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Energy Efficient Implementation of IETF Constrained Protocol Suite  
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## Abstract

This document summarizes the problems and current practices of energy efficient protocol implementation on constrained devices, mostly about how to make the protocols within IETF scope behave energy friendly. This document also summarizes the impact of link layer protocol power saving behaviors to the upper layer protocols, so that they can coordinately make the system energy efficient.

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## [1.](#) Introduction

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

Various research efforts have been spent on this "energy efficiency" problem. Most of this research has focused on how to optimize the system's power consumption regarding a certain deployment scenario or how could an existing network function such as routing or security be

more energy-efficient. Only few efforts were spent on energy-efficient designs for IETF protocols and standardized network stacks for such constrained devices [[I-D.kovatsch-lwig-class1-coap](#)].

The IETF has developed a suite of Internet protocols suitable for such small devices, including 6LoWPAN ( [[RFC6282](#)],[[RFC6775](#)],[[RFC4944](#)] ), RPL[[RFC6550](#)], and CoAP[[I-D.ietf-core-coap](#)]. This document tries to summarize the design considerations of making the IETF protocol suite as energy-efficient as possible. While this document does not provide detailed and systematic solutions to the energy efficiency problem, it summarizes the design efforts and analyzes the design space of this problem.

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

### [1.1](#). Conventions used in this document

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

### [1.2](#). Terminology

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

## [2](#). Overview

The IETF has developed multiple protocols to enable end-to-end IP communication between constrained nodes and fully capable nodes. This work has witnessed the evolution of the traditional Internet protocol stack to a light-weight Internet protocol stack. As show in

Figure 1 below, the IETF has developed CoAP as the application layer and 6LoWPAN as the adaption layer to run IPv6 over IEEE 802.15.4 and Bluetooth Low-Energy, with the support of routing by RPL and efficient neighbor discovery by 6LoWPAN-ND.

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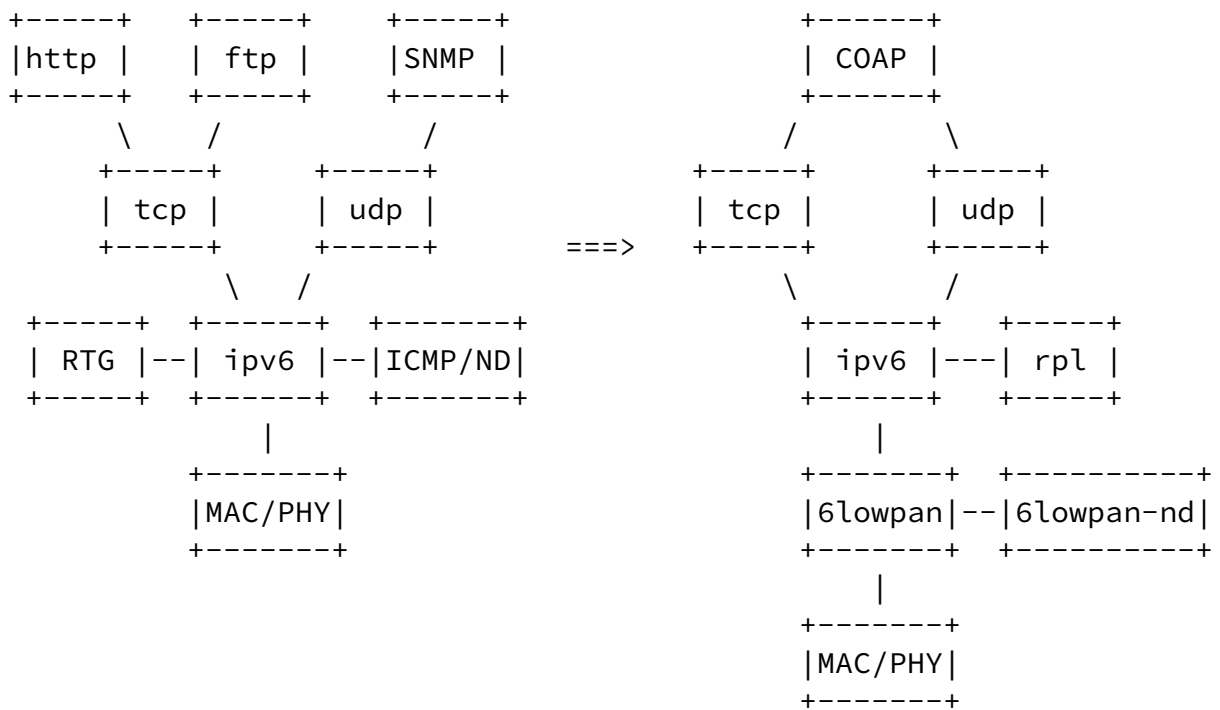


Figure 1: Traditional and Light-weight Internet Protocol Stack

There are comprehensive measurements of wireless communication [[Powertrace](#)]. Below we list the energy consumption profile of the most common atom operations on a prevalent sensor node platform. The measurement was based on the Tmote Sky with ContikiMAC as the radio duty cycling algorithm. From the measurement, we can see that optimized transmissions and reception consume almost the same amount of energy. For IEEE 802.15.4 and UWB radios, transmitting is

actually even cheaper than receiving. Only for broadcast and non-synchronized communication transmissions become costly in terms of energy because they need to flood the medium for a long time.

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

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

### 3. MAC and Radio Duty Cycling

In low-power wireless networks, communication and power consumption

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

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

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

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

### [3.1.](#) Power Save Services Provided by IEEE 802.11v

IEEE 802.11v [[IEEE80211v](#)] defines mechanisms and services for power save of stations/nodes that include flexible multicast service (FMS), proxy ARP advertisement, extended sleep modes, traffic filtering. It would be useful if upper layer protocols knows such capabilities provided by the lower layer, so that they can coordinate with each other.

These services include:

**Proxy ARP:** The Proxy ARP capability enables an Access Point (AP) to indicate that the non-AP station (STA) will not receive ARP frames. The Proxy ARP capability enables the non-AP STA to remain in power-save for longer periods of time.

Basic Service Set (BSS) Max Idle Period management enables an AP to indicate a time period during which the AP does not disassociate a STA due to non-receipt of frames from the STA. This supports improved STA power saving and AP resource management.

FMS: A service in which a non-access point (non-AP) station (STA) can request a multicast delivery interval longer than the delivery traffic indication message (DTIM) interval for the purposes of lengthening the period of time a STA may be in a power save state.

Traffic Filtering Service (TFS): A service provided by an access point (AP) to a non-AP station (STA) that can reduce the number of frames sent to the non-AP STA by not forwarding individually addressed frames addressed to the non-AP STA that do not match traffic filters specified by the non-AP STA.

Using the above services provided by the lower layer, the constrained nodes can achieve either client initiated power save (via TFS) or network assisted power save (Proxy-ARP, BSS Max Idle Period and FMS).

Upper layer protocols would better synchronize with the parameters such as FMS interval and BSS MAX Idle Period, so that the wireless transmissions are not triggered periodically.

### [3.2.](#) Power Save Services Provided by Bluetooth Low Energy

Bluetooth Low Energy (BT-LE) is a wireless low-power communications technology that is the hallmark component of the Bluetooth 4.0 specification. BT-LE has been designed for the goal of ultra-low-power consumption. Currently, it is possible to run IPv6 over BT-LE networks by using a 6LoWPAN variant adapted to BT-LE [[I-D.ietf-6lowpan-btle](#)].

BT-LE networks comprise a master and one or more slaves which are connected to the master. The BT-LE master is assumed to be a relatively powerful device, whereas a slave is typically a constrained device (e.g. a class 1 device).

Medium access in BT-LE is based on a TDMA scheme which is coordinated by the master. This device determines the start of connection events, in which communication between the master and a slave takes

place. At the beginning of a connection event, the master sends a poll message, which may encapsulate data, to the slave. The latter must send a response, which may also contain data. The master and the slave may continue exchanging data until the end of the connection event. The next opportunity for communication between the master and the slave will be in the next connection event scheduled for the slave.

The time between consecutive connection events is defined by the `connInterval` parameter, which may range between 7.5 ms and 4 s. The slave may remain in sleep mode since the end of its last connection event until the beginning of its next connection event. Therefore, BT-LE is duty-cycled by nature. Furthermore, after having replied to the master, a slave is not required to listen to the master (and thus may keep the radio in sleep mode) for `connSlaveLatency` consecutive connection events. `connSlaveLatency` is an integer parameter between 0 and 499 which should not cause link inactivity for more than `connSupervisionTimeout` time. The `connSupervisionTimeout` parameter is in the range between 100 ms and 32 s.

Upper layer protocols should take into account the medium access and duty-cycling behavior of BT-LE. In particular, `connInterval`, `connSlaveLatency` and `connSupervisionTimeout` determine the time between two consecutive connection events for a given slave. The upper layer packet generation pattern and rate should be consistent with the settings of the aforementioned parameters (and vice versa).

### 3.3. Power Save Services in IEEE 802.15.4

IEEE 802.15.4 is a family of standard radio interfaces for low-rate, low-power wireless networking. Since the publication of its first version in 2003, IEEE 802.15.4 has become the de-facto choice for a wide range of constrained node network application domains and has been a primary target technology of various IETF working groups such as 6LoWPAN [[RFC6282](#)], [[RFC6775](#)], [[RFC4944](#)] and 6TiSCH [[I-D.ietf-6tisch-architecture](#)]. IEEE 802.15.4 specifies PHY and MAC layer functionality.

IEEE 802.15.4 defines three roles called device, coordinator and PAN coordinator. The device role is adequate for nodes that do not

implement the complete IEEE 802.15.4 functionality, and is mainly



targeted for constrained nodes with a limited energy source. The coordinator role includes synchronization capabilities and is suitable for nodes that do not suffer severe constraints (e.g. a mains-powered node). The PAN coordinator is a special type of coordinator that acts as a principal controller in an IEEE 802.15.4 network.

IEEE 802.15.4 has mainly defined two types of networks depending on their configuration: beacon-enabled and nonbeacon-enabled networks. In the first network type, coordinators periodically transmit beacons. The time between beacons is divided in three main parts: the Contention Access Period (CAP), the Contention Free Period (CFP) and an inactive period. In the first period, nodes use slotted CSMA/CA for data communication. In the second one, a TDMA scheme controls medium access. During the idle period, communication does not take place, thus the inactive period is a good opportunity for nodes to turn the radio off and save energy. The coordinator announces in each beacon the list of nodes for which data will be sent in the subsequent period. Therefore, devices may remain in sleep mode by default and wake up periodically to listen to the beacons sent by their coordinator. If a device wants to transmit data, or learns from a beacon that it is an intended destination, then it will exchange messages with the coordinator and will thus consume energy. An underlying assumption is that when a message is sent to a coordinator, the radio of the latter will be ready to receive the message.

The beacon interval and the duration of the beacon interval active portion (i.e. the CAP and the CFP), and thus the duty cycle, can be configured. The parameters that control these times are called `macBeaconOrder` and `macSuperframeOrder`, respectively. As an example, when IEEE 802.15.4 operates in the 2.4 GHz PHY, both times can be (independently) set to values in the range between 15.36 ms and 251.6 s.

In the beaconless mode, nodes use unslotted CSMA/CA for data transmission. The device may be in sleep mode by default and may activate its radio to either i) request to the coordinator whether there is pending data for the device, or ii) to transmit data to the coordinator. The wake-up pattern of the device, if any, is out of the scope of IEEE 802.15.4.

Communication between the two ends of an IEEE 802.15.4 link may also take place in a peer-to-peer configuration, whereby both link ends assume the same role. In this case, data transmission can happen at any moment. Nodes must have their radio in receive mode, and be ready to listen to the medium by default (which for battery-enabled

nodes may lead to a quick battery depletion), or apply synchronization techniques. The latter are out of the scope of IEEE 802.15.4.

The main MAC layer IEEE 802.15.4 amendment to date is IEEE 802.15.4e. This amendment includes various new MAC layer modes, some of which include mechanisms for low energy consumption. Among these, the Time-Slotted Channel Hopping (TSCH) is an outstanding mode which offers robust features for industrial environments, among others. In order to provide the functionality needed to enable IPv6 over TSCH, the 6TiSCH working group has been recently created. TSCH is based on a TDMA schedule whereby a set of time slots are used for frame transmission and reception, and other time slots are unscheduled. The latter time slots may be used by a dynamic scheduling mechanism, otherwise nodes may keep the radio off during the unscheduled time slots, thus saving energy. The minimal schedule configuration specified in [[I-D.ietf-6tisch-minimal](#)] comprises 101 time slots, whereby 95 of these time slots are unscheduled and the time slot duration is 15 ms.

#### 4. IP Adaptation and Transport Layer

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

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

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

The 6LoWPAN contributes to the energy-efficiency problem in two ways. First of all, it swaps computing with communication. 6LoWPAN applies compression of the IPv6 header. This means less amount of data will be handled by the lower layer, but both the sender and receiver should spend more computing power on the compression and decompression of the packets over the air. Secondly, the 6LoWPAN

working group developed the energy-efficient Neighbor Discovery called 6LoWPAN-ND, which is an energy efficient replacement of the

IPv6 ND in constrained environments. IPv6 Neighbor Discovery was not designed for non-transitive wireless links, as its heavy use of multicast makes it inefficient and sometimes impractical in a low-power and lossy network. 6LoWPAN-ND describes simple optimizations to IPv6 Neighbor Discovery, its addressing mechanisms, and duplicate address detection for Low-power Wireless Personal Area Networks and similar networks. However, 6LoWPAN ND does not modify Neighbor Unreachability Detection (NUD) timeouts, which are very short (by default three transmissions spaced one second apart). NUD timeout settings should be tuned taking into account the latency that may be introduced by duty-cycled mechanisms at the link layer, or alternative, less impatient NUD algorithms should be considered [[I-D.ietf-6man-impatient-nud](#)].

## 5. Routing Protocols

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

The authors of the Powertrace tool [[Powertrace](#)] studied the power profile of RPL. It divides the routing protocol into control and data traffic. The control channel uses ICMP messages to establish and maintain the routing states. The data channel is any application that uses RPL for routing packets. The study has shown that the power consumption of the control traffic goes down over time and data traffic stays relatively constant. The study also reflects that the routing protocol should keep the control traffic as low as possible to make it energy-friendly. The amount of RPL control traffic can be tuned by setting the Trickle algorithm parameters (i.e.  $I_{min}$ ,  $I_{max}$  and  $k$ ) to adequate values. However, there exists a trade-off between energy consumption and other performance parameters such as network convergence time and robustness.

Todo: more discussion of energy efficient routing.

## 6. Application Layer

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

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

CoAP offers mechanisms for reliable communication between two CoAP endpoints. A CoAP message may be signaled as a confirmable (CON) message, and an acknowledgment (ACK) is issued by the receiver if the CON message is correctly received. The sender starts a Retransmission Timeout (RTO) for every CON message sent. The initial RTO value is chosen randomly between 2 and 3 s. If an RTO expires, the new RTO value is doubled (unless a limit on the number of retransmissions has been reached). Since duty-cycling at the link layer may lead to long latency (i.e. even greater than the initial RTO value), CoAP RTO parameters should be tuned accordingly in order to avoid spurious RTOs which would unnecessarily waste node energy and other resources.

## 7. Cross Layer Optimization

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

Also a cross-layer design in multihop wireless networks is proposed

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

Todo: more discussion of Cross layer issues.

## 8. Summary

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

- a. All Internet protocols, which are in the scope of the IETF, are customers of the lower layers (PHY, MAC, and Duty-cycling). In

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order to get a better service, the designers of higher layers should know them better.

- b. The IETF has developed multiple protocols for constrained networked devices. A lot of implicit energy efficient design principles have been used in these protocols.
- c. The power trace analysis of different protocol operations showed that for radio-duty-cycled networks broadcasts should be avoided. Saving unnecessary states maintenance is also an effective method to be energy-friendly.

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## 10. IANA Considerations

This document has no IANA requests.

## 11. Security Considerations

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

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