To Update Network State or Not?

B. Fu, F. A. Kuipers, P. Van Mieghem

Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mathematics and Computer Science,
Delft University of Technology,
P.O. Box 5031, 2600 GA, Delft, The Netherlands.
B.Fu,F.A.Kuipers,P.F.A.VanMieghem@tudelft.nl

Abstract—A Link-State Update Policy (LSUP) has the task to
distribute information regarding the network resources, and is
therefore considered to be an integral part of future Quality
of Service (QoS) routing protocols. The argument is that in
order to guarantee QoS to applications, one must know the
available resources. Unfortunately, the high dynamics in available
resources complicates the development of an LSUP, which on its
turn will result in high deployment costs for Internet Service
Providers. In this paper we will re-examine whether the gain in
network performance, which is expected under the deployment
of LSUPs, will outweigh its investment and complexity costs.
To capture the complete range of possible LSUPs, we take a
pragmatic approach and confine ourselves to examining two
extreme strategies: routing with exact resource information and
routing with no resource information.

Our study comprises of an analytical exercise and extensive
simulations on various network topologies under a large range
of network loads. Our objective is to determine where static
information provides acceptable network performance and where
dynamic LSUPs are indispensable.

I. INTRODUCTION

Most real-time applications require certain Quality of Ser-
vice (QoS) guarantees (e.g., on capacity, loss, and delay) to
achieve good performance. The study of QoS routing has
mainly focused on algorithms that can find paths based on
multiple constraints (cf. [1] for a survey). Those algorithms
assume that the knowledge on the state of the network is
provided by a QoS protocol. Unfortunately, the development of
a QoS protocol has received much less attention, most
probably due to the complexity of handling network dynamics.

In particular for QoS routing, a QoS routing protocol
is expected to determine, update and distribute the set of
dynamically changing link weights. The QoS routing protocol
possesses a functionality to give each router a consistent
view of the network and its resources by using a link-state
update policy (LSUP). The resource information varies rapidly
compared to the infrequent changes in network topology (such
as the breakdown of a link or router). Based on the resource
information, a QoS algorithm will compute a suitable path to
accommodate the QoS requirements of a particular flow.

The complexity of QoS routing in comparison to “simple”
best-effort routing may result in high costs. Internet Service
Providers (ISPs) may not be willing to change their current
non-QoS-aware systems if the performance gain of QoS-Aware
networking is not substantial enough compared to the addi-
tional cost. Beside the monetary cost involved in implementing
QoS technology, cost also relates to computation and protocol
overhead. The computation overhead is bounded by the worst-
case complexity of the routing algorithm, while the protocol
overhead is caused by the flooding and updating of resource
information.

Most of the proposed link-state update policies (LSUPs)
consider a trade-off between the protocol overhead and the
accuracy of the resource information (see [2]). To reduce the
protocol overhead, the number of updates needs to be limited,
and consequently, not all resource changes are advertised.
This leads to the problem of QoS routing with stale resource
information.

Stale resource information may affect routing in the follow-

• A feasible path cannot be found by the algorithm although
one exists.

• A path is found by the routing algorithm but rejected
during the set-up process, because not all links along the
path can provide the required capacity.

• A non-optimal path is found while there exist other paths,
which are more suitable.

It is difficult to indicate how much cost is acceptable in order
to gain a certain improvement in network performance, as this
may differ per ISP. In this paper, the profits of using link-state
routing systems are estimated indirectly via the comparison
of two extreme strategies: (A) routing with exact resource
information, and (B) routing without resource information, i.e.,
without link-state updates (LSUs). Our work is motivated by
the fact that there are no in-depth studies that quantify the
performance gain that can be attained with accurate LSUPs.

The rest of this paper is constructed as follows. In Section
II, we discuss related work. In Section III, we motivate our
study and explain the two extreme strategies in which we
are interested. Examples of performance evaluation are given
in Section IV. Section V presents the simulation models. In
Section VI, we show the performance in selected situations
and discuss the simulation results. Finally, we present our
conclusions in Section VII.

II. RELATED WORK

In this section we briefly discuss the work related to LSUPs
and stale resource information.

A. LSUPs

For intradomain QoS routing, many LSUPs have been
proposed.
Periodic LSUP: The periodic LSUP distributes the resource information through the network periodically. It is, for instance, employed by OSPF to update the topology information. The periodic LSUP is easy to implement and the update rate is fixed once the period is set. Hence, the periodic LSUP is not coupled to any traffic dynamics.

Trigger-based LSUPs: Due to the shortcomings of the periodic LSUP, the trigger-based LSUPs were proposed to better catch the dynamics in link state [2][3][4]. In the following we assume that the available capacity is our link-state metric, but the same principles apply to other metrics. Trigger-based LSUPs can be further classified into class-based and threshold-based LSUPs. Class-based LSUPs trigger updates if the available capacity crosses the pre-defined boundaries; while threshold-based LSUPs consider the relative difference between the available capacity known by the network and the actual available capacity known only by the immediate node.

To reduce the protocol overhead caused by LSU traffic, the update rate should be limited. Some complementary strategies can be added to limit the number of updates. The hold-down timer [2][5] limits the update rates by defining the smallest period between two consecutive updates on the same link. The moving average strategy [4] considers the average available capacity (over a certain window size) to trigger updates. The average value is used to follow the trend of a link-state metric and to avoid updates triggered by a short-lived metric change.

Combined LSUPs: Based on the LSUPs mentioned above, some works suggest policies combining two or more of them, e.g. [6].

B. The impact of stale resource information

Many works study the impact of stale resource information on QoS routing performance. The effects of stale information introduced by the LSUPs mentioned in Section II-A have been evaluated in [4][5][6][7], where the LSUP parameters are tuned to achieve different information granularity and thus different network performance. Ma and Steenkiste [8] have compared static routing (routing without LSUs) and other routing algorithms under periodic LSUP. Shaikh et al. [2] give an overview of how the combination of LSUP, routing algorithm, traffic pattern and network topology influences the network performance.

As inaccuracy in resource information is inevitable, routing algorithms were proposed that can tolerate imprecise resource information. Some works [9][10] suggest using intelligent routing algorithms with local resource information.

III. TWO EXTREME STRATEGIES

A full-fledged QoS architecture requires, apart from topology updates, also resource availability updates. The first kind of updates are slowly varying in time, while the second type – the traffic related – updates are changing much faster. This article only focuses on the second kind of updates. The key question boils down to: “Is it worth to implement complicated update strategies for the second kind of changes in a network?” That question is undoubtedly not new, but a clear answer is still lacking. A quite important motivation to not update is that the Internet, where dynamic strategies of the second kind are absent, has featured a reasonably good overall functioning.

To simplify the setting, we confine to two extreme strategies A and B. Strategy A is the optimal update case that takes all information of the past and present into account to allocate a flow in the network at each flow request instant $t$. “Optimal” here refers to any property we would like to maximize or minimize in a network, such as, for example, throughput, rejection rate or blocking probability, or revenue. Each flow is allocated along a path for its entire life-time; we do not consider re-allocations of previous flows. Since the strategy A assumes the knowledge of any past or present information, any network property can be computed optimally in our “Gedanke” experiment. We thus ignore the practical issues that may prevent the strategy A to achieve optimality, such as e.g. the computation time, flooding time and the memory needed.

In practice, strategy A cannot be implemented, because the flooding of information always takes a non-zero time such that not all routing topology databases can be guaranteed to be synchronized. Strategy B is completely static and does not update at all. Each flow is just allocated along a fixed, initially computed shortest-hop path from source to destination.

In most real networks, we cannot predict the future. At best, we may possess estimates of the likelihood of a future traffic demand. Hence, strategy A is only optimal in the time interval $[0, t]$, but not necessarily in $[t, T]$, where $T > t$, because future demands are not taken into account.

Our analysis thus belongs to the field of dynamic decision theory, where the key question is “Is my myopic decision rule optimal?”. In most cases, update rules are designed to improve the performance in the heavy traffic regime. For, if the traffic is low, the resources are usually plentiful and no need for update rules is perceived. Contrary to common intuition, we show that, in the heavy traffic regime, there are network scenarios where the static strategy B outperforms the “optimal” strategy A.

IV. PERFORMANCE IN TIME

In routing with exact resource information (strategy A), the network elements need to update every change, and paths are computed based on this exact information. In routing without LSUs (strategy B), only information about the topology is used. Paths are not computed for each flow, but instead, a static routing table is used. If one or more links on the path cannot accommodate the flow, the flow is rejected.

Consider Figure 1, where a flow is requested from source

![Fig. 1. (a) the routing without LSUs; (b) the routing with exact resources information](image-url)
node 1 to destination node 5. Routing without LSUs uses the shortest path 1 → 3 → 5 (Figure 1 (a)). We assume that link 3 → 5 does not have enough capacity to accommodate the new flow. Since the routing protocol without LSUs (strategy B) always uses the path 1 → 3 → 5, the new flow is blocked. Strategy A, on the other hand, can find another path for the new flow (Figure 1 (b)). However, the new path in this example has a larger hopcount than the shortest path, which might be detrimental for future flows.

The effect on future flows is more pronounced under high network loads. Indeed, if an available path with h hops is found for a flow with capacity requirement \( c_r \), the total network capacity consumed by this flow is \( c_r h \). Ergo, the more hops a path has, the more network capacity will be consumed. The static strategy B chooses for each source-destination pair the path with minimum hopcount. In the first instance where the static routing in strategy B blocks a flow, strategy A has the potential to find an alternative, likely with longer hopcount. Thus, in the first few instances where strategy B blocks flows, strategy A clearly can outperform strategy B, but strategy A consumes in those cases, more than the minimum amount of capacity. If the traffic demand remains higher, strategy A will find itself suffocated by those expensive flows accepted in the past, which may result in a higher blocking from then on compared to strategy B. In Figure 1 (b), future flows from 3 to 4 and from 4 to 5, can be affected by the deviation from the shortest path. Strategy A greedily allocates each subsequent flow, until no network capacity is available anymore. Strategy B allocates always a minimum amount of capacity, but spreads that allocation over time. Over a long time interval \([0, T]\), optimal flow scheduling assumes the knowledge of all future demands. Since the general problem of network flow scheduling in \([0, T]\) is a combinatorial optimization problem that is NP-complete, there do not exist simple greedy algorithms that are optimal. Hence, although strategy A seems optimal, because it uses all possible available information up to time \( t \), the impact of the unknown future demands may result in an inferior performance compared to the static strategy B.

In the following example we will show that indeed static routing can outperform dynamic routing with exact information. Consider the complete graph \( K_N \) with \( N \) nodes and \( L = \binom{N}{2} \) links. We consider the time-frame \([0, T]\) and assume that each allocated flow consumes the entire link capacity for a duration \( d \geq T \). Strategy A perfectly routes paths with hopcount restricted to 2. Strategy B only allocates paths on the direct links. We denote the steady state link availability, as \( p_A(i) \) and \( p_B(i) \), which are a function of the number of flow requests \( i \). The blocking probability for strategy B as function of \( i \) equals \( p_B(i) = 1 - p_B(i) \), which is the probability that the direct link is already allocated. The corresponding blocking probability for strategy A is the probability that the direct link and all possible two hop paths between that source-destination pair are occupied. That probability is computed in [11] as

\[
P_A(i) = (1 - p_A(i)) \left( 1 - p_A(i)^2 \right)^{N-2}
\]

The expected number of links for strategy B after \( i + 1 \) requests equals \( Lp_B(i + 1) = Lp_B(i) - p_B(i) \). For strategy A we have \( Lp_A(i + 1) = Lp_A(i) - p_A(i) \). For strategy A, the total network capacity consumed by this flow is \( c_r h \). For strategy A, the total network capacity consumed by this flow is \( c_r h \). If the traffic demand remains higher, strategy A will find itself suffocated by those expensive flows accepted in the past, which may result in a higher blocking from then on compared to strategy B. In Figure 1 (b), future flows from 3 to 4 and from 4 to 5, can be affected by the deviation from the shortest path. Strategy A greedily allocates each subsequent flow, until no network capacity is available anymore. Strategy B allocates always a minimum amount of capacity, but spreads that allocation over time. Over a long time interval \([0, T]\), optimal flow scheduling assumes the knowledge of all future demands. Since the general problem of network flow scheduling in \([0, T]\) is a combinatorial optimization problem that is NP-complete, there do not exist simple greedy algorithms that are optimal. Hence, although strategy A seems optimal, because it uses all possible available information up to time \( t \), the impact of the unknown future demands may result in an inferior performance compared to the static strategy B.

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For small \( i \), \( p_A \approx p_B \), which results in \( P_A(i) < P_B(i) \). Indeed less flows are blocked by strategy A, because more alternative paths exist. However, by using two-hop paths, resources are consumed faster (i.e., \( p_A(i) \) decreases faster with \( i \) than \( p_B(i) \)), which increases the chance of blocking for future flows. Hence, after the allocation of a large number of flows, the strategy B is expected to outperform strategy A. The cross-over point where \( P_A(i) = P_B(i) \) is approximately \( i_c \approx \frac{\ln 2}{\ln(1 + 1/L)} \) as illustrated in Figure 2.

V. SIMULATION SCENARIOS

In this section, we describe our simulation scenarios. We have used a flow-level simulator\(^1\). The network and traffic parameters are introduced as well as the routing algorithm and signaling model. At the end, we explain how we process the data from our simulation results.

A. Network model

We mainly concentrate on the class of random graphs \( G_p(N) \) with \( N \) the number of nodes, and \( p \) the probability that there exists a connection between a pair of nodes. However, we also simulate in a square lattice topology and an MCI topology, which are given in Figure 3. Each connection is symmetric, with the two directions treated as two links separately, and all the links have unit capacity.

As the capacity guarantee is the most likely constraint for a customer requiring QoS, we only consider the capacity

\(^1\)DESINE (DElft Simulator of NEworks), developed at Delft University of Technology.
requirement as our QoS metric when carrying out the simulations. Other interesting QoS metrics like delay and packet loss are often highly correlated to the available capacity (e.g., a lower available capacity is likely to result in higher delays and packet loss). Hence, we believe that the trends observed for available capacity will match to a certain extend with trends in delay and packet loss.

D. Signaling model

Once a path is found by the routing algorithm for a new flow, from the source node on, the amount of resources needed will be reserved on each link along the path. If all the links along this path can accommodate the new flow, i.e., \( C_{i,j} \geq C_{r}, \forall i,j \in P \), the path is set up. The resources required by this flow will be reserved during the service time until this path terminates. As the information of the source node may be inaccurate, the path computed by the routing algorithm might be unfeasible. In this case, the resources that have already been reserved need to be released, and the flow is rejected during the setup process. We call this a setup failure.

Upon a failure during either the routing process or the setup process, we drop the flow without rerouting, because our aim is to see how stale information affects the network performance under the same path selection process.

VI. Simulation results

We first present our simulation results after which we collectively discuss them. The blocking ratio (blocking ratio \( BR_e = \frac{\text{Number of failed flows with } e}{\text{Total number of flows}} \)) is the comparison metric.

Two types of traffic were tested: one with the flow duration \( d \) set to 100 time units, and the capacity requirement of each flow \( C_r \) set to 5%, a constant percentage of the unit link capacity; the other with the flow duration \( d \) following a Weibull distribution with mean 100 time units to capture the long-tailed nature of connection durations, and \( C_r \) set to a uniform distribution in the range [2.5%, 7.5%] of the unit link capacity. Smaller capacity requirements may be more realistic, but we want to know how badly a certain routing strategy behaves. Thus, larger capacity requirements, which are more sensitive to routing decisions, are chosen to better capture the performance of routing strategies.

For each graph, we simulate with different load \( \rho \), and the flows’ arrival rate \( \lambda \) is calculated as \( \lambda = L \rho / E[d]E[C_r]E[h] \).

For each combination of graph, network load and extreme LSUP, 10 realizations are simulated. In each simulation, a set of 200,000 flows are offered to the network in a Poissonian way. The first 100,000 flows are used as warm-up flows whose routing results will not be taken into account when collecting the data. In this way, we model a steady-state behavior. Once the 10 iterations are finished, an average will be taken for all the data.
**MCI topology:** Figure 4 shows the network performance of the two extreme strategies in the MCI topology, as a function of the network load under two traffic patterns. For both traffic patterns, the blocking ratios for both extreme strategies increase quickly as the network load increases, and the biggest difference happens somewhere near $\rho_N = 0.5$. As expected, routing without LSUs performs worse than with exact resource information, but the difference is small under low and very high network loads.

![Fig. 4. The blocking ratio on MCI under different types of flow duration, different capacity requirements, and different network loads.](image)

**Random graphs:** We have performed simulations in the class of random graphs $G_p(N)$, for different $N$ and different $p$. The critical link density $p_c$ in the random graphs equals $p_c \approx \ln N$. Choosing $p < p_c$ results, with high probability, in disconnected graphs. We consider only $G_p(N)$ with $p > p_c$.

Figure 6 shows the network behavior in $G_{0.1}(50)$ under different network loads for the two traffic patterns.

![Fig. 6. The blocking ratios on the class of random graphs under different types of flow duration, different capacity requirements, and different network loads with $N = 50$ and $p = 0.1$.](image)

**Square lattice topology:** For the lattice, the network performance under two traffic patterns is shown in Figure 5. Again, under low network loads, routing without LSUs has a similar performance as routing with exact resource information. However, its performance decreases quickly as the network load increases. The reason is that, in a topology like lattice, between each pair of nodes, there may exist multiple shortest paths, and using only one out of this set could result in earlier blocking. Randomized routing [13] was introduced to balance the load. For each pair of source and destination nodes, a set of shortest paths are computed, once a flow comes, the source selects one path randomly from this set. We applied the randomized routing to the traffic pattern with constant flow duration. Figure 5 shows that randomized routing improves the network performance considerably for the no LSUs case, but it still gives higher blocking than routing with exact resource information. The routing with exact resource information starts giving increased blocking ratios at a heavier network load.

![Fig. 5. The blocking ratio on lattice under different types of flow duration, different capacity requirements, and different network loads.](image)
The actual load $\rho$ which each link experiences, can be given as $\rho = \lambda E[d]E[C_l]E[b]/L$. $\rho$ goes to 1 before $\rho N$ does. This is the reason why the curves for routing with strategy $A$ cross those for routing with strategy $B$ in Figure 6.

Figure 7 shows that under the traffic model with the constant flow duration, $BR_A$ increases as $N$ increases. As the network grows, the routing with strategy $A$ gives worse performance with more computation and communication overhead. This is neither economical nor scalable.

For $BR_B$ we observe for each $N$, a bell-shaped curve, with a peak depending on the number of nodes $N$. For small $p$, the graph will approximate a tree-like structure and the shortest paths between all pairs of nodes are likely to span nearly all links. In that case the load is well balanced. Similarly for $p \to 1$, the shortest paths are likely to be the direct links and by using these links the network does not waste many resources, which would affect the allocation of other flows. In between these densities, the shortest paths may only span (i.e., use) a small portion of the network, causing an increased chance of blocking (which might be reduced via randomized routing as shown for the lattice networks).

We carried out similar simulations under the traffic model with Weibull distributed flow duration, and obtained similar results as under the traffic model with constant flow duration.

VII. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have presented analytical and simulation results for two extreme link state update policies (LSUPs), namely routing with exact resource information and routing with static information. Different traffic and network scenarios have been evaluated. Our results show that the extremes react differently to different network models. In each network model, the difference in performance varies with the network load, and stays small under low network loads.

For the MCI topology, the performance difference remained fairly small. For the square lattice topology, routing with exact resource information gives small blocking ratio even under heavy network load, while routing with static information degrades very fast as the network load increases. However, by introducing randomized routing without LSUs, the network performance could be improved substantially.

The class of random graphs $G_p(N)$ performs differently as $p$ or $N$ varies. When the amount of traffic running in the network is relatively small compared to the high capacity provided by the core network, routing without LSUs is expected to give satisfactory performance. However, under very high network loads, the intelligence of knowing exactly the resource information backfires, because it leads to longer-hop paths, which results in a more congested network, leading to high blocking ratios.

The most striking observation in our work is that under high network load the “no updates” routing performs close to or even better than the “exact” routing. If we would have counted the amount of traffic overhead induced by the LSUs, this observation would even be more pronounced. We believe that with the fast increase in access technologies (e.g., FttH), the ISP and core networks will have to operate under high load regimes. They even have an economic incentive to utilize their network as much as possible. Our results argue that in this case an investment in LSUPs will not be cost efficient and that a simple shortest-hop framework is likely to suffice.

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