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**An HTTP Status Code for Indicating Hints**  
**draft-kazuho-early-hints-status-code-00**

Abstract

This memo introduces an informational status code for HTTP that can be used for indicating hints to help a client start making preparations for processing the final response.

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## Table of Contents

<a href="#">1.</a>	Introduction . . . . .	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">1.1.</a>	Notational Conventions . . . . .	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">2.</a>	103 Early Hints . . . . .	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">3.</a>	Interoperability Issues . . . . .	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">4.</a>	Security Considerations . . . . .	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">5.</a>	IANA Considerations . . . . .	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">6.</a>	References . . . . .	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">6.1.</a>	Normative References . . . . .	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">6.2.</a>	Informative References . . . . .	<a href="#">4</a>
	Author's Address . . . . .	<a href="#">4</a>

**[1.](#) Introduction**

Most if not all of the web pages processed by a web browser contain links to external resources that need to be fetched prior to rendering the documents. Therefore, it is beneficial to send such links as early as possible in order to minimize the time spent until the browser becomes possible to render the document. Link header of type "preload" ([\[Preload\]](#)) can be used to indicate such links within the response headers of an HTTP response.

However, it is not always possible for an origin server to send a response immediately after receiving a request. In fact, it is often the contrary. There are many deployments in which an origin server needs to query a database before generating a response. It is also not unusual for an origin server to delegate a request to an upstream HTTP server running at a distant location.

The dilemma here is that even though it is preferable for an origin server to send some headers as soon as it receives a request, it cannot do so until the status code and the headers of the final HTTP response is determined.

HTTP/2 ([\[RFC7540\]](#)) push can be used as a solution to the issue, but has its own limitations. The resources that can be pushed using HTTP/2 are limited to those belonging to the same origin. Also, it is impossible to send only the links of the resources using HTTP/2 push. Sending HTTP responses for every resource is an inefficient way of using bandwidth, especially when a caching server exists as an intermediary.

This memo defines a status code for sending an informational response ([\[RFC7231\]](#), [section 6.2](#)) that contains headers that are likely to be included in the final response. A server can send the informational response containing some of the headers to help the client start making preparations for processing the final response, and then run

Oku

Expires May 4, 2017

[Page 2]

time-consuming operations to generate the final response. The informational response can also be used by an origin server to trigger HTTP/2 push at a caching intermediary.

### **1.1.   Notational Conventions**

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.   103 Early Hints**

This informational status code indicates the client that the server is likely to send a final request with the headers included in the informational response.

A server MUST NOT include Content-Length, Transfer-Encoding, or any hop-by-hop headers ([\[RFC7230\]](#), [section 6.1](#)) in the informational response using the status code.

A client MAY speculatively evaluate the headers included in the informational response while waiting for the final response. For example, a client may recognize the link header of type preload and start fetching the resource. However, the evaluation MUST NOT affect how the final response is processed; the client must behave as if it had not seen the informational response.

An intermediary MAY drop the informational response. It MAY send HTTP/2 ([\[RFC7540\]](#)) push responses using the information found in the informational response.

## **3.   Interoperability Issues**

Clients may have issues handling Early Hints, since informational response is rarely used for requests not including an Expect header ([\[RFC7231\]](#), [section 5.1.1](#)). Therefore, it is desirable to negotiate the capability to use the status code.

## **4.   Security Considerations**

TBD

## **5.   IANA Considerations**

If Early Hints is standardized, the HTTP Status Codes Registry should be updated with the following entries:

- o Code: 103

Oku

Expires May 4, 2017

[Page 3]

- o Description: Early Hints
- o Specification: this document

## **6. References**

### **6.1. Normative References**

- [RFC2119] Bradner, S., "Key words for use in RFCs to Indicate Requirement Levels", [BCP 14](#), [RFC 2119](#), DOI 10.17487/RFC2119, March 1997, <<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2119>>.
- [RFC7230] Fielding, R., Ed. and J. Reschke, Ed., "Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP/1.1): Message Syntax and Routing", [RFC 7230](#), DOI 10.17487/RFC7230, June 2014, <<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc7230>>.
- [RFC7231] Fielding, R., Ed. and J. Reschke, Ed., "Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP/1.1): Semantics and Content", [RFC 7231](#), DOI 10.17487/RFC7231, June 2014, <<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc7231>>.
- [RFC7540] Belshe, M., Peon, R., and M. Thomson, Ed., "Hypertext Transfer Protocol Version 2 (HTTP/2)", [RFC 7540](#), DOI 10.17487/RFC7540, May 2015, <<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc7540>>.

### **6.2. Informative References**

- [Preload] Grigorik, I., "Preload", September 2016, <<https://w3c.github.io/preload/>>.

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