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**The Babel Routing Protocol**  
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Abstract

Babel is a loop-avoiding distance-vector routing protocol that is robust and efficient both in ordinary wired networks and in wireless mesh networks.

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## [1.](#) Introduction

Babel is a loop-avoiding distance-vector routing protocol that is designed to be robust and efficient both in networks using prefix-based routing and in networks using flat routing ("mesh networks"),

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and both in relatively stable wired networks and in highly dynamic wireless networks.

### **1.1. Features**

The main property that makes Babel suitable for unstable networks is that, unlike naive distance-vector routing protocols [[RIP](#)], it strongly limits the frequency and duration of routing pathologies such as routing loops and black-holes during reconvergence. Even after a mobility event is detected, a Babel network usually remains loop-free. Babel then quickly reconverges to a configuration that preserves the loop-freedom and connectedness of the network, but is not necessarily optimal; in many cases, this operation requires no packet exchanges at all. Babel then slowly converges, in a time on the scale of minutes, to an optimal configuration. This is achieved by using sequenced routes, a technique pioneered by Destination-Sequenced Distance-Vector routing [[DSDV](#)].

More precisely, Babel has the following properties:

- o when every prefix is originated by at most one router, Babel never suffers from routing loops;
- o when a prefix is originated by multiple routers, Babel may occasionally create a transient routing loop for this particular prefix; this loop disappears in a time proportional to its diameter, and never again (up to an arbitrary garbage-collection (GC) time) will the routers involved participate in a routing loop for the same prefix;
- o assuming reasonable packet loss rates, any routing black-holes that may appear after a mobility event are corrected in a time at most proportional to the network's diameter.

Babel has provisions for link quality estimation and for fairly arbitrary metrics. When configured suitably, Babel can implement shortest-path routing, or it may use a metric based, for example, on measured packet loss.

Babel nodes will successfully establish an association even when they are configured with different parameters. For example, a mobile node that is low on battery may choose to use larger time constants (hello and update intervals, etc.) than a node that has access to wall power. Conversely, a node that detects high levels of mobility may choose to use smaller time constants. The ability to build such heterogeneous networks makes Babel particularly adapted to the wireless environment.



Finally, Babel is a hybrid routing protocol, in the sense that it can carry routes for multiple network-layer protocols (IPv4 and IPv6), whichever protocol the Babel packets are themselves being carried over.

## **1.2. Limitations**

Babel has two limitations that make it unsuitable for use in some environments. First, Babel relies on periodic routing table updates rather than using a reliable transport; hence, in large, stable networks it generates more traffic than protocols that only send updates when the network topology changes. In such networks, protocols such as OSPF [[OSPF](#)], IS-IS [[IS-IS](#)], or the Enhanced Interior Gateway Routing Protocol (EIGRP) [[EIGRP](#)] might be more suitable.

Second, Babel does impose a hold time when a prefix is retracted ([Section 3.5.5](#)). While this hold time does not apply to the exact prefix being retracted, and hence does not prevent fast reconvergence should it become available again, it does apply to any shorter prefix that covers it. Hence, if a previously deaggregated prefix becomes aggregated, it will be unreachable for a few minutes. This makes Babel unsuitable for use in mobile networks that implement automatic prefix aggregation.

## **1.3. Specification of Requirements**

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](#)].

## **2. Conceptual Description of the Protocol**

Babel is a mostly loop-free distance vector protocol: it is based on the Bellman-Ford protocol, just like the venerable RIP [[RIP](#)], but includes a number of refinements that either prevent loop formation altogether, or ensure that a loop disappears in a timely manner and doesn't form again.

Conceptually, Bellman-Ford is executed in parallel for every source of routing information (destination of data traffic). In the following discussion, we fix a source S; the reader will recall that the same algorithm is executed for all sources.



### **2.1. Costs, Metrics and Neighbourship**

As many routing algorithms, Babel computes costs of links between any two neighbouring nodes, abstract values attached to the edges between two nodes. We write  $C(A, B)$  for the cost of the edge from node A to node B.

Given a route between any two nodes, the metric of the route is the sum of the costs of all the edges along the route. The goal of the routing algorithm is to compute, for every source S, the tree of the routes of lowest metric to S.

Costs and metrics need not be integers. In general, they can be values in any algebra that satisfies two fairly general conditions ([Section 3.5.2](#)).

A Babel node periodically broadcasts Hello messages to all of its neighbours; it also periodically sends an IHU ("I Heard You") message to every neighbour from which it has recently heard a Hello. From the information derived from Hello and IHU messages received from its neighbour B, a node A computes the cost  $C(A, B)$  of the link from A to B.

### **2.2. The Bellman-Ford Algorithm**

Every node A maintains two pieces of data: its estimated distance to S, written  $D(A)$ , and its next-hop router to S, written  $NH(A)$ . Initially,  $D(S) = 0$ ,  $D(A)$  is infinite, and  $NH(A)$  is undefined.

Periodically, every node B sends to all of its neighbours a route update, a message containing  $D(B)$ . When a neighbour A of B receives the route update, it checks whether B is its selected next hop; if that is the case, then  $NH(A)$  is set to B, and  $D(A)$  is set to  $C(A, B) + D(B)$ . If that is not the case, then A compares  $C(A, B) + D(B)$  to its current value of  $D(A)$ . If that value is smaller, meaning that the received update advertises a route that is better than the currently selected route, then  $NH(A)$  is set to B, and  $D(A)$  is set to  $C(A, B) + D(B)$ .

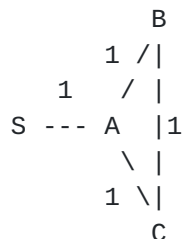
A number of refinements to this algorithm are possible, and are used by Babel. In particular, convergence speed may be increased by sending unscheduled "triggered updates" whenever a major change in the topology is detected, in addition to the regular, scheduled updates. Additionally, a node may maintain a number of alternate routes, which are being advertised by neighbours other than its selected neighbour, and which can be used immediately if the selected route were to fail.





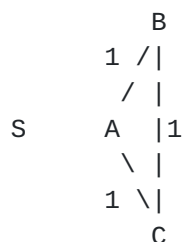
### 2.3. Transient Loops in Bellman-Ford

It is well known that a naive application of Bellman-Ford to distributed routing can cause transient loops after a topology change. Consider for example the following diagram:



After convergence,  $D(B) = D(C) = 2$ , with  $NH(B) = NH(C) = A$ .

Suppose now that the link between S and A fails:



When it detects the failure of the link, A switches its next hop to B (which is still advertising a route to S with metric 2), and advertises a metric equal to 3, and then advertises a new route with metric 3. This process of nodes changing selected neighbours and increasing their metric continues until the advertised metric reaches "infinity", a value larger than all the metrics that the routing protocol is able to carry.

### 2.4. Feasibility Conditions

Bellman-Ford is a very robust algorithm: its convergence properties are preserved when routers delay route acquisition or when they discard some updates. Babel routers discard received route announcements unless they can prove that accepting them cannot possibly cause a routing loop.

More formally, we define a condition over route announcements, known as the feasibility condition, that guarantees the absence of routing loops whenever all routers ignore route updates that do not satisfy the feasibility condition. In effect, this makes Bellman-Ford into a family of routing algorithms, parameterised by the feasibility condition.



Many different feasibility conditions are possible. For example, BGP can be modelled as being a distance-vector protocol with a (rather drastic) feasibility condition: a routing update is only accepted when the receiving node's AS number is not included in the update's AS-Path attribute (note that BGP's feasibility condition does not ensure the absence of transitory "micro-loops" during reconvergence).

Another simple feasibility condition, used in Destination-Sequenced Distance-Vector (DSDV) routing [DSDV] and in Ad hoc On-Demand Distance Vector (AODV) routing, stems from the following observation: a routing loop can only arise after a router has switched to a route with a larger metric than the route that it had previously selected. Hence, one could decide that a route is feasible only when its metric at the local node would be no larger than the metric of the currently selected route, i.e., an announcement carrying a metric  $D(B)$  is accepted by A when  $C(A, B) + D(B) \leq D(A)$ . If all routers obey this constraint, then the metric at every router is nonincreasing, and the following invariant is always preserved: if A has selected B as its successor, then  $D(B) < D(A)$ , which implies that the forwarding graph is loop-free.

Babel uses a slightly more refined feasibility condition, used in EIGRP [DUAL]. Given a router A, define the feasibility distance of A, written  $FD(A)$ , as the smallest metric that A has ever advertised for S to any of its neighbours. An update sent by a neighbour B of A is feasible when the metric  $D(B)$  advertised by B is strictly smaller than A's feasibility distance, i.e., when  $D(B) < FD(A)$ .

It is easy to see that this latter condition is no more restrictive than DSDV-feasibility. Suppose that node A obeys DSDV-feasibility; then  $D(A)$  is nonincreasing, hence at all times  $D(A) \leq FD(A)$ . Suppose now that A receives a DSDV-feasible update that advertises a metric  $D(B)$ . Since the update is DSDV-feasible,  $C(A, B) + D(B) \leq D(A)$ , hence  $D(B) < D(A)$ , and since  $D(A) \leq FD(A)$ ,  $D(B) < FD(A)$ .

To see that it is strictly less restrictive, consider the following diagram, where A has selected the route through B, and  $D(A) = FD(A) = 2$ . Since  $D(C) = 1 < FD(A)$ , the alternate route through C is feasible for A, although its metric  $C(A, C) + D(C) = 5$  is larger than that of the currently selected route:

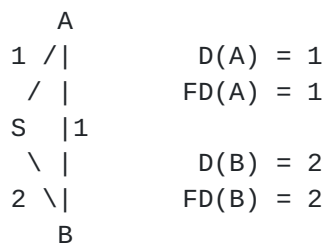




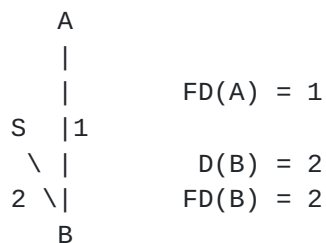
To show that this feasibility condition still guarantees loop-freedom, recall that at the time when A accepts an update from B, the metric  $D(B)$  announced by B is no smaller than  $FD(B)$ ; since it is smaller than  $FD(A)$ , at that point in time  $FD(B) < FD(A)$ . Since this property is preserved when A sends updates, it remains true at all times, which ensures that the forwarding graph has no loops.

## 2.5. Solving Starvation: Sequencing Routes

Obviously, the feasibility conditions defined above cause starvation when a router runs out of feasible routes. Consider the following diagram, where both A and B have selected the direct route to S:



Suppose now that the link between A and S breaks:



The only route available from A to S, the one that goes through B, is not feasible: A suffers from a spurious starvation.

At this point, the whole network must be rebooted in order to solve the starvation; this is essentially what EIGRP does when it performs a global synchronisation of all the routers in the network with the source (the "active" phase of EIGRP).

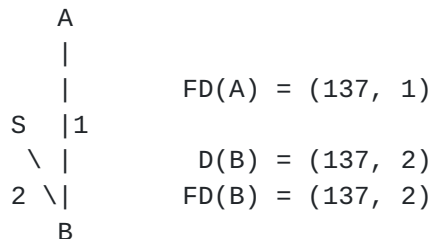
Babel reacts to starvation in a less drastic manner, by using sequenced routes, a technique introduced by DSDV and adopted by AODV. In addition to a metric, every route carries a sequence number, a nondecreasing integer that is propagated unchanged through the network and is only ever incremented by the source; a pair  $(s, m)$ , where  $s$  is a sequence number and  $m$  a metric, is called a distance.

A received update is feasible when either it is more recent than the feasibility distance maintained by the receiving node, or it is

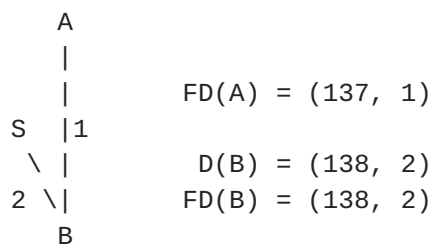


equally recent and the metric is strictly smaller. More formally, if  $FD(A) = (s, m)$ , then an update carrying the distance  $(s', m')$  is feasible when either  $s' > s$ , or  $s = s'$  and  $m' < m$ .

Assuming the sequence number of S is 137, the diagram above becomes:



After S increases its sequence number, and the new sequence number is propagated to B, we have:



at which point the route through B becomes feasible again.

Note that while sequence numbers are used for determining feasibility, they are not necessarily used in route selection: a node will normally ignore the sequence number when selecting a route ([Section 3.6](#)).

## 2.6. Requests

In DSDV, the sequence number of a source is increased periodically. A route becomes feasible again after the source increases its sequence number, and the new sequence number is propagated through the network, which may, in general, require a significant amount of time.

Babel takes a different approach. When a node detects that it is suffering from a potentially spurious starvation, it sends an explicit request to the source for a new sequence number. This request is forwarded hop by hop to the source, with no regard to the feasibility condition. Upon receiving the request, the source increases its sequence number and broadcasts an update, which is forwarded to the requesting node.





Note that after a change in network topology not all such requests will, in general, reach the source, as some will be sent over links that are now broken. However, if the network is still connected, then at least one among the nodes suffering from spurious starvation has an (unfeasible) route to the source; hence, in the absence of packet loss, at least one such request will reach the source. (Resending requests a small number of times compensates for packet loss.)

Since requests are forwarded with no regard to the feasibility condition, they may, in general, be caught in a forwarding loop; this is avoided by having nodes perform duplicate detection for the requests that they forward.

## **2.7. Multiple Routers**

The above discussion assumes that every prefix is originated by a single router. In real networks, however, it is often necessary to have a single prefix originated by multiple routers; for example, the default route will be originated by all of the edge routers of a routing domain.

Since synchronising sequence numbers between distinct routers is problematic, Babel treats routes for the same prefix as distinct entities when they are originated by different routers: every route announcement carries the router-id of its originating router, and feasibility distances are not maintained per prefix, but per source, where a source is a pair of a router-id and a prefix. In effect, Babel guarantees loop-freedom for the forwarding graph to every source; since the union of multiple acyclic graphs is not in general acyclic, Babel does not in general guarantee loop-freedom when a prefix is originated by multiple routers, but any loops will be broken in a time at most proportional to the diameter of the loop -- as soon as an update has "gone around" the routing loop.

Consider for example the following diagram, where A has selected the default route through S, and B has selected the one through S':

```

      1      1      1
    ::/0 -- S --- A --- B --- S' -- ::/0

```

Suppose that both default routes fail at the same time; then nothing prevents A from switching to B, and B simultaneously switching to A. However, as soon as A has successfully advertised the new route to B, the route through A will become unfeasible for B. Conversely, as soon as B will have advertised the route through A, the route through B will become unfeasible for A.



In effect, the routing loop disappears at the latest when routing information has gone around the loop. Since this process can be delayed by lost packets, Babel makes certain efforts to ensure that updates are sent reliably after a router-id change.

Additionally, after the routers have advertised the two routes, both sources will be in their source tables, which will prevent them from ever again participating in a routing loop involving routes from S and S' (up to the source GC time, which, available memory permitting, can be set to arbitrarily large values).

### **2.8. Overlapping Prefixes**

In the above discussion, we have assumed that all prefixes are disjoint, as is the case in flat ("mesh") routing. In practice, however, prefixes may overlap: for example, the default route overlaps with all of the routes present in the network.

After a route fails, it is not correct in general to switch to a route that subsumes the failed route. Consider for example the following configuration:

```
      1      1
::/0 -- A --- B --- C
```

Suppose that node C fails. If B forwards packets destined to C by following the default route, a routing loop will form, and persist until A learns of B's retraction of the direct route to C. Babel avoids this pitfall by maintaining an "unreachable" route for a few minutes after a route is retracted; the time for which such a route must be maintained should be the worst-case propagation time of the retraction of the route to C.

## **3. Protocol Operation**

Every Babel speaker is assigned a router-id, which is an arbitrary string of 8 octets that is assumed unique across the routing domain. We suggest that router-ids should be assigned in modified EUI-64 format [[ADDRARCH](#)]. (As a matter of fact, the protocol encoding is slightly more compact when router-ids are assigned in the same manner as the IPv6 layer assigns host IDs.)

### **3.1. Message Transmission and Reception**

Babel protocol packets are sent in the body of a UDP datagram. Each Babel packet consists of one or more TLVs.



The source address of a Babel packet is always a unicast address, link-local in the case of IPv6. Babel packets may be sent to a well-known (link-local) multicast address (this is the usual case) or to a (link-local) unicast address. In normal operation, a Babel speaker sends both multicast and unicast packets to its neighbours.

With the exception of Hello TLVs and acknowledgements, all Babel TLVs can be sent to either unicast or multicast addresses, and their semantics does not depend on whether the destination was a unicast or multicast address. Hence, a Babel speaker does not need to determine the destination address of a packet that it receives in order to interpret it.

A moderate amount of jitter is applied to packets sent by a Babel speaker: outgoing TLVs are buffered and SHOULD be sent with a small random delay. This is done for two purposes: it avoids synchronisation of multiple Babel speakers across a network [[JITTER](#)], and it allows for the aggregation of multiple TLVs into a single packet.

The exact delay and amount of jitter applied to a packet depends on whether it contains any urgent TLVs. Acknowledgement TLVs MUST be sent before the deadline specified in the corresponding request. The particular class of updates specified in [Section 3.7.2](#) MUST be sent in a timely manner. The particular class of request and update TLVs specified in [Section 3.8.2](#) SHOULD be sent in a timely manner.

## **[3.2.](#) Data Structures**

Every Babel speaker maintains a number of data structures.

### **[3.2.1.](#) Sequence Number**

A node's sequence number is a 16-bit integer that is included in route updates sent for routes originated by this node. A node increments its sequence number (modulo  $2^{16}$ ) whenever it receives a request for a new sequence number ([Section 3.8.1.2](#)).

A node SHOULD NOT increment its sequence number (seqno) spontaneously, since increasing seqnos makes it less likely that other nodes will have feasible alternate routes when their selected routes fail.

### **[3.2.2.](#) The Interface Table**

The interface table contains the list of interfaces on which the node speaks the Babel protocol. Every interface table entry contains the interface's Hello seqno, a 16-bit integer that is sent with each



Hello TLV on this interface and is incremented (modulo  $2^{16}$ ) whenever a Hello is sent. (Note that an interface's Hello seqno is unrelated to the node's seqno.)

There are two timers associated with each interface table entry -- the Hello timer, which governs the sending of periodic Hello and IHU packets, and the update timer, which governs the sending of periodic route updates.

### **3.2.3. The Neighbour Table**

The neighbour table contains the list of all neighbouring interfaces from which a Babel packet has been recently received. The neighbour table is indexed by pairs of the form (interface, address), and every neighbour table entry contains the following data:

- o the local node's interface over which this neighbour is reachable;
- o the address of the neighbouring interface;
- o a history of recently received Hello packets from this neighbour; this can, for example, be a sequence of  $n$  bits, for some small value  $n$ , indicating which of the  $n$  hellos most recently sent by this neighbour have been received by the local node;
- o the "transmission cost" value from the last IHU packet received from this neighbour, or FFFF hexadecimal (infinity) if the IHU hold timer for this neighbour has expired;
- o the neighbour's expected Hello sequence number, an integer modulo  $2^{16}$ .

There are two timers associated with each neighbour entry -- the hello timer, which is initialised from the interval value carried by Hello TLVs, and the IHU timer, which is initialised to a small multiple of the interval carried in IHU TLVs.

Note that the neighbour table is indexed by IP addresses, not by router-ids: neighbourship is a relationship between interfaces, not between nodes. Therefore, two nodes with multiple interfaces can participate in multiple neighbourship relationships, a fairly common situation when wireless nodes with multiple radios are involved.

### **3.2.4. The Source Table**

The source table is used to record feasibility distances. It is indexed by triples of the form (prefix, plen, router-id), and every source table entry contains the following data:





- o the prefix (prefix, plen), where plen is the prefix length, that this entry applies to;
- o the router-id of a router originating this prefix;
- o a pair (seqno, metric), this source's feasibility distance.

There is one timer associated with each entry in the source table -- the source garbage-collection timer. It is initialised to a time on the order of minutes and reset as specified in [Section 3.7.3](#).

#### **[3.2.5](#). The Route Table**

The route table contains the routes known to this node. It is indexed by triples of the form (prefix, plen, neighbour), and every route table entry contains the following data:

- o the source (prefix, plen, router-id) for which this route is advertised;
- o the neighbour that advertised this route;
- o the metric with which this route was advertised by the neighbour, or FFFF hexadecimal (infinity) for a recently retracted route;
- o the sequence number with which this route was advertised;
- o the next-hop address of this route;
- o a boolean flag indicating whether this route is selected, i.e., whether it is currently being used for forwarding and is being advertised.

There is one timer associated with each route table entry -- the route expiry timer. It is initialised and reset as specified in [Section 3.5.4](#).

#### **[3.2.6](#). The Table of Pending Requests**

The table of pending requests contains a list of seqno requests that the local node has sent (either because they have been originated locally, or because they were forwarded) and to which no reply has been received yet. This table is indexed by prefixes, and every entry in this table contains the following data:

- o the prefix, router-id, and seqno being requested;



- o the neighbour, if any, on behalf of which we are forwarding this request;
- o a small integer indicating the number of times that this request will be resent if it remains unsatisfied.

There is one timer associated with each pending request; it governs both the resending of requests and their expiry.

### **3.3. Acknowledged Packets**

A Babel speaker may request that any neighbour receiving a given packet reply with an explicit acknowledgement within a given time. While the use of acknowledgement requests is optional, every Babel speaker **MUST** be able to reply to such a request.

An acknowledgement **MUST** be sent to a unicast destination. On the other hand, acknowledgement requests may be sent to either unicast or multicast destinations, in which case they request an acknowledgement from all of the receiving nodes.

When to request acknowledgements is a matter of local policy; the simplest strategy is to never request acknowledgements and to rely on periodic updates to ensure that any reachable routes are eventually propagated throughout the routing domain. For increased efficiency, we suggest that acknowledged packets should be used in order to send urgent updates ([Section 3.7.2](#)) when the number of neighbours on a given interface is small. Since Babel is designed to deal gracefully with packet loss on unreliable media, sending all packets with acknowledgement requests is not necessary, and not even recommended, as the acknowledgements cause additional traffic and may force additional Address Resolution Protocol (ARP) or Neighbour Discovery exchanges.

### **3.4. Neighbour Acquisition**

Neighbour acquisition is the process by which a Babel node discovers the set of neighbours heard over each of its interfaces and ascertains bidirectional reachability. On unreliable media, neighbour acquisition additionally provides some statistics that **MAY** be used in link quality computation.

#### **3.4.1. Reverse Reachability Detection**

Every Babel node sends periodic Hellos over each of its interfaces. Each Hello TLV carries an increasing (modulo  $2^{16}$ ) sequence number and the interval between successive periodic packets sent on this particular interface.



In addition to the periodic Hello packets, a node MAY send unscheduled Hello packets, e.g., to accelerate link cost estimation when a new neighbour is discovered, or when link conditions have suddenly changed.

A node MAY change its Hello interval. The Hello interval MAY be decreased at any time; it SHOULD NOT be increased, except immediately before sending a Hello packet. (Equivalently, a node SHOULD send an unscheduled Hello immediately after increasing its Hello interval.)

How to deal with received Hello TLVs and what statistics to maintain are considered local implementation matters; typically, a node will maintain some sort of history of recently received Hellos. A possible algorithm is described in [Appendix A.1](#).

After receiving a Hello, or determining that it has missed one, the node recomputes the association's cost ([Section 3.4.3](#)) and runs the route selection procedure ([Section 3.6](#)).

#### **[3.4.2](#). Bidirectional Reachability Detection**

In order to establish bidirectional reachability, every node sends periodic IHU ("I Heard You") TLVs to each of its neighbours. Since IHUs carry an explicit interval value, they MAY be sent less often than Hellos in order to reduce the amount of routing traffic in dense networks; in particular, they SHOULD be sent less often than Hellos over links with little packet loss. While IHUs are conceptually unicast, they SHOULD be sent to a multicast address in order to avoid an ARP or Neighbour Discovery exchange and to aggregate multiple IHUs in a single packet.

In addition to the periodic IHUs, a node MAY, at any time, send an unscheduled IHU packet. It MAY also, at any time, decrease its IHU interval, and it MAY increase its IHU interval immediately before sending an IHU.

Every IHU TLV contains two pieces of data: the link's rxcost (reception cost) from the sender's perspective, used by the neighbour for computing link costs ([Section 3.4.3](#)), and the interval between periodic IHU packets. A node receiving an IHU updates the value of the sending neighbour's txcost (transmission cost), from its perspective, to the value contained in the IHU, and resets this neighbour's IHU timer to a small multiple of the value received in the IHU.

When a neighbour's IHU timer expires, its txcost is set to infinity.



After updating a neighbour's txcost, the receiving node recomputes the neighbour's cost ([Section 3.4.3](#)) and runs the route selection procedure ([Section 3.6](#)).

### **3.4.3. Cost Computation**

A neighbourhood association's link cost is computed from the values maintained in the neighbour table -- namely, the statistics kept in the neighbour table about the reception of Hellos, and the txcost computed from received IHU packets.

For every neighbour, a Babel node computes a value known as this neighbour's rxcost. This value is usually derived from the Hello history, which may be combined with other data, such as statistics maintained by the link layer. The rxcost is sent to a neighbour in each IHU.

How the txcost and rxcost are combined in order to compute a link's cost is a matter of local policy; as far as Babel's correctness is concerned, only the following conditions MUST be satisfied:

- o the cost is strictly positive;
- o if no hellos were received recently, then the cost is infinite;
- o if the txcost is infinite, then the cost is infinite.

Note that while this document does not constrain cost computation any further, not all cost computation strategies will give good results. We give a few examples of strategies for computing a link's cost that are known to work well in practice in [Appendix A.2](#).

### **3.5. Routing Table Maintenance**

Conceptually, a Babel update is a quintuple (prefix, plen, router-id, seqno, metric), where (prefix, plen) is the prefix for which a route is being advertised, router-id is the router-id of the router originating this update, seqno is a nondecreasing (modulo  $2^{16}$ ) integer that carries the originating router seqno, and metric is the announced metric.

Before being accepted, an update is checked against the feasibility condition ([Section 3.5.1](#)), which ensures that the route does not create a routing loop. If the feasibility condition is not satisfied, the update is either ignored or treated as a retraction, depending on some other conditions ([Section 3.5.4](#)). If the feasibility condition is satisfied, then the update cannot possibly cause a routing loop, and the update is accepted.





### **3.5.1. The Feasibility Condition**

The feasibility condition is applied to all received updates. The feasibility condition compares the metric in the received update with the metrics of the updates previously sent by the receiving node; updates with finite metrics large enough to cause a loop are discarded.

A feasibility distance is a pair (seqno, metric), where seqno is an integer modulo  $2^{16}$  and metric is a positive integer. Feasibility distances are compared lexicographically, with the first component inverted: we say that a distance (seqno, metric) is strictly better than a distance (seqno', metric'), written

$$(\text{seqno}, \text{metric}) < (\text{seqno}', \text{metric}')$$

when

$$\text{seqno} > \text{seqno}' \text{ or } (\text{seqno} = \text{seqno}' \text{ and } \text{metric} < \text{metric}')$$

where sequence numbers are compared modulo  $2^{16}$ .

Given a source (p, plen, id), a node's feasibility distance for this source is the minimum, according to the ordering defined above, of the distances of all the finite updates ever sent by this particular node for the prefix (p, plen) carrying the router-id id. Feasibility distances are maintained in the source table; the exact procedure is given in [Section 3.7.3](#).

A received update is feasible when either it is a retraction (its metric is FFFF hexadecimal), or the advertised distance is strictly better, in the sense defined above, than the feasibility distance for the corresponding source. More precisely, a route advertisement carrying the quintuple (prefix, plen, router-id, seqno, metric) is feasible if one of the following conditions holds:

- o metric is infinite; or
- o no entry exists in the source table indexed by (id, prefix, plen); or
- o an entry (prefix, plen, router-id, seqno', metric') exists in the source table, and either
  - \* seqno' < seqno or
  - \* seqno = seqno' and metric < metric'.



Note that the feasibility condition considers the metric advertised by the neighbour, not the route's metric; hence, a fluctuation in a neighbour's cost cannot render a selected route unfeasible.

### **3.5.2. Metric Computation**

A route's metric is computed from the metric advertised by the neighbour and the neighbour's link cost. Just like cost computation, metric computation is considered a local policy matter; as far as Babel is concerned, the function  $M(c, m)$  used for computing a metric from a locally computed link cost and the metric advertised by a neighbour MUST only satisfy the following conditions:

- o if  $c$  is infinite, then  $M(c, m)$  is infinite;
- o  $M$  is strictly monotonic:  $M(c, m) > m$ .

Additionally, the metric SHOULD satisfy the following condition:

- o  $M$  is isotonic: if  $m \leq m'$ , then  $M(c, m) \leq M(c, m')$ .

Note that while strict monotonicity is essential to the integrity of the network (persistent routing loops may appear if it is not satisfied), isotonicity is not: if it is not satisfied, Babel will still converge to a locally optimal routing table, but might not reach a global optimum (in fact, such a global optimum may not even exist).

As with cost computation, not all strategies for computing route metrics will give good results. In particular, some metrics are more likely than others to lead to routing instabilities (route flapping). In [Appendix A.3](#), we give a number of examples of strictly monotonic, isotonic routing metrics that are known to work well in practice.

### **3.5.3. Encoding of Updates**

In a large network, the bulk of Babel traffic consists of route updates; hence, some care has been given to encoding them efficiently. An Update TLV itself only contains the prefix, seqno, and metric, while the next hop is derived either from the network-layer source address of the packet or from an explicit Next Hop TLV in the same packet. The router-id is derived from a separate Router-Id TLV in the same packet, which optimises the case when multiple updates are sent with the same router-id.

Additionally, a prefix of the advertised prefix can be omitted in an Update TLV, in which case it is copied from a previous Update TLV in the same packet -- this is known as address compression [[PACKETBB](#)].



Finally, as a special optimisation for the case when a router-id coincides with the interface-id part of an IPv6 address, the router-id can optionally be derived from the low-order bits of the advertised prefix.

The encoding of updates is described in detail in [Section 4.4](#).

#### **[3.5.4](#). Route Acquisition**

When a Babel node receives an update (id, prefix, seqno, metric) from a neighbour neigh with a link cost value equal to cost, it checks whether it already has a routing table entry indexed by (neigh, id, prefix).

If no such entry exists:

- o if the update is unfeasible, it is ignored;
- o if the metric is infinite (the update is a retraction), the update is ignored;
- o otherwise, a new route table entry is created, indexed by (neigh, id, prefix), with seqno equal to seqno and an advertised metric equal to the metric carried by the update.

If such an entry exists:

- o if the entry is currently installed and the update is unfeasible, then the behaviour depends on whether the router-ids of the two entries match. If the router-ids are different, the update is treated as though it were a retraction (i.e., as though the metric were FFFF hexadecimal). If the router-ids are equal, the update is ignored;
- o otherwise (i.e., if either the update is feasible or the entry is not currently installed), then the entry's sequence number, advertised metric, metric, and router-id are updated and, unless the advertised metric is infinite, the route's expiry timer is reset to a small multiple of the Interval value included in the update.

When a route's expiry timer triggers, the behaviour depends on whether the route's metric is finite. If the metric is finite, it is set to infinity and the expiry timer is reset. If the metric is already infinite, the route is flushed from the route table.

After the routing table is updated, the route selection procedure ([Section 3.6](#)) is run.



### **3.5.5. Hold Time**

When a prefix  $p$  is retracted, because all routes are unfeasible, too old, or have an infinite metric, and a shorter prefix  $p'$  that covers  $p$  is reachable,  $p'$  cannot in general be used for routing packets destined to  $p$  without running the risk of creating a routing loop ([Section 2.8](#)).

To avoid this issue, whenever a prefix is retracted, a routing table entry with infinite metric is maintained as described in [Section 3.5.4](#) above, and packets destined for that prefix MUST NOT be forwarded by following a route for a shorter prefix. The infinite metric entry is maintained until it is superseded by a feasible update; if no such update arrives within the route hold time, the entry is flushed.

### **3.6. Route Selection**

Route selection is the process by which a single route for a given prefix is selected to be used for forwarding packets and to be re-advertised to a node's neighbours.

Babel is designed to allow flexible route selection policies. As far as the protocol's correctness is concerned, the route selection policy MUST only satisfy the following properties:

- o a route with infinite metric (a retracted route) is never selected;
- o an unfeasible route is never selected.

Note, however, that Babel does not naturally guarantee the stability of routing, and configuring conflicting route selection policies on different routers may lead to persistent route oscillation.

Defining a good route selection policy for Babel is an open research problem. Route selection can take into account multiple mutually contradictory criteria; in roughly decreasing order of importance, these are:

- o routes with a small metric should be preferred over routes with a large metric;
- o switching router-ids should be avoided;
- o routes through stable neighbours should be preferred over routes through unstable ones;





- o stable routes should be preferred over unstable ones;
- o switching next hops should be avoided.

A simple strategy is to choose the feasible route with the smallest metric, with a small amount of hysteresis applied to avoid switching router-ids.

After the route selection procedure is run, triggered updates ([Section 3.7.2](#)) and requests ([Section 3.8.2](#)) are sent.

### **[3.7.](#) Sending Updates**

A Babel speaker advertises to its neighbours its set of selected routes. Normally, this is done by sending one or more multicast packets containing Update TLVs on all of its connected interfaces; however, on link technologies where multicast is significantly more expensive than unicast, a node MAY choose to send multiple copies of updates in unicast packets when the number of neighbours is small.

Additionally, in order to ensure that any black-holes are reliably cleared in a timely manner, a Babel node sends retractions (updates with an infinite metric) for any recently retracted prefixes.

If an update is for a route injected into the Babel domain by the local node (e.g., the address of a local interface, the prefix of a directly attached network, or redistributed from a different routing protocol), the router-id is set to the local id, the metric is set to some arbitrary finite value (typically 0), and the seqno is set to the local router's sequence number.

If an update is for a route learned from another Babel speaker, the router-id and sequence number are copied from the routing table entry, and the metric is computed as specified in [Section 3.5.2](#).

#### **[3.7.1.](#) Periodic Updates**

Every Babel speaker periodically advertises all of its selected routes on all of its interfaces, including any recently retracted routes. Since Babel doesn't suffer from routing loops (there is no "counting to infinity") and relies heavily on triggered updates ([Section 3.7.2](#)), this full dump only needs to happen infrequently.

#### **[3.7.2.](#) Triggered Updates**

In addition to the periodic routing updates, a Babel speaker sends unscheduled, or triggered, updates in order to inform its neighbours of a significant change in the network topology.



A change of router-id for the selected route to a given prefix may be indicative of a routing loop in formation; hence, a node **MUST** send a triggered update in a timely manner whenever it changes the selected router-id for a given destination. Additionally, it **SHOULD** make a reasonable attempt at ensuring that all neighbours receive this update.

There are two strategies for ensuring that. If the number of neighbours is small, then it is reasonable to send the update together with an acknowledgement request; the update is resent until all neighbours have acknowledged the packet, up to some number of times. If the number of neighbours is large, however, requesting acknowledgements from all of them might cause a non-negligible amount of network traffic; in that case, it may be preferable to simply repeat the update some reasonable number of times (say, 5 for wireless and 2 for wired links).

A route retraction is somewhat less worrying: if the route retraction doesn't reach all neighbours, a black-hole might be created, which, unlike a routing loop, does not endanger the integrity of the network. When a route is retracted, a node **SHOULD** send a triggered update and **SHOULD** make a reasonable attempt at ensuring that all neighbours receive this retraction.

Finally, a node **MAY** send a triggered update when the metric for a given prefix changes in a significant manner, either due to a received update or because a link cost has changed. A node **SHOULD NOT** send triggered updates for other reasons, such as when there is a minor fluctuation in a route's metric, when the selected next hop changes, or to propagate a new sequence number (except to satisfy a request, as specified in [Section 3.8](#)).

### **3.7.3. Maintaining Feasibility Distances**

Before sending an update (prefix, plen, router-id, seqno, metric) with finite metric (i.e., not a route retraction), a Babel node updates the feasibility distance maintained in the source table. This is done as follows.

If no entry indexed by (prefix, plen, router-id) exists in the source table, then one is created with value (prefix, plen, router-id, seqno, metric).

If an entry (prefix, plen, router-id, seqno', metric') exists, then it is updated as follows:

- o if seqno > seqno', then seqno' := seqno, metric' := metric;



- o if seqno = seqno' and metric' > metric, then metric' := metric;
- o otherwise, nothing needs to be done.

The garbage-collection timer for the modified entry is then reset. Note that the garbage-collection timer is not reset when a retraction is sent.

#### **3.7.4. Split Horizon**

When running over a transitive, symmetric link technology, e.g., a point-to-point link or a wired LAN technology such as Ethernet, a Babel node SHOULD use an optimisation known as split horizon. When split horizon is used on a given interface, a routing update is not sent on this particular interface when the advertised route was learnt from a neighbour over the same interface.

Split horizon SHOULD NOT be applied to an interface unless the interface is known to be symmetric and transitive; in particular, split horizon is not applicable to decentralised wireless link technologies (e.g., IEEE 802.11 in ad hoc mode).

### **3.8. Explicit Route Requests**

In normal operation, a node's routing table is populated by the regular and triggered updates sent by its neighbours. Under some circumstances, however, a node sends explicit requests to cause a resynchronisation with the source after a mobility event or to prevent a route from spuriously expiring.

The Babel protocol provides two kinds of explicit requests: route requests, which simply request an update for a given prefix, and seqno requests, which request an update for a given prefix with a specific sequence number. The former are never forwarded; the latter are forwarded if they cannot be satisfied by a neighbour.

#### **3.8.1. Handling Requests**

Upon receiving a request, a node either forwards the request or sends an update in reply to the request, as described in the following sections. If this causes an update to be sent, the update is either sent to a multicast address on the interface on which the request was received, or to the unicast address of the neighbour that sent the update.

The exact behaviour is different for route requests and seqno requests.



#### **3.8.1.1. Route Requests**

When a node receives a route request for a prefix (prefix, plen), it checks its route table for a selected route to this exact prefix. If such a route exists, it **MUST** send an update; if such a route does not, it **MUST** send a retraction for that prefix.

When a node receives a wildcard route request, it **SHOULD** send a full routing table dump.

#### **3.8.1.2. Seqno Requests**

When a node receives a seqno request for a given router-id and sequence number, it checks whether its routing table contains a selected entry for that prefix; if no such entry exists, or the entry has infinite metric, it ignores the request.

If a selected route for the given prefix exists, and either the router-ids are different or the router-ids are equal and the entry's sequence number is no smaller than the requested sequence number, it **MUST** send an update for the given prefix.

If the router-ids match but the requested seqno is larger than the route entry's, the node compares the router-id against its own router-id. If the router-id is its own, then it increases its sequence number by 1 and sends an update. A node **MUST NOT** increase its sequence number by more than 1 in response to a route request.

If the requested router-id is not its own, the received request's hop count is 2 or more, and the node has a route (not necessarily a feasible one) for the requested prefix that does not use the requestor as a next hop, the node **SHOULD** forward the request. It does so by decreasing the hop count and sending the request in a unicast packet destined to a neighbour that advertises the given prefix (not necessarily the selected neighbour) and that is distinct from the neighbour from which the request was received.

A node **SHOULD** maintain a list of recently forwarded requests and forward the reply in a timely manner. A node **SHOULD** compare every incoming request against its list of recently forwarded requests and avoid forwarding it if it is redundant.

Since the request-forwarding mechanism does not necessarily obey the feasibility condition, it may get caught in routing loops; hence, requests carry a hop count to limit the time for which they remain in the network. However, since requests are only ever forwarded as unicast packets, the initial hop count need not be kept particularly low, and performing an expanding horizon search is not necessary. A





request MUST NOT be forwarded to a multicast address, and it MUST be forwarded to a single neighbour only.

### **3.8.2. Sending Requests**

A Babel node MAY send a route or seqno request at any time, to a multicast or a unicast address; there is only one case when originating requests is required ([Section 3.8.2.1](#)).

#### **3.8.2.1. Avoiding Starvation**

When a route is retracted or expires, a Babel node usually switches to another feasible route for the same prefix. It may be the case, however, that no such routes are available.

A node that has lost all feasible routes to a given destination MUST send a seqno request. The router-id of the request is set to the router-id of the route that it has just lost, and the requested seqno is the value contained in the source table, plus 1.

Such a request SHOULD be multicast over all of the node's attached interfaces. Similar requests will be sent by other nodes that are affected by the route's loss and will be forwarded by neighbouring nodes up to the source. If the network is connected, and there is no packet loss, this will result in a route being advertised with a new sequence number. (Note that, due to duplicate suppression, only a small number of such requests will actually reach the source.)

In order to compensate for packet loss, a node SHOULD repeat such a request a small number of times if no route becomes feasible within a short time. Under heavy packet loss, however, all such requests may be lost; in that case, the second mechanism in the next section will eventually ensure that a new seqno is received.

#### **3.8.2.2. Dealing with Unfeasible Updates**

When a route's metric increases, a node might receive an unfeasible update for a route that it has currently selected. As specified in [Section 3.5.1](#), the receiving node will either ignore the update or retract the route.

In order to keep routes from spuriously expiring because they have become unfeasible, a node SHOULD send a unicast seqno request whenever it receives an unfeasible update for a route that is currently selected. The requested sequence number is computed from the source table as above.



Additionally, a node SHOULD send a unicast seqno request whenever it receives an unfeasible update from a currently unselected neighbour that is "good enough", i.e., that would lead to the received route becoming selected were it feasible.

#### **3.8.2.3. Preventing Routes from Expiring**

In normal operation, a route's expiry timer should never trigger: since a route's hold time is computed from an explicit interval included in Update TLVs, a new update should arrive in time to prevent a route from expiring.

In the presence of packet loss, however, it may be the case that no update is successfully received for an extended period of time, causing a route to expire. In order to avoid such spurious expiry, shortly before a selected route expires, a Babel node SHOULD send a unicast route request to the neighbour that advertised this route; since nodes always send retractions in response to non-wildcard route requests ([Section 3.8.1.1](#)), this will usually result in either the route being refreshed or a retraction being received.

#### **3.8.2.4. Acquiring New Neighbours**

In order to speed up convergence after a mobility event, a node MAY send a unicast wildcard request after acquiring a new neighbour. Additionally, a node MAY send a small number of multicast wildcard requests shortly after booting.

### **4. Protocol Encoding**

A Babel packet is sent as the body of a UDP datagram, with network-layer hop count set to 1, destined to a well-known multicast address or to a unicast address, over IPv4 or IPv6; in the case of IPv6, these addresses are link-local. Both the source and destination UDP port are set to a well-known port number. A Babel packet MUST be silently ignored unless its source address is either a link-local IPv6 address, or an IPv4 address belonging to the local network, and its source port is the well-known Babel port. Babel packets MUST NOT be sent as IPv6 Jumbograms.

In order to minimise the number of packets being sent while avoiding lower-layer fragmentation, a Babel node SHOULD attempt to maximise the size of the packets it sends, up to the outgoing interface's MTU adjusted for lower-layer headers (28 octets for UDP/IPv4, 48 octets for UDP/IPv6). It MUST NOT send packets larger than the attached interface's MTU (adjusted for lower-layer headers) or 512 octets, whichever is larger, but not exceeding  $2^{16} - 1$  adjusted for lower-layer headers. Every Babel speaker MUST be able to receive packets



that are as large as any attached interface's MTU (adjusted for lower-layer headers) or 512 octets, whichever is larger.

In order to avoid global synchronisation of a Babel network and to aggregate multiple TLVs into large packets, a Babel node MUST buffer every TLV and delay sending a UDP packet by a small, randomly chosen delay [[JITTER](#)]. In order to allow accurate computation of packet loss rates, this delay MUST NOT be larger than half the advertised Hello interval.

## **[4.1.](#) Data Types**

### **[4.1.1.](#) Interval**

Relative times are carried as 16-bit values specifying a number of centiseconds (hundredths of a second). This allows times up to roughly 11 minutes with a granularity of 10ms, which should cover all reasonable applications of Babel.

### **[4.1.2.](#) Router-Id**

A router-id is an arbitrary 8-octet value. Router-ids SHOULD be assigned in modified EUI-64 format [[ADDRARCH](#)].

### **[4.1.3.](#) Address**

Since the bulk of the protocol is taken by addresses, multiple ways of encoding addresses are defined. Additionally, a common subnet prefix may be omitted when multiple addresses are sent in a single packet -- this is known as address compression [[PACKETBB](#)].

Address encodings:

- o AE 0: wildcard address. The value is 0 octets long.
- o AE 1: IPv4 address. Compression is allowed. 4 octets or less.
- o AE 2: IPv6 address. Compression is allowed. 16 octets or less.
- o AE 3: link-local IPv6 address. The value is 8 octets long, a prefix of fe80::/64 is implied.

The address family of an address is either IPv4 or IPv6; it is undefined for AE 0, IPv4 for AE 1, and IPv6 for AE 2 and 3.



#### 4.1.4. Prefixes

A network prefix is encoded just like a network address, but it is stored in the smallest number of octets that are enough to hold the significant bits (up to the prefix length).

#### 4.2. Packet Format

A Babel packet consists of a 4-octet header, followed by a sequence of TLVs.

```

0                               1                               2                               3
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|   Magic   |   Version   |   Body length   |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
| Packet Body ...
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+

```

Fields :

**Magic**        The arbitrary but carefully chosen value 42 (decimal); packets with a first octet different from 42 MUST be silently ignored.

**Version**     This document specifies version 2 of the Babel protocol. Packets with a second octet different from 2 MUST be silently ignored.

**Body length** The length in octets of the body following the packet header.

**Body**        The packet body; a sequence of TLVs.

Any data following the body MUST be silently ignored.

#### 4.3. TLV Format

With the exception of Pad1, all TLVs have the following structure:

```

0                               1                               2                               3
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|   Type   |   Length   |   Body...
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+

```

Fields :





Type	The type of the TLV.
Length	The length of the body, exclusive of the Type and Length fields. If the body is longer than the expected length of a given type of TLV, any extra data MUST be silently ignored.
Body	The TLV body, the interpretation of which depends on the type.

TLVs with an unknown type value MUST be silently ignored.

#### [4.4.](#) Details of Specific TLVs

##### [4.4.1.](#) Pad1

```

0
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
+---+---+---+---+
|   Type = 0   |
+---+---+---+---+
```

Fields :

Type        Set to 0 to indicate a Pad1 TLV.

This TLV is silently ignored on reception.

##### [4.4.2.](#) PadN

```

0                               1                               2                               3
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|   Type = 1   |   Length   |   MBZ...   |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
```

Fields :

Type        Set to 1 to indicate a PadN TLV.

Length      The length of the body, exclusive of the Type and Length fields.

MBZ         Set to 0 on transmission.

This TLV is silently ignored on reception.



**4.4.3. Acknowledgement Request**

```

0                               1                               2                               3
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|   Type = 2   |   Length   |           Reserved           |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|           Nonce           |           Interval           |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+

```

This TLV requests that the receiver send an Acknowledgement TLV within the number of centiseconds specified by the Interval field.

Fields :

Type        Set to 2 to indicate an Acknowledgement Request TLV.

Length      The length of the body, exclusive of the Type and Length fields.

Reserved    Sent as 0 and MUST be ignored on reception.

Nonce       An arbitrary value that will be echoed in the receiver's Acknowledgement TLV.

Interval    A time interval in centiseconds after which the sender will assume that this packet has been lost. This MUST NOT be 0. The receiver MUST send an acknowledgement before this time has elapsed (with a margin allowing for propagation time).

**4.4.4. Acknowledgement**

```

0                               1                               2                               3
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|   Type = 3   |   Length   |           Nonce           |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+

```

This TLV is sent by a node upon receiving an Acknowledgement Request.

Fields :

Type        Set to 3 to indicate an Acknowledgement TLV.

Length      The length of the body, exclusive of the Type and Length fields.



Nonce        Set to the Nonce value of the Acknowledgement Request that prompted this Acknowledgement.

Since nonce values are not globally unique, this TLV MUST be sent to a unicast address.

#### [4.4.5.](#) Hello

```

0                               1                               2                               3
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|   Type = 4   |   Length   |           Reserved           |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|           Seqno           |           Interval           |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+

```

This TLV is used for neighbour discovery and for determining a link's reception cost.

Fields :

Type        Set to 4 to indicate a Hello TLV.

Length      The length of the body, exclusive of the Type and Length fields.

Reserved    Sent as 0 and MUST be ignored on reception.

Seqno       The value of the sending node's Hello seqno for this interface.

Interval    An upper bound, expressed in centiseconds, on the time after which the sending node will send a new Hello TLV. This MUST NOT be 0.

Since there is a single seqno counter for all the Hellos sent by a given node over a given interface, this TLV MUST be sent to a multicast destination. In order to avoid large discontinuities in link quality, multiple Hello TLVs SHOULD NOT be sent in the same packet.

#### [4.4.6.](#) IHU



```

0                               1                               2                               3
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|   Type = 5   |   Length   |   AE   |   Reserved   |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|           Rxcost           |           Interval           |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|           Address...
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+

```

An IHU ("I Heard You") TLV is used for confirming bidirectional reachability and carrying a link's transmission cost.

Fields :

Type	Set to 5 to indicate an IHU TLV.
Length	The length of the body, exclusive of the Type and Length fields.
AE	The encoding of the Address field. This should be 1 or 3 in most cases. As an optimisation, it MAY be 0 if the TLV is sent to a unicast address, if the association is over a point-to-point link, or when bidirectional reachability is ascertained by means outside of the Babel protocol.
Reserved	Sent as 0 and MUST be ignored on reception.
Rxcost	The rxcost according to the sending node of the interface whose address is specified in the Address field. The value FFFF hexadecimal (infinity) indicates that this interface is unreachable.
Interval	An upper bound, expressed in centiseconds, on the time after which the sending node will send a new IHU; this MUST NOT be 0. The receiving node will use this value in order to compute a hold time for this symmetric association.
Address	The address of the destination node, in the format specified by the AE field. Address compression is not allowed.

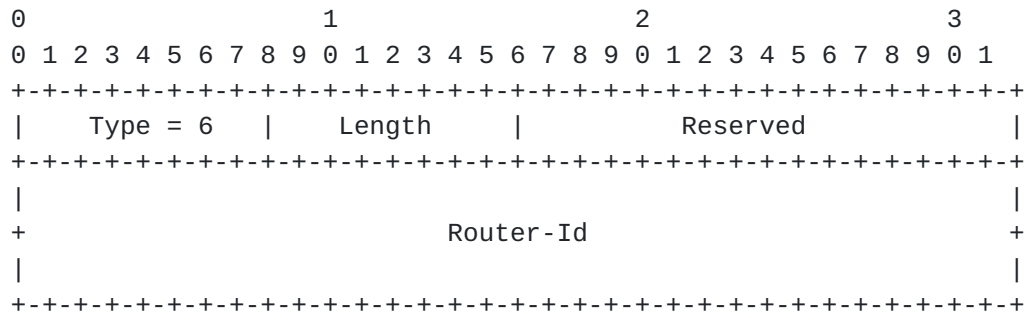
Conceptually, an IHU is destined to a single neighbour. However, IHU TLVs contain an explicit destination address, and it SHOULD be sent to a multicast address, as this allows aggregation of IHUs destined to distinct neighbours into a single packet and avoids the need for an ARP or Neighbour Discovery exchange when a neighbour is not being used for data traffic.





IHU TLVs with an unknown value for the AE field MUST be silently ignored.

#### 4.4.7. Router-Id



A Router-Id TLV establishes a router-id that is implied by subsequent Update TLVs.

Fields :

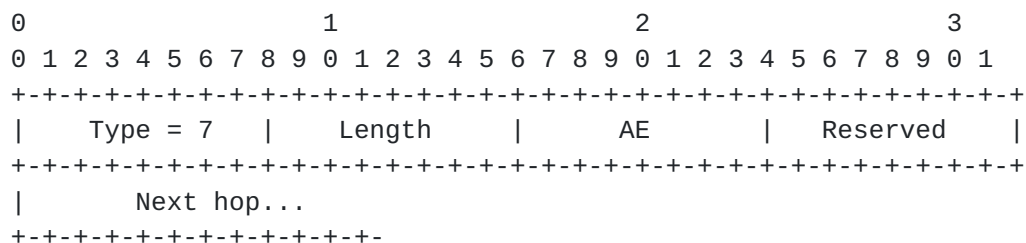
Type        Set to 6 to indicate a Router-Id TLV.

Length      The length of the body, exclusive of the Type and Length fields.

Reserved    Sent as 0 and MUST be ignored on reception.

Router-Id   The router-id for routes advertised in subsequent Update TLVs

#### 4.4.8. Next Hop



A Next Hop TLV establishes a next-hop address for a given address family (IPv4 or IPv6) that is implied by subsequent Update TLVs.

Fields :

Type        Set to 7 to indicate a Next Hop TLV.



Length	The length of the body, exclusive of the Type and Length fields.
--------	--

AE	The encoding of the Address field. This SHOULD be 1 or 3 and MUST NOT be 0.
----	---

Reserved Sent as 0 and MUST be ignored on reception.

**Next hop** The next-hop address advertised by subsequent Update TLVs, for this address family.

When the address family matches the network-layer protocol that this packet is transported over, a Next Hop TLV is not needed: in that case, the next hop is taken to be the source address of the packet.

Next Hop TLVs with an unknown value for the AE field MUST be silently ignored.

#### 4.4.9. Update

[illegible]

An Update TLV advertises or retracts a route. As an optimisation, this can also have the side effect of establishing a new implied router-id and a new default prefix.

Fields :

Type        Set to 8 to indicate an Update TLV.

Length	The length of the body, exclusive of the Type and Length fields.
--------	--

AE      The encoding of the Prefix field.

Flags	The individual bits of this field specify special handling of this TLV (see below). Every node MUST be able to
-------	--



interpret the flags with values 80 and 40 hexadecimal;  
unknown flags MUST be silently ignored.

- Plen        The length of the advertised prefix.
- Omitted    The number of octets that have been omitted at the beginning of the advertised prefix and that should be taken from a preceding Update TLV with the flag with value 80 hexadecimal set.
- Interval   An upper bound, expressed in centiseconds, on the time after which the sending node will send a new update for this prefix. This MUST NOT be 0 and SHOULD NOT be less than 10. The receiving node will use this value to compute a hold time for this routing table entry. The value FFFF hexadecimal (infinity) expresses that this announcement will not be repeated unless a request is received ([Section 3.8.2.3](#)).
- Seqno      The originator's sequence number for this update.
- Metric     The sender's metric for this route. The value FFFF hexadecimal (infinity) means that this is a route retraction.
- Prefix     The prefix being advertised. This field's size is  $(\text{Plen}/8 - \text{Omitted})$  rounded upwards.

The Flags field is interpreted as follows:

- o if the bit with value 80 hexadecimal is set, then this Update establishes a new default prefix for subsequent Update TLVs with a matching address family within the same packet;
- o if the bit with value 40 hexadecimal is set, then the low-order 8 octets of the advertised prefix establish a new default router-id for this TLV and subsequent Update TLVs in the same packet.

The prefix being advertised by an Update TLV is computed as follows:

- o the first Omitted octets of the prefix are taken from the previous Update TLV with flag 80 hexadecimal set and the same address family;
- o the next  $(\text{Plen}/8 - \text{Omitted})$  (rounded upwards) octets are taken from the Prefix field;
- o the remaining octets are set to 0.



If the Metric field is finite, the router-id of the originating node for this announcement is taken from the low-order 8 octets of the prefix advertised by this Update if the bit with value 40 hexadecimal is set in the Flags field. Otherwise, it is taken either from the preceding Router-Id packet, or the preceding Update packet with flag 40 hexadecimal set, whichever comes last.

The next-hop address for this update is taken from the last preceding Next Hop TLV with a matching address family in the same packet; if no such TLV exists, it is taken from the network-layer source address of this packet.

If the metric field is FFFF hexadecimal, this TLV specifies a retraction. In that case, the current router-id and the Seqno are not used. AE MAY then be 0, in which case this Update retracts all of the routes previously advertised on this interface.

Update TLVs with an unknown value for the AE field MUST be silently ignored.

#### [4.4.10.](#) Route Request

```

0                               1                               2                               3
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|   Type = 9   |   Length   |   AE   |   Plen   |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|   Prefix...
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+

```

A Route Request TLV prompts the receiver to send an update for a given prefix, or a full routing table dump.

Fields :

Type	Set to 9 to indicate a Route Request TLV.
Length	The length of the body, exclusive of the Type and Length fields.
AE	The encoding of the Prefix field. The value 0 specifies that this is a request for a full routing table dump (a wildcard request).
Plen	The length of the requested prefix.
Prefix	The prefix being requested. This field's size is Plen/8 rounded upwards.





A Request TLV prompts the receiving node to send an update message for the prefix specified by the AE, Plen, and Prefix fields, or a full dump of its routing table if AE is 0 (in which case Plen MUST be 0 and Prefix is of length 0). A Request may be sent to a unicast address if it is destined to a single node, or to a multicast address if the request is destined to all of the neighbours of the sending interface.

#### [4.4.11](#). Seqno Request

```

0                               1                               2                               3
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|   Type = 10   |   Length   |   AE   |   Plen   |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|               Seqno        |   Hop Count   |   Reserved   |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|                                   |
+                                   +
|                                   |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|   Prefix...
+---+---+---+---+---+---+

```

A Seqno Request TLV prompts the receiver to send an Update for a given prefix with a given sequence number, or to forward the request further if it cannot be satisfied locally.

Fields :

- Type        Set to 10 to indicate a Seqno Request message.
- Length      The length of the body, exclusive of the Type and Length fields.
- AE          The encoding of the Prefix field. This MUST NOT be 0.
- Plen        The length of the requested prefix.
- Seqno       The sequence number that is being requested.
- Hop Count   The maximum number of times that this TLV may be forwarded, plus 1. This MUST NOT be 0.
- Prefix      The prefix being requested. This field's size is Plen/8 rounded upwards.



A Seqno Request TLV prompts the receiving node to send an Update for the prefix specified by the AE, Plen, and Prefix fields, with either a router-id different from what is specified by the Router-Id field, or a Seqno no less than what is specified by the Seqno field. If this request cannot be satisfied locally, then it is forwarded according to the rules set out in [Section 3.8.1.2](#).

While a Seqno Request MAY be sent to a multicast address, it MUST NOT be forwarded to a multicast address and MUST NOT be forwarded to more than one neighbour. A request MUST NOT be forwarded if its Hop Count field is 1.

## 5. IANA Considerations

IANA has registered the UDP port number 6697, called "babel", for use by the Babel protocol.

IANA has registered the IPv6 multicast group ff02:0:0:0:0:0:1:6 and the IPv4 multicast group 224.0.0.111 for use by the Babel protocol.

## 6. Security Considerations

As defined in this document, Babel is a completely insecure protocol. Any attacker can attract data traffic by advertising routes with a low metric. This particular issue can be solved either by lower-layer security mechanisms (e.g., IPsec or link-layer security), or by appending a cryptographic key to Babel packets; the provision of ignoring any data contained within a Babel packet beyond the body length declared by the header is designed for just such a purpose.

The information that a Babel node announces to the whole routing domain is often sufficient to determine a mobile node's physical location with reasonable precision. The privacy issues that this causes can be mitigated somewhat by using randomly chosen router-ids and randomly chosen IP addresses, and changing them periodically.

When carried over IPv6, Babel packets are ignored unless they are sent from a link-local IPv6 address; since routers don't forward link-local IPv6 packets, this provides protection against spoofed Babel packets being sent from the global Internet. No such natural protection exists when Babel packets are carried over IPv4.

## 7. References



## **7.1. Normative References**

- [ADDRARCH] Hinden, R. and S. Deering, "IP Version 6 Addressing Architecture", [RFC 4291](#), February 2006.
- [RFC2119] Bradner, S., "Key words for use in RFCs to Indicate Requirement Levels", [RFC 2119](#), March 1997.

## **7.2. Informative References**

- [DSDV] Perkins, C. and P. Bhagwat, "Highly Dynamic Destination-Sequenced Distance-Vector Routing (DSDV) for Mobile Computers", ACM SIGCOMM'94 Conference on Communications Architectures, Protocols and Applications 234-244, 1994.
- [DUAL] Garcia Luna Aceves, J., "Loop-Free Routing Using Diffusing Computations", IEEE/ACM Transactions on Networking 1:1, February 1993.
- [EIGRP] Albrightson, B., Garcia Luna Aceves, J., and J. Boyle, "EIGRP -- a Fast Routing Protocol Based on Distance Vectors", Proc. Interop 94, 1994.
- [ETX] De Couto, D., Aguayo, D., Bicket, J., and R. Morris, "A high-throughput path metric for multi-hop wireless networks", Proc. MobiCom 2003, 2003.
- [IS-IS] "Information technology -- Telecommunications and information exchange between systems -- Intermediate System to Intermediate System intra-domain routing information exchange protocol for use in conjunction with the protocol for providing the connectionless-mode network service (ISO 8473)", ISO/IEC 10589:2002, 2002.
- [JITTER] Floyd, S. and V. Jacobson, "The synchronization of periodic routing messages", IEEE/ACM Transactions on Networking 2, 2, 122-136, April 1994.
- [OSPF] Moy, J., "OSPF Version 2", [RFC 2328](#), April 1998.
- [PACKETBB] Clausen, T., Dearlove, C., Dean, J., and C. Adjih, "Generalized Mobile Ad Hoc Network (MANET) Packet/Message Format", [RFC 5444](#), February 2009.
- [RIP] Malkin, G., "RIP Version 2", [RFC 2453](#), November 1998.



## **Appendix A. Cost and Metric Computation**

The strategy for computing link costs and route metrics is a local matter; Babel itself only requires that it comply with the conditions given in [Section 3.4.3](#) and [Section 3.5.2](#). Different nodes MAY use different strategies in a single network and MAY use different strategies on different interface types. This section gives a few examples of such strategies.

The sample implementation of Babel maintains statistics about the last 16 received Hello TLVs (Appendix A.1), computes costs by using the 2-out-of-3 strategy (Appendix A.2.1) on wired links, and ETX (Appendix A.2.2) on wireless links. It uses an additive algebra for metric computation (Appendix A.3.1).

### **A.1. Maintaining Hello History**

For each neighbour, the sample implementation of Babel maintains a Hello history and an expected sequence number. The Hello history is a vector of 16 bits, where a 1 value represents a received Hello, and a 0 value a missed Hello. The expected sequence number, written  $ne$ , is the sequence number that is expected to be carried by the next received hello from this neighbour.

Whenever it receives a Hello packet from a neighbour, a node compares the received sequence number  $nr$  with its expected sequence number  $ne$ . Depending on the outcome of this comparison, one of the following actions is taken:

- o if the two differ by more than 16 (modulo  $2^{16}$ ), then the sending node has probably rebooted and lost its sequence number; the associated neighbour table entry is flushed;
- o otherwise, if the received  $nr$  is smaller (modulo  $2^{16}$ ) than the expected sequence number  $ne$ , then the sending node has increased its Hello interval without our noticing; the receiving node removes the last  $(ne - nr)$  entries from this neighbour's Hello history (we "undo history");
- o otherwise, if  $nr$  is larger (modulo  $2^{16}$ ) than  $ne$ , then the sending node has decreased its Hello interval, and some Hellos were lost; the receiving node adds  $(nr - ne) \ 0$  bits to the Hello history (we "fast-forward").

The receiving node then appends a 1 bit to the neighbour's Hello history, resets the neighbour's Hello timer, and sets  $ne$  to  $(nr + 1)$ . It then resets the neighbour's Hello timer to 1.5 times the value





advertised in the received Hello (the extra margin allows for the delay due to jitter).

Whenever the Hello timer associated to a neighbour expires, the local node adds a 0 bit to this neighbour's Hello history, and increments the expected Hello number. If the Hello history is empty (it contains 0 bits only), the neighbour entry is flushed; otherwise, it resets the neighbour's Hello timer to the value advertised in the last Hello received from this neighbour (no extra margin is necessary in this case).

## **[A.2.](#) Cost Computation**

### **[A.2.1.](#) k-out-of-j**

K-out-of-j link sensing is suitable for wired links that are either up, in which case they only occasionally drop a packet, or down, in which case they drop all packets.

The k-out-of-j strategy is parameterised by two small integers k and j, such that  $0 < k \leq j$ , and the nominal link cost, a constant  $K \geq 1$ . A node keeps a history of the last j hellos; if k or more of those have been correctly received, the link is assumed to be up, and the rxcost is set to K; otherwise, the link is assumed to be down, and the rxcost is set to infinity.

The cost of such a link is defined as

- o cost = FFFF hexadecimal if rxcost = FFFF hexadecimal;
- o cost = txcost otherwise.

### **[A.2.2.](#) ETX**

The Estimated Transmission Cost metric [[ETX](#)] estimates the number of times that a unicast frame will be retransmitted by the IEEE 802.11 MAC, assuming infinite persistence.

A node uses a neighbour's Hello history to compute an estimate, written beta, of the probability that a Hello TLV is successfully received. The rxcost is defined as  $256/\text{beta}$ .

Let alpha be  $\text{MIN}(1, 256/\text{txcost})$ , an estimate of the probability of successfully sending a Hello TLV. The cost is then computed by

$$\text{cost} = 256/(\text{alpha} * \text{beta})$$

or, equivalently,



$$\text{cost} = (\text{MAX}(\text{txcost}, 256) * \text{rxcost}) / 256.$$

### **[A.3. Metric Computation](#)**

#### **[A.3.1. Additive Metrics](#)**

The simplest approach for obtaining a monotonic, isotonic metric is to define the metric of a route as the sum of the costs of the component links. More formally, if a neighbour advertises a route with metric  $m$  over a link with cost  $c$ , then the resulting route has metric  $M(c, m) = c + m$ .

A multiplicative metric can be converted to an additive one by taking the logarithm (in some suitable base) of the link costs.

#### **[A.3.2. External Sources of Willingness](#)**

A node may want to vary its willingness to forward packets by taking into account information that is external to the Babel protocol, such as the monetary cost of a link, the node's battery status, CPU load, etc. This can be done by adding to every route's metric a value  $k$  that depends on the external data. For example, if a battery-powered node receives an update with metric  $m$  over a link with cost  $c$ , it might compute a metric  $M(c, m) = k + c + m$ , where  $k$  depends on the battery status.

In order to preserve strict monotonicity ([Section 3.5.2](#)), the value  $k$  must be greater than  $-c$ .

## **[Appendix B. Constants](#)**

The choice of time constants is a trade-off between fast detection of mobility events and protocol overhead. Two implementations of Babel with different time constants will interoperate, although the resulting convergence time will most likely be dictated by the slowest of the two implementations.

Experience with the sample implementation of Babel indicates that the Hello interval is the most important time constant: a mobility event is detected within 1.5 to 3 Hello intervals. Due to Babel's reliance on triggered updates and explicit requests, the Update interval only has an effect on the time it takes for accurate metrics to be propagated after variations in link costs too small to trigger an unscheduled update.

At the time of writing, the sample implementation of Babel uses the following default values:



Hello Interval: 4 seconds on wireless links, 20 seconds on wired links.

IHU Interval: the advertised IHU interval is always 3 times the Hello interval. IHUs are actually sent with each Hello on lossy links (as determined from the Hello history), but only with every third Hello on lossless links.

Update Interval: 4 times the Hello interval.

IHU Hold Time: 3.5 times the advertised IHU interval.

Route Expiry Time: 3.5 times the advertised update interval.

Source GC time: 3 minutes.

The amount of jitter applied to a packet depends on whether it contains any urgent TLVs or not. Urgent triggered updates and urgent requests are delayed by no more than 200ms; other TLVs are delayed by no more than one-half the Hello interval.

## [Appendix C](#). Simplified Implementations

Babel is a fairly economic protocol. Route updates take between 12 and 40 octets per destination, depending on how successful compression is; in a double-stack mesh network, an average of less than 24 octets is typical. The route table occupies about 35 octets per IPv6 entry. To put these values into perspective, a single full-size Ethernet frame can carry some 65 route updates, and a megabyte of memory can contain a 20000-entry routing table and the associated source table.

Babel is also a reasonably simple protocol. The sample implementation consists of less than 8000 lines of C code, and it compiles to less than 60 kB of text on a 32-bit CISC architecture.

Nonetheless, in some very constrained environments, such as PDAs, microwave ovens, or abacuses, it may be desirable to have subset implementations of the protocol.

A parasitic implementation is one that uses a Babel network for routing its packets but does not announce any of the routes that it has learnt from its neighbours. (This is slightly more than a passive implementation, which doesn't even announce routes to itself.) It may either maintain a full routing table or simply select a gateway amongst any one of its neighbours that announces a default route. Since a parasitic implementation never forwards packets, it cannot possibly participate in a routing loop; hence, it



need not evaluate the feasibility condition, and need not maintain a source table.

A parasitic implementation MUST answer acknowledgement requests and MUST participate in the Hello/IHU protocol. Finally, it MUST be able to reply to seqno requests for routes that it announces and SHOULD be able to reply to route requests.

#### **Appendix D. Software Availability**

The sample implementation of Babel is available from  
<<http://www.pps.univ-paris-diderot.fr/~jch/software/babel/>>.

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