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Support for multiple clock rates in an RTP session  
draft-ietf-avtext-multiple-clock-rates-01

Abstract

This document clarifies the RTP specification when different clock rates are used in an RTP session. It also provides guidance on how to interoperate with legacy RTP implementations that use multiple clock rates.

Status of this Memo

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## 1. Introduction

The clock rate is a parameter of the payload format. It is often defined as been the same as the sampling rate but it is not always the case (see e.g. the G722 and MPA audio codecs in [\[RFC3551\]](#)).

An RTP sender can switch between different payloads during the lifetime of an RTP session and because clock rates are defined by payload types, it is possible that the clock rate also varies during an RTP session. RTP [\[RFC3550\]](#) lists using multiple clock rates as one of the reasons to not use different payloads on the same SSRC but unfortunately this advice was not always followed and some RTP implementations change the payload in the same SSRC even if the different payloads use different clock rates.

This creates three problems:

- o The method used to calculate the RTP timestamp field in an RTP packet is underspecified.
- o When the same SSRC is used for different clock rates, it is difficult to know what clock rate was used for the RTP timestamp field in an RTCP SR packet.
- o When the same SSRC is used for different clock rates, it is difficult to know what clock rate was used for the interarrival jitter field in an RTCP RR packet.

Table 1 contains a non-exhaustive list of fields in RTCP packets that uses a clock rate as unit:

| Field name          | RTCP packet type | Reference                 |
|---------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| RTP timestamp       | SR               | <a href="#">[RFC3550]</a> |
| Interarrival jitter | RR               | <a href="#">[RFC3550]</a> |
| min_jitter          | XR Summary Block | <a href="#">[RFC3611]</a> |
| max_jitter          | XR Summary Block | <a href="#">[RFC3611]</a> |
| mean_jitter         | XR Summary Block | <a href="#">[RFC3611]</a> |

|                     |                  |                             |  |
|---------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| dev_jitter          | XR Summary Block | [ <a href="#">RFC3611</a> ] |  |
| Interarrival jitter | IJ               | [ <a href="#">RFC5450</a> ] |  |
| RTP timestamp       | SMPTE TC         | [ <a href="#">RFC5484</a> ] |  |
| Jitter              | RSI Jitter Block | [ <a href="#">RFC5760</a> ] |  |
| Median jitter       | RSI Stats Block  | [ <a href="#">RFC5760</a> ] |  |
| +-----+-----+-----+ |                  |                             |  |

Table 1

This document first tries to list in [Section 2](#) and subsections all known algorithms used in existing RTP implementations at the time of writing. This sections are not normative.

[Section 4](#) and subsections then recommend a unique algorithm that modifies [[RFC3550](#)]. This sections are normative.

[Section 5](#) and subsections then analyze what happen when the legacy algorithms listed in [Section 2](#) are used with the new algorithm listed in [Section 4](#). This sections are not normative.

## 2. Legacy RTP

The following sections describe the various ways legacy RTP implementations behave when multiple clock rates are used. Legacy RTP refers to [RFC 3550](#) without the modifications introduced by this document.

[[We need to list here all the methods used in the field. Please send them to the author. NDA can be arranged if needed]]

### 2.1. Different SSRC

One way of managing multiple clock rates is to use a different SSRC for each different clock rate, as in this case there is no ambiguity on the clock rate used by fields in the RTCP packets. This method also seems to be the original intent of RTP as can be deduced from points 2 and 3 of [section 5.2 of RFC 3550](#).

On the other hand changing the SSRC can be a problem for some implementations designed to work only with unicast IP addresses, where having multiple SSRCs is considered a corner case. Lip

synchronization can also be a problem in the interval between the beginning of the new stream and the first RTCP SR packet. This is not different than what happen at the beginning of the RTP session but it can be more annoying for the end-user.

## 2.2. Same SSRC

The simplest way of managing multiple clock rates is to use the same SSRC for all the payload types regardless of the clock rates.

Unfortunately there is no clear definition on how the RTP timestamp should be calculated in this case. The following subsection presents one algorithm used in the field.

### 2.2.1. Monotonic timestamps

The most common method of calculating the RTP timestamp ensures that the value increases monotonically. The formula used by this method is as follow:

$$\text{timestamp} = \text{previous\_timestamp} + (\text{current\_capture\_time} - \text{previous\_capture\_time}) * \text{current\_clock\_rate}$$

The problem with this method is that the jitter calculation on the receiving side gives invalid result during the transition between two clock rates, as shown in Table 2. The capture and arrival time are in seconds, starting at the beginning of the capture of the first packet; clock rate is in Hz; the RTP timestamp does not include the random offset; the transit, jitter, and average jitter use the clock rate as unit.

| Capt. time | Clock rate | RTP timestamp | Arrival time | Transit | Jitter | Average jitter |
|------------|------------|---------------|--------------|---------|--------|----------------|
| 0          | 8000       | 0             | 0.1          | 800     |        |                |
| 0.02       | 8000       | 160           | 0.12         | 800     | 0      | 0              |
| 0.04       | 8000       | 320           | 0.14         | 800     | 0      | 0              |
| 0.06       | 8000       | 480           | 0.16         | 800     | 0      | 0              |
| 0.08       | 16000      | 800           | 0.18         | 2080    | 480    | 30             |
| 0.1        | 16000      | 1120          | 0.2          | 2080    | 0      | 28             |
| 0.12       | 16000      | 1440          | 0.22         | 2080    | 0      | 26             |

|      |      |      |      |     |     |    |
|------|------|------|------|-----|-----|----|
| 0.14 | 8000 | 1600 | 0.24 | 320 | 720 | 70 |
| 0.16 | 8000 | 1760 | 0.26 | 320 | 0   | 65 |

Table 2

Calculating the correct transit time on the receiving side can be done by using the following formulas:

- (1)  $\text{current\_time\_capture} = \frac{\text{current\_timestamp} - \text{previous\_timestamp}}{\text{current\_clock\_rate} + \text{previous\_time\_capture}}$
- (2)  $\text{transit} = \text{current\_clock\_rate} * (\text{time\_arrival} - \text{current\_time\_capture})$
- (3)  $\text{previous\_time\_capture} = \text{current\_time\_capture}$

The main problem with this method, in addition to the fact that the jitter calculation described in [RFC 3550](#) cannot be used, is that it is dependent on the previous RTP packets, packets that can be reordered or lost in the network. But it seems that this is what most implementations are using.

### 3. Terminology

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](#)].

**Clock rate:** The multiplier used to convert from a wallclock value in seconds to an equivalent RTP timestamp value (without the fixed random offset). Note that [RFC 3550](#) uses various terms like "clock frequency", "media clock rate", "timestamp unit", "timestamp frequency", and "RTP timestamp clock rate" as synonymous to clock rate.

**RTP Sender:** A logical network element that sends RTP packets, sends RTCP SR packets, and receives RTCP RR packets.

**RTP Receiver:** A logical network element that receives RTP packets, receives RTCP SR packets, and sends RTCP RR packets.

### 4. Recommendations

#### [4.1.](#) RTP Sender

An RTP Sender with RTCP turned off (i.e. by setting the RS and RR bandwidth modifiers defined in [[RFC3556](#)] to 0) SHOULD use a different SSRC for each different clock rate but MAY use different clock rates on the same SSRC as long as the RTP timestamp without the random offset is calculated as explained below:

[[This was designed to help VoIP implementations who anyway never cared about RTCP. Do we want to keep this?]]

Each time the clock rate changes, the `start_offset` and `capture_start` values are calculated with the following formulas:

```
start_offset = (capture_time - capture_start) * previous_clock_rate
capture_start = capture_time
```

For the first RTP packet, the values are initialized with the following formulas:

```
start_offset = 0
capture_start = capture_time
```

After eventually updating this values, the RTP timestamp is calculated with the following formula:

```
timestamp = (capture_time - capture_start) * clock_rate +
start_offset
```

Note that in all the formulas, `capture_time` is the first instant the new timestamp rate is used.

An RTP Sender with RTCP turned on MUST use a different SSRC for each different clock rate. An RTCP BYE MUST be sent and a new SSRC MUST be used if the clock rate switches back to a value already seen in the RTP stream.

To accelerate lip synchronization, the next compound RTCP packet sent by the RTP sender MUST contain multiple SR packets, the first one containing the mapping for the current clock rate and the next SR

packets containing the mapping for the other clock rates seen during the last period.

[[Some legacy implementations may dislike receiving multiple SR packets. What should we do?]]

The RTP extension defined in [[RFC6051](#)] MAY be used to accelerate the synchronization.

#### [4.2.](#) RTP Receiver

An RTP Receiver MUST calculate the jitter using the following formula:

$$D(i,j) = (\text{arrival\_time\_j} * \text{clock\_rate\_i} - \text{timestamp\_j}) - (\text{arrival\_time\_i} * \text{clock\_rate\_i} - \text{timestamp\_i})$$

An RTP Receiver MUST be able to handle a compound RTCP packet with multiple SR packets.

For interoperability with legacy RTP implementations, an RTP receiver MAY use the information in two consecutive SR packets to calculate the clock rate used, i.e. if  $N_i$  is the NTP timestamp for the SR packet  $i$ ,  $R_i$  the RTP timestamp for the SR packet  $i$  and  $N_j$  and  $R_j$  the NTP timestamp and RTP timestamp for the previous SR packet  $j$ , then the clock rate can be guessed as the closest to  $(R_i - R_j) / (N_i - N_j)$ .

#### [5.](#) Interoperability Analysis

The next subsections analyze the various combinations between legacy RTP implementations and RTP implementations that follow this document specifications.

TBD

#### [6.](#) Security Considerations



TBD

## 7. IANA Considerations

No IANA considerations.

## 8. Acknowledgements

Thanks to Colin Perkins, Ali C. Begen and Magnus Westerlund for their comments, suggestions and questions that helped to improve this document.

Thanks to Robert Sparks and the attendees of SIPit 26 for the survey on multiple clock rates interoperability.

This document was written with the xml2rfc tool described in [\[RFC2629\]](#).

## 9. References

### 9.1. Normative References

- [RFC2119] Bradner, S., "Key words for use in RFCs to Indicate Requirement Levels", [BCP 14](#), [RFC 2119](#), March 1997.
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### 9.2. Informative References

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- [RFC6051] Perkins, C. and T. Schierl, "Rapid Synchronisation of RTP Flows", [RFC 6051](#), November 2010.
- [uRTR] Wenger, S. and C. Perkins, "RTP Timestamp Frequency for Variable Rate Audio Codecs", [draft-ietf-avt-variable-rate-audio-00](#) (work in progress), October 2004.

#### [Appendix A](#). Using a fixed clock rate

An alternate way of fixing the multiple clock rates issue was proposed in [uRTR]. This document proposed to define a unified clock rate, but the proposal was rejected at IETF 61.

#### [Appendix B](#). Release notes

This section must be removed before publication as an RFC.

##### [B.1](#). Modifications between [draft-ietf-avtext-multiple-clock-rates-01](#) and [draft-ietf-avtext-multiple-clock-rates-00](#)

- o New text says that the algorithms listed are the one currently known.
- o Explains capture\_time.
- o Nits.

##### [B.2](#). Modifications between [draft-ietf-avtext-multiple-clock-rates-00](#) and [draft-petithuguenin-avtext-multiple-clock-rates-01](#)

- o Changed capture\_state to capture\_start.

- B.3.** Modifications between [draft-petithuguenin-avtext-multiple-clock-rates-01](#) and [draft-petithuguenin-avtext-multiple-clock-rates-00](#)
- o Clarified the goals for this documents
  - o Removed the non-monotonic method (replaced by Magnus formula).
  - o Moved the "RTP Sender and RTP Receiver section inside a new "Recommendations" section.
  - o Inserted the new Sender formula inside the Recommendation section.
  - o Inserted the new jitter formula in the RTP Receiver section.
  - o Emptied the Analysis sections.
- B.4.** Modifications between [draft-petithuguenin-avtext-multiple-clock-rates-00](#) and [draft-petithuguenin-avt-multiple-clock-rates-03](#)
- o Initial release for avtext WG.
- B.5.** Modifications between [draft-petithuguenin-avt-multiple-clock-rates-03](#) and [draft-petithuguenin-avt-multiple-clock-rates-02](#)
- o Updated RFC reference.
- B.6.** Modifications between [draft-petithuguenin-avt-multiple-clock-rates-02](#) and [draft-petithuguenin-avt-multiple-clock-rates-01](#)
- o Having multiple SRs in a compound RTCP packet is OK.
  - o If RTCP is used, must send a BYE and not reuse the SSRC.
  - o Removed resolved notes.
  - o Acknowledged SIPit 26 survey.
  - o Fixed some nits.
- B.7.** Modifications between [draft-petithuguenin-avt-multiple-clock-rates-01](#) and [draft-petithuguenin-avt-multiple-clock-rates-00](#)
- o Complete rewrite as a Standard Track I-D modifying [RFC 3550](#).

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