender and receiver should spend more computing power on the compression and decompression of the packets over the air. Secondly, the 6LoWPAN working group developed the energy-efficient Neighbor Discovery called 6LoWPAN-ND, which is an energy efficient replacement of the IPv6 ND in constrained environments. IPv6 Neighbor Discovery was not designed for non-transitive wireless links, as its heavy use of multicast makes it inefficient and sometimes impractical in a low-power and lossy network. 6LoWPAN-ND describes simple optimizations to IPv6 Neighbor Discovery, its addressing mechanisms, and duplicate address detection for Low-power Wireless Personal Area Networks and similar networks.

5. Routing Protocols

The routing protocol designed by the IETF for constrained environments is called RPL [[RFC6550](#)]. As a routing protocol, RPL has to exchange messages periodically and keep routing states for each destination. RPL is optimized for the many-to-one communication pattern, where network nodes primarily send data towards the border router, but has provisions for any-to-any routing as well.

The authors of the Powertrace tool studied the power profile of RPL. It divides the routing protocol into control and data traffic. The

control channel uses ICMP messages to establish and maintain the routing states. The data channel is any application that uses RPL for routing packets. The study has shown that the power consumption of the control traffic goes down over time and data traffic stays relatively constant. The study also reflects that the routing protocol should keep the control traffic as low as possible to make it energy-friendly.

6. Application Layer

CoAP [[I-D.ietf-core-coap](#)] was designed as a RESTful application protocol, connecting the services of smart devices to the World Wide Web. CoAP is not a chatty protocol, it provides basic communication services such as service discovery and GET/POST/PUT/DELETE methods with a binary header.

The energy-efficient design is implicitly included in the CoAP protocol design. To reduce regular and frequent queries of the resources, CoAP provides an observe mode, in which the requester registers its interest of a certain resource and the responder will report the value whenever it was updated. This reduces the request response roundtrip while keeping information exchange a ubiquitous service.

7. Cross Layer Optimization

The cross layer optimization is a technique used in many scenarios. There are some technologies for power efficient optimization via PHY to Routing cross layer design [[Cross-layer-Optimization](#)]. In this research, cross-layer optimization frameworks have been developed to minimize the total power consumption or to maximize the utility-power tradeoff using cooperative diversity.

Also a cross-layer design in multihop wireless networks is proposed for congestion control, routing and scheduling--in transport, network and link layers into a coherent framework [[Cross-layer-design](#)]. This method and thinking could be applied to the implementation of energy effective cross layer design.

8. Summary

We find a summary section necessary although most IETF documents do not contain it. The points we would like to summarize are as follows.

- a. All Internet protocols, which are in the scope of the IETF, are customers of the lower layers (PHY, MAC, and Duty-cycling). In order to get a better service, the designers of higher layers should know them better.
- b. The IETF has developed multiple protocols for constrained networked devices. A lot of implicitly included design principles have been used in these protocols.
- c. The power trace analysis of different protocol operations showed that for radio-duty-cycled networks broadcasts should be avoided. Saving unnecessary states maintenance is also an effective method to be energy-friendly.

9. IANA Considerations

This document has no IANA requests.

10. Security Considerations

This document discusses the energy efficient protocol design, and does not incur any changes or challenges on security issues besides what the protocol specifications have analyzed.

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Authors' Addresses

Zhen Cao (Ed.)
China Mobile
Xuanwumenxi Ave. No.32
Beijing, 100871
P.R.China

Phone:
Email: zehn.cao@gmail.com, caozhen@chinamobile.com

Xuan He
Hitachi (China) Research and Development Corporation
301, Tower C North, Raycom, 2 Kexuyuan Nanlu, Haidian District
Beijing, 100190
P.R.China

Phone:
Fax:
Email: xhe@hitachi.cn
URI:

Matthias Kovatsch
ETH Zurich
Universitaetstrasse 6
Zurich, CH-8092
Switzerland

Phone:
Fax:
Email: kovatsch@inf.ethz.ch
URI:

