

Network Working Group
Internet-Draft
Intended status: Informational
Expires: November 29, 2013

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May 28, 2013

**A Framework for Semantic IPv6 Prefix
draft-jiang-v6ops-semantic-prefix-03**

Abstract

This document describes a framework method that network operations may use their addresses. Network operators, who have large IPv6 address space, may choose to embedded some semantics into IPv6 addresses by assigning additional significance to specific bits within the prefix. By embedded semantics into IPv6 prefixes, the semantics of packets can be inspected easily. Routers and other intermediary devices can easily apply relevant policies as required. Packet-level differentiation can also enable flow-level and user-level differentiation. Consequently, the network operators can accordingly treat network packets differently and efficiently. The management and maintenance of networks can be much simpler.

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1. Introduction

As the global Internet expands, it is being used for an increasingly diverse range of services. These services place differentiated requirements upon packet delivery networks meaning that Internet Service Providers and enterprises need to be aware of more information about each packet in order to best meet a specific service's needs.

Within a specific prefix, source/destination location information is used for routing decisions. However, user types, service types, applications, security requirements, traffic identity types, quality requirements and other criteria may also be relevant parameters which a network operator may wish to use to treat packets differently and efficiently. Packet-level differentiation can also be used for flow-level and user-level differentiation.

However, almost all of the above mentioned criteria are not expressed explicitly within an packet. Hence, it is difficult for network operators to identify from packet level.

This informational document only discusses the usage of semantics within a single network, or group of interconnected networks which share a common addressing policy, referred to as a Semantic Prefix Domain.

The informational document is NOT intended to suggest the standardization of any common global semantics.

2. Existing Approaches to Traffic Differentiation

There are several existing approaches which have been developed that can assist operators in identifying and marking traffic. These solutions were mainly developed in the IPv4 era, where the IP address is used as a host locator and little else. The limited capacity of a 32-bit IPv4 address provides very little room for encoding additional information. Correspondingly, these approaches are indirect, inefficient and expensive for operators.

2.1. Differentiated Services

Quality of Service (QoS) based on and Differentiated Services [[RFC2474](#)] is a widely deployed framework specifying a simple, scalable and coarse-grained mechanism for classifying and managing network traffic. But in a service provider's network, DiffServ codepoint (DSCP) values cannot be trusted when they are set by the customer as these are arbitrary values.

In real-world scenarios, ISPs deploy "remarking" points at the customer edge of their network, re-classifying received packets by rewriting the DSCP field according to local policy using information such as the source/destination address, IP protocol number and transport layer source/destination ports.

The traffic classification process leads to increased packet processing overhead and complexity at the edge of the service provider's network.

The DSCP in the IPv6 header traffic class field allows 6-bits for encoding service provider specific information related to the contents of the packet. Whilst this is a useful part of an overall packet differentiation architecture, the relative small number of available bits (when compared to the available number of bits within the service providers prefix) means that it cannot be used in isolation.

2.2. Deep Packet Inspection

Deep Packet Inspection (DPI) may also be used by ISPs to learn the characteristics of users packets. This involves looking into the packet well beyond the network-layer header to identify the specific application traffic type. Once identified, the traffic type can be used as an input for setting the packet's DSCP or other actions.

But DPI is expensive both in processing costs and latency. The processing costs means that dedicated infrastructure is necessary to carry out the function. The incurred latency may be too much for use with any delay/jitter sensitive applications. As a result, DPI is difficult for large-scale deployment and it's usage is usually limited to small and specific functions in the network.

3. Terminology

The following terms are used throughout this document:

Semantic Prefix: A flexible-length IPv6 prefix which embeds certain semantics.

Semantic Prefix Domain: A portion of the Internet over which a consistent semantic-prefix based policy is in operation.

Semantic Prefix Policy: A policy based on the embedded semantics within IPv6 prefix.

4. Technical Framework of Semantic IPv6 Prefix

The IPv6 address can explicitly express semantics due to its large address space. This can be used by network operators to embed certain pre-defined semantics into an address so that intermediate devices can easily apply relevant forwarding operations each packet based solely on network layer source and destination address information.

This document describes a technical framework for embedding semantics into IPv6 prefixes so that network devices can process and forward packets based on these semantics. This approach diverts much network complexity to the planning and management of IPv6 address and IP address based policies. It indeed simplifies the management of ISP networks.

A network operator should first carefully plan/design its IPv6 address schema, in which useful semantics (see [Section 4.3](#)) are embedded into prefix. It then delegates prefixes with correspondent semantics to users. The users generate their IPv6 addresses based on assigned prefixes. Then, when the IPv6 stack on the user devices forms packets, the source addresses comprise compliance semantics. The filters on the edge router drop packets which does not compliant with assigned prefixes.

Semantic prefix definitions are only meaningful within a domain which implements a single policy (see [Section 4.2](#)). Different service providers may make very different choices regarding the specific semantics which are relevant to their networks. Therefore, it is not possible or desirable to attempt to standardize a general semantic prefix policy.

Forwarding policies, security isolation and other network operations (see [Section 4.4](#)) can be easily applied according to semantics, which self-expressed by the source address of every packet. Also, the semantics of the destination address may take in account if the destination is in the same Semantic Prefix Domain or the peer Semantic Prefix Domain whose semantics has been notified.

[4.1](#). Justifcation for Semantics with the IPv6 Prefix

Although the interface identifier portion of an IPv6 address has arbitrary bits and extension headers can carry significantly more information, these fields can not be trusted by network operators. Users may easily change the setting of interface identifier or extension header in order to obtain undeserved priorities/privileges, while servers or enterprise users may be much more self-restricted since they are charged accordingly.

Prefix is almost the only thing a network operator can trust in an IP packet. Semantic prefix approach does require the deployment of access control filters. The packets with the noncompliance source addresses should be filtered. The prefix is delegated by the network and therefore the network is able to detect any undesired modifications and filter the packet accordingly. This also makes it possible for the service provider to increase the level of trust in a customer-generated packet. If the packet has an incorrectly set source or destination address, then a session will simply fail to establish.

4.2. The Semantic Prefix Domain

A Semantic Prefix Domain is analogous to a Differentiated Services Domain [[RFC2474](#)]. It can be described as a portion of the Internet over which a consistent set of semantic-prefix-based policies are administered in a coordinated fashion. Some of the characteristics of a single Semantic Prefix Domain could represent include:

- a. Administrative domains
- b. Autonomous systems
- c. Trust regions
- d. Network technologies
- e. Hosts
- f. Routers
- g. User groups
- h. Services
- i. Traffic groups
- j. Applications

An enterprise Semantic Prefix Domain may span several physical networks and traverse ISP networks. However, when an interim network is traversed (such as when an intermediary ISP is used for interconnectivity), the relevance of the semantics is limited to network domains that share a common Semantic Prefix Policy.

The selection of semantics vary between different Semantic Prefix Domains. Network operators should choose semantics according to their network and service management needs. If an ISP has several

non-contiguous address blocks, they may be organized as a single Semantic Prefix Domain if the same Semantic Prefix Policy is shared across these non-contiguous address blocks.

A Semantic Prefix Domain has a set of pre-defined semantic definitions, which are only meaningful locally. Without an efficient semantics notification, exchanging mechanism or service agreement, the definitions of semantics are only meaningful within local Semantic Prefix Domain. Manual interactions between network operators may also work out. However, this may involve trust models among network operators.

Sharing semantic definition among Semantic Prefix Domains enables more semantic based network operations.

4.3. The Embedded Semantics

The size of the operator assigned prefix means that there is potentially much more scope for embedding semantics than has previously been possible. The following list describes some suggested semantics which may be useful to network operators besides source/destination location:

- a. User types
- b. Applications
- c. Security domain
- d. Traffic identity types
- e. Quality requirements

Consideration must also be given to the complexity that is created within the semantic prefix policy. Whilst it may be desirable to encode as much information within the prefix so that it is possible to have a high level of granularity, this can come at the expense of future addressing flexibility and could also lead to a high amount of address wastage. In the same time, embedding too many semantics may waste addressing space and induce semantic overlap. It should be taken into careful consideration on semantics definition.

4.4. Network Operations Based on Semantic Prefix

Based on the explicit semantics from the addresses of every packet, many network operations can be applied. Comparing with traditional operations, these operations are easier to realize and stable. Although the detailed operation are various depending on various

embedded semantics, the network operations based on semantic prefix can be abstracted into following categories:

- a. Statistic based on certain semantic. Any embedded semantic can be set as a statistic condition. In other word, any embedded semantic can be measured independently.
- b. Differentiate packet processing. Many packet processing operations can be applied based on the semantic differentiation, such as queueing, path selection, forwarding to certain process devices, etc.
- c. Security isolation. A set of packet filters that are based on semantic can fulfil network security isolation.
- d. Access control. Resource access, authentication, service access can be based on semantic directly.
- e. Resource allocation. Resources, such as bandwidth, fast queue, cache, etc., can be allocated or reserved for certain semantic users/packets.
- f. Virtualization. Within a Semantic Prefix Domain, it would be easy to organize a virtual network, in which all the nodes have been assigned same semantic identifier so that the packets from them can be distinguished from other virtual networks.

5. Potential Benefits

Depending on embedded semantics, various beneficial scenarios can be expected.

- a. Simplified measurement and statistics gathering: the semantic prefix provides explicit identifiers which can be used for measurement and statistical information collection. This can be achieved by checking certain bits of the source and/or destination address in each packet.
- b. Simplified flow control: by applying policies according to certain bit values, packets carrying the same semantics in their source/destination addresses can.
- c. Service segregation: when service related information is encoded within the semantic prefix, this can be used to create simple access-control lists which can be applied uniformly across all network devices. This means that it is easy to

- d. Policy aggregation: the semantic prefix allows many policies to be aggregated according to the same semantics within the policy based routing system [[RFC1104](#)].
- e. Easy dynamic reconfiguration of semantic oriented policy: network operators may want to dynamically change the policy actions that are operated on certain semantic packets. The semantic prefix allows such changes be operated easily, as only a small number of consistent policy rules need to be updated on all devices within the semantic prefix domain.
- f. Application-aware routing: embedding application information into IP addresses is the simplest way to realize application aware routing.
- g. Easy user behavior management: based on the user type reading from the addresses, any improper user behaviors can be easily detected and automatically handled by network policies.
- h. Easy network resources access rights management: the authentication of access right may already be embedded into the addresses. Simple matching policies can filter improper access requests.
- i. Easy virtualization: virtual network based on any semantics can be easily deployed using the semantic prefix mechanism.

6. IANA Considerations

This document has no IANA considerations.

7. Change Log (removed by RFC editor)

[draft-jiang-v6ops-semantic-prefix-03](#): reword to emphasize this mechanism is a (not the) method that network operators use their addresses; add text to clarify the increased trust is actually from the deployment of source address filter, which is a compliance requirement by semantic prefix; restructure the document, move examples and gap analysis into appendixes, reorganize most content into a frame section; add summarized description for framework at the beginning of [Section 4](#); add description for network operations based on semantic prefix; add a new coauthor who contributes an enterprise semantic prefix network example; combine most of [draft-sun-v6ops-semantic-usecase](#) into the draft as ISP example in appendix; 2013-5-28.

[draft-jiang-v6ops-semantic-prefix-02](#): add new coauthor, re-organize the content, and refine the English, 2013-1-31.

[draft-jiang-v6ops-semantic-prefix-01](#): add the concept of hierarchical Semantic Prefix Domain and more gap analysis, 2012-10-22.

[draft-jiang-v6ops-semantic-prefix-00](#): resubmitted to v6ops WG. Removed detailed examples and recommendations for semantics bits, 2012-10-15.

[draft-jiang-semantic-prefix-01](#): added enterprise considerations and scenarios, emphasizing semantics only for local meaning and no intend to standardize any common global semantics, 2012-07-16.

[draft-jiang-semantic-prefix-00](#): original version, 2012-07-09

8. Security Considerations

Embedding semantics in prefix is actually exposing more information of packets explicit. These informations may also provide convenient for malicious attackers to track or attack certain type of packets. If networks announce their local prefix semantics to their peer networks, it may also increase the vulnerable risk.

Prefix-based filters should be deployed, in order to protect against address spoofing attacks or denial of service for packets with forged source addresses.

9. Acknowledgements

Useful comments were made by Erik Nygren, Nick Hilliard, Ray Hunter, David Farmer, Fred Baker, Joel Jaeggli, John Curran and other participants in the V6OPS working group.

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10.1. Normative References

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[10.2.](#) Informative References

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[Appendix A.](#) An ISP Semantic Prefix Example

This ISP semantic prefix example is abstracted from a real ISP address architecture design.

Note: for now, this example only covers unicast address within IP Version 6 Addressing Architecture [[RFC4291](#)].

For ISPs, several motivations to use semantic prefixes are as follows:

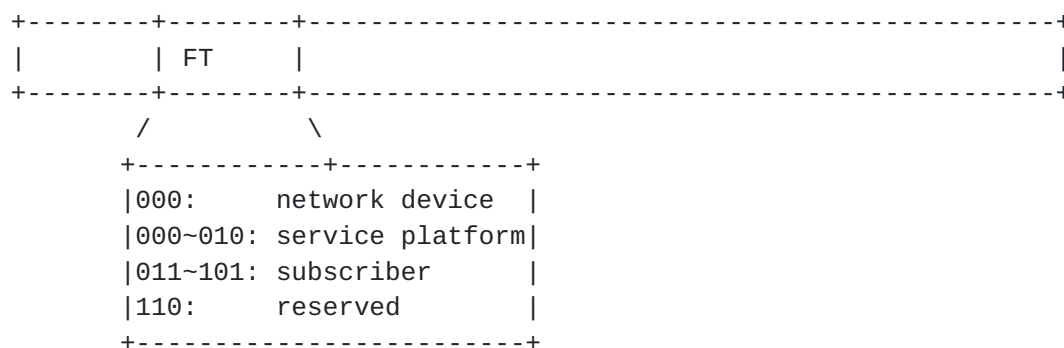
- a. Network Device management: Separated and specialized address space for network device will help to identify the network device among numerous addresses and apply policy accordingly.
- b. Differentiated user management: In ISPs' network, different kinds of customers may have different requirements for service provisioning.

- c. High-priority service guarantee: Different priorities may be divided into apply differentiated policy.
- d. Service-based Routing: ISPs may offer different routing policy for specific service platforms .e.g.video streaming, VOIP, etc.
- e. Security Control: For security requirement, operators need to take control and identify of certain devices/customers in a quick manner.
- f. Easy measurement and statistic: The semantic prefix provides explicit identifiers for measurement and statistic.

These requirements are largely falling into two categories: some is regarding to the network device features, and the others are related to services provision and subscriber identification. The functional usage of the semantics for the two categories are quite different. Therefore, an ISP semantic IPv6 prefix example is designed as a two-level hierarchical architecture, in which the first level is the function types of prefixes, and the second level is the further usage within an specific prefix type.

[A.1.](#) Function Type Semantic Bits

Function Type (FT): the value of this field is to indicate the functional usage of this prefix. The typical types for operators include network device, subscriber and service platform.



Function Type Bits Example

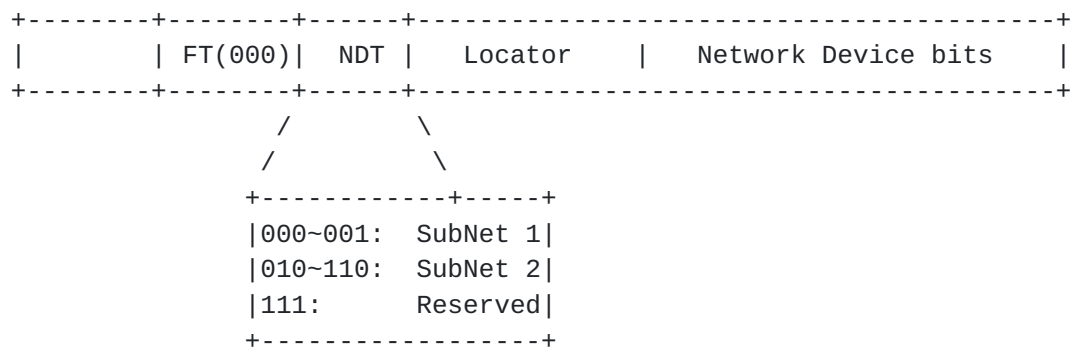
Figure 1

The portion of each type should be estimated according to the actual requirements for operators, in order to use the address space most efficiently. Within the above FT design, the whole ISP IPv6 address space is divided into four parts: the network device address space (1/8 of total address space), the service platform address space (2/8

of total address space), the subscriber address space (3/8 of total address space), and a reserved address space (1/8 of total address space) for future usage.

A.2. Network Device Type Bits within Network Device Address Space

Network Device Type (NDT) indicates different types of network devices. Normally, one operator may have multiple networks, e.g. backbone network, mobile network, ISP brokered service network, etc. Using NDT field to indicate specific network within an operator may help to apply some routing policies. Locating NDT bits in the left-most bits means that a single, simple access- control list implemented across all networking devices would be enough to enforce effective traffic segregation. The Locator field is followed behind NDT.



Network Device Type Bits Example

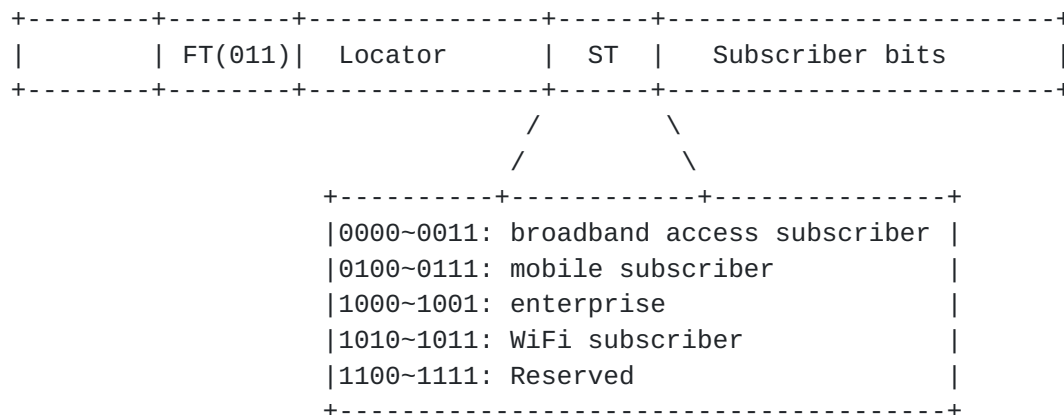
Figure 2

The portion of each subnet type should be estimated according to the actual requirements for operators, in order to use the address space most efficiently. Within the above NDT design, SubNet 1 is assigned 2/8 of the network device address space, SubNet 2 is assigned 5/8, and 1/8 is reserved.

A.3. Subscriber Type Bits within Subscriber Address Space

Subscriber Type (ST) indicates different types of subscribers, e.g. wireline broadband subscriber, mobile subscriber, enterprise, WiFi, etc. This type of prefix is allocated to end users. Further, division may be taken on subscriber's priorities within a certain subscriber type.

The Locator field within subscriber address space is put before ST for better routing aggregation.



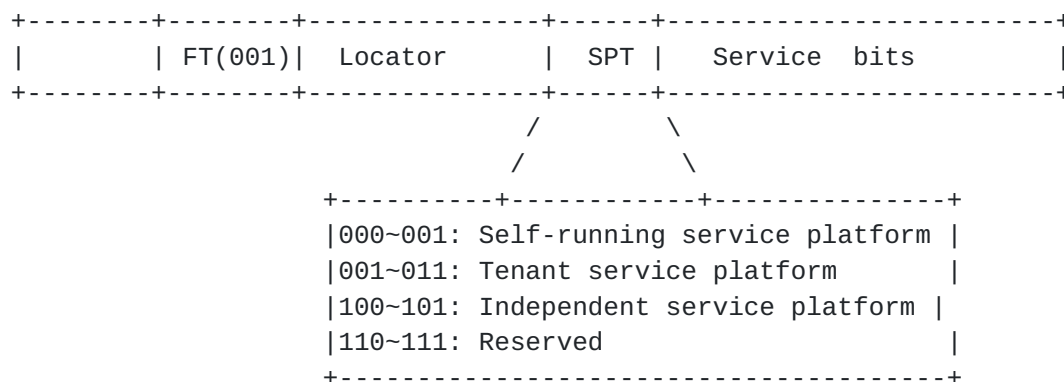
Subscriber Type Bits Example

Figure 3

The portion of each subscriber type should be estimated according to the actual requirements for operators, in order to use the address space most efficiently. Within the above ST design, the broadband access subscriber type is assigned 4/16 of the subscriber address space, the mobile subscriber is assigned 4/16, enterprise type and WiFi subscriber type are assigned 2/16 each, and 2/16 is reserved.

A.4. Service Platform Type Bits within Service Platform Address Space

Service Platform Type (SPT) indicates typical service platforms offered by operators. This field may have scalability problem since there are numerous types of services. It is recommended that only aggregated service platform types should be defined in this field. This type of prefix is usually allocated to service platforms in operator's data center.



Service Platform Type Bits Example

Figure 4

The portion of each subnet type should be estimated according to the actual requirements for operators, in order to use the address space most efficiently.

Appendix B. An Enterprise Semantic Prefix example

This enterprise semantic prefix example is also abstracted from an ongoing enterprise address architecture design. This example is designed for a realtime video monitor network across a city region. The semantic prefix solution is planning to be deployed along with a strict authorization system.

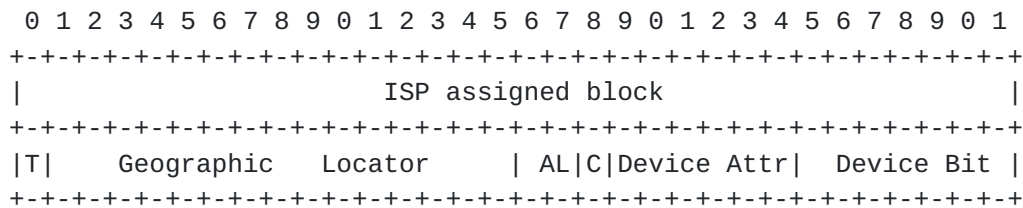
Note: this example only covers unicast address within IP Version 6 Addressing Architecture [[RFC4291](#)].

For this example, the below semantics are important for the network operation and require different network behaviors.

- a. Terminal type: there are two terminal types only: monitor cameras or video receivers. They are estimated to have similar number. Network devices use another different address space.
- b. Geographic location: the city has been managed in a three-level hierarchical regionalism: district, area and street. Each level has less than 28 sub-regions. This can also be considered as a replacement of topology locator within this specific network.
- c. Authorization level: the network operator is planning to administrate the authorization in three or four levels. An receiver can access the cameras that are the same or lower authorization level.
- d. Civilian or police/government.
- e. Device attribute: this indicates the attribute of a camera device. The attribute is expressed in an abstract way, such as road traffic, hospital, nursery, bank, airport, etc. The abstracted attribute type is designed to be less than 64.
- f. Receiver Attribute: this indicates the attribute of a video receiver. The attribute is based on the receiver group, such as police, firefighter, local security, etc. The attribute/receiver group type is designed to be less than 128.

This example enterprise network has obtained a /32 address block from ISP. There is another /48 dedicated for network devices.

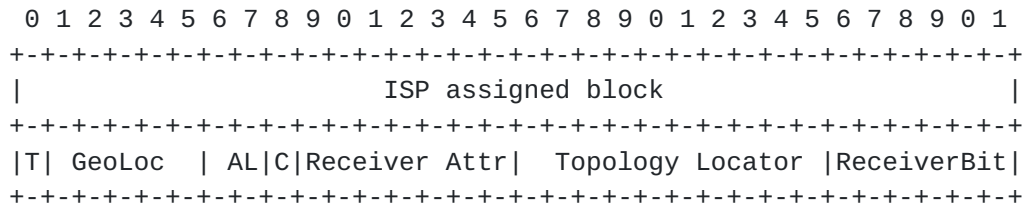
The first bit is Terminal type, which indicates terminal type.



A semantic prefix design example for cameras

Figure 5

3-level hierarchical geographic locator takes 15 bits (each level 5 bits, 32 sub-regions). Authorization level takes 2 bits and 1 bit differentiates civilian or police/government. 6 bits is assigned for device attribute.



An semantic prefix design example for video receivers

Figure 6

The receiver is not as much as geographically distributed as cameras. Therefore, Geographic locator is only detailed to district level. Topology locator is needed for network forwarding and aggregation within a district. It is assigned 10 bits. Authorization level bits and civilian bit are the same with camera address space. Receive attribute takes 7 bits, giving it is designed to be up to 128.

[Appendix C](#). A Multi-Prefix Semantic example

A multiple-site enterprise may have been assigned several prefixes of different lengths by its upstream ISPs. In this situation, in order to create a single, contiguous Semantic Prefix Domain, it is necessary to base the semantic prefix policy on the longest assigned prefix to ensure that there is enough addressing space to encode a consistent set of semantics across all of the assigned prefixes.

In this example, an enterprise has received a /38 address block for one site (A) and a /44 for a second site (B). They can be organized in the same Semantic Prefix Domain. The most-left 18 (site A) and 12 (site B) bits are allocated as locator. It provides topology based network aggregation. The 8 right-most bits (from bits 56 to 63) are

assigned as the semantic field. In this design, the multiple-site enterprise that has been assigned two prefixes of different lengths can be organized as the same Semantic Prefix Domain. The semantic and the Semantic Prefix Domain can traverse the intermediate ISP networks, or even public networks.

The similar situation may happen on ISPs in the future, when an ISP used up its assigned address space, or built up multiple networks in different places.

Appendix D. Gaps for complex semantic scenarios

The simplest semantic prefix model is to embed only abstracted user type semantics into the prefix. Current network architectures can support this as each subscriber is still assigned a single prefix, while they are not notified the semantic within it.

In order to maximise the benefits of the semantic prefix design, additional functions are needed to allow semantic relevant operations in networks and semantic relevant interactions with hosts.

IPv6 provides a facility for multiple addresses to be configured on a single interface. This creates a precondition for the approach that user chooses addresses differently for different purposes/usages.

D.1. Semantic Notification in the Network

In order to manage semantic prefixes and their relevant network actions, the network should be able to notify semantics along with prefix delegation.

When an prefix is delegated using a DHCPv6 IA_PD [[RFC3633](#)], the associated semantics should also be propagated to the requesting router. This is particularly useful for autonomic process when a new device is connected.

D.2. Semantic Relevant Interactions between Hosts and the Network

The more that semantics are embedded into a prefix, the more that complicated functions are needed for semantic relevant interactions between hosts and the network, such as prefix delegation, host notification and address selections, etc.

In practice, a single host may belong to multiple semantics. This means that several IPv6 addresses are configured on a single physical interface and should be selected for use depending on the service that a host wishes to access. A certain packet would only serve a certain semantic.

The host's IPv6 stack must have a mechanism for understanding these semantics in order to choose right source address when forming a packet. If the embedded semantic is application relevant, applications on the hosts should also be involved in the address choosing process: the host IPv6 stack reports multiple available addresses to the application through socket API (one example is "IPv6 Socket API for Source Address Selection" [[RFC5014](#)]). The application then needs to apply the semantic logic so that it can correctly select from the offered candidate addresses.

Although [[RFC6724](#)] provides an algorithm for source address selection, some semantic prefix policies may conflict with this algorithm. In this case, the source address selection mechanism may also further supporting functions to be developed.

Appendix E. Topics for Future Work

There are several areas in which the semantic prefix could be extended in order to increase the usefulness and applicability of the concept. They are complementarity besides the main framework. These are being described here as topics for possible future work. Each of them may deserve a separated document for technical details.

- Dynamic Policy Configuration

Dynamic policy configuration would simplify the distribution of policy across devices in the semantic prefix domain. New functions or protocol extension are needed to enable dynamic changes to the policy actions in operation on certain semantic packets.

- Semantics Announcements to peer networks

A network may announce all, or some of its Semantic Prefix Policy to connected peer networks. This could be used to enable more dynamic configuration and enable traffic from different semantic prefix domains to traverse different networks whilst having the same semantic prefix policy applied. To achieve this automatically by message exchanging would require new functions or protocol extensions.

- Extension of Prefix Semantics beyond the left-most 64-bits

The prefix concept refers here to the left-most bits in the IP addresses delegated by the network management plane. The prefix could be longer than 64-bits if the network operators strictly manage the address assignment by using Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol for IPv6 (DHCPv6) [[RFC3315](#)] (but in this case standard Stateless Address AutoConfiguration - SLAAC [[RFC4862](#)] cannot be used).

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