

PAROL6 Firmware Migration Strategy - v2 (2026 Update)

Goal Description

The PAROL6 robot is migrating its low-level hardware controller from an ESP32 (serial relay) to a **Teensy 4.1** acting as a deterministic, real-time servo controller.

This document outlines the professional-grade architectural roadmap to achieve a **1 kHz deterministic control loop** with high-resolution QuadTimer encoder feedback, while strictly preserving the existing ROS 2 `parol6_hardware` interface, serial commands, and thesis validation metrics.

This is a targeted migration that moves intelligence *down the stack*—from ROS-driven logic to embedded-controlled logic—enabling high-bandwidth, low-latency trajectory execution suitable for welding and precision robotic tasks.

The architecture prioritizes temporal determinism over algorithmic complexity, ensuring all control paths have bounded execution time suitable for real-time guarantees. The architecture remains compatible with future fixed-point implementations if floating-point determinism becomes a constraint.

Key Architectural Locks & Decisions

Non-Goals (Thesis Scope Limits):

- Model-predictive control (MPC)
- Full rigid-body dynamics computation
- Multi-axis torque control/compliance

Before implementation begins, we explicitly lock the following design decisions:

1. Interpolation Strategy: Locked to **Linear position + velocity feedforward**.

- *Why:* At a 1 kHz inner loop (effectively 40x upsampling from a 25 Hz ROS command), linear interpolation is deterministic, predictable, and exceptionally smooth. Complex models like Cubic Splines are deferred as post-thesis future work.

2. Control Law: Locked to **Velocity Command = Feedforward Velocity + Kp * Position Error**.

- *Why:* Simple, proven, and computationally cheap for a 1 kHz loop. Prevents scope creep into complex model-predictive territory.

3. Velocity Estimation: Locked to an **Alpha-Beta Observer (Filter)**.

- *Why:* Welding paths demand tangential smoothness, not just raw bandwidth. An alpha-beta filter is a minimal-cost 2-state observer that drastically outperforms simple IIR smoothing and negates the need for a complex (and non-deterministic) Kalman filter.

4. RTOS Usage: Locked to an **Optional Background Model**.

- *Why:* An RTOS (e.g., FreeRTOS) may be used for the transport layer, logging, or diagnostics. However, the RTOS is optional and never involved in the servo loop timing chain. The core 1 kHz servo loop **must** remain driven by a strict Hardware Timer ISR.

5. Transport Protocol: Locked to **Current ASCII Protocol (<SEQ...>/<ACK...>)**.

6. Tooling Ecosystem: Locked to PlatformIO + Docker (`teensy_loader_cli`).

- *Why:* Arduino IDE is non-reproducible. ESP-IDF Makefiles lose the Teensy core USB stack. PlatformIO executing inside the `parol6-ultimate` Docker image guarantees an identical compiler toolchain for every developer, perfectly mirroring the established ESP32 build flow via a one-click `flash_teensy.sh` script.
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Performance Targets (KPIs)

These are the strict engineering metrics the new firmware must hit to validate the thesis:

- **Inner Control Loop Rate:** 1 kHz (1 ms period)
 - **Control Jitter:** < 50 µs
 - **Encoder Noise:** < 0.05°
 - **End-to-End Latency:** < 15 ms (command received to motor action)
 - **Packet Loss:** 0 packets (validated via the `SEQ` metric logging)
 - *Future Capability:* 100 Hz ROS command rate over 480 Mbps USB High-Speed.
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Proposed Changes: Architectural Layers

Each architectural layer is designed for isolated validation using the ESP32 PWM simulator, enabling hardware-in-the-loop testing without mechanical dependencies. The Alpha-Beta observer operates entirely in the signal processing layer, independent of the control ISR scheduling, ensuring estimator upgrades do not perturb control timing.

1. Transport & Application Layer (RTOS Safe)

- **Action:** Isolate serial parsing. The parser runs in the main loop (or an RTOS task) and pushes target ROS waypoints into a **lock-free ISR-safe queue**.
- **Future:** This layer is cleanly swapped for USB CDC later without touching the control math.

Implementation Example:

```
// SerialTransport.h
#include <CircularBuffer.h> // Common Arduino/Teensy ISR-safe buffer

struct RosCommand {
    uint32_t seq;
    float positions[6];
    float velocities[6];
    uint32_t timestamp_us;
};

class SerialTransport {
public:
    void init(uint32_t baud) {
        Serial.begin(baud);
    }
}
```

```

// Called in main loop() or RTOS Task (Non-blocking)
void process_incoming(CircularBuffer<RosCommand, 10>& cmd_queue) {
    while (Serial.available()) {
        char c = Serial.read();
        if (c == '\n' || c == '\r') {
            if (rx_pos_ > 0) {
                rx_buf_[rx_pos_] = '\0';
                RosCommand new_cmd;
                if (parse_string(rx_buf_, new_cmd)) {
                    cmd_queue.push(new_cmd); // Push to ISR-safe queue
                }
                rx_pos_ = 0;
            }
        } else if (rx_pos_ < MAX_BUF - 1) {
            rx_buf_[rx_pos_++] = c;
        }
    }
}

void send_feedback(uint32_t seq, const float current_pos[6]) {
    // Formats <ACK, seq, p1, p2...> and Serial.write()s it
}

private:
    static const int MAX_BUF = 128;
    char rx_buf_[MAX_BUF];
    int rx_pos_ = 0;

    bool parse_string(const char* str, RosCommand& cmd) {
        // Implementation of strtok-based parse for <SEQ, J1...>
        return true;
    }
};

```

2. Supervisor / Safety Layer (NEW)

- Action:** Introduce a safety state machine containing command timeouts, encoder anomaly detection, and motor runaway stops.

Implementation Example:

```

// Supervisor.h
class SafetySupervisor {
public:
    enum State { INIT, NOMINAL, SOFT_ESTOP, FAULT };

    void update(uint32_t current_time_ms, const float actual_velocities[6])
    {
        // 1. Check Watchdog (Command Timeout)
        if (current_time_ms - last_cmd_time_ms_ > COMMAND_TIMEOUT_MS) {
            trigger_fault(SOFT_ESTOP, "Command Timeout: No ROS data");
        }
    }
};

```

```

    }

    // 2. Check Kinematic Limits (Runaway Velocity)
    // Velocity thresholds evaluated using observer-estimated velocity
    for (int i = 0; i < 6; i++) {
        if (abs(actual_velocities[i]) > MAX_SAFE_VELOCITY_RAD_S) {
            trigger_fault(FAULT, "Runaway Velocity Detected");
        }
    }
}

void feed_watchdog(uint32_t time_ms) { last_cmd_time_ms_ = time_ms; }
bool is_safe() const { return current_state_ == NOMINAL; }
State get_state() const { return current_state_; }

private:
    State current_state_ = NOMINAL;
    uint32_t last_cmd_time_ms_ = 0;
    const uint32_t COMMAND_TIMEOUT_MS = 100; // ROS sends at ~40ms
    const float MAX_SAFE_VELOCITY_RAD_S = 10.0f;

    void trigger_fault(State state, const char* reason) {
        if (current_state_ != FAULT) { // Don't override hard faults
            current_state_ = state;
            // Log over serial/debug port immediately
        }
    }
};

}

```

3. Trajectory Interpolation Layer

- **Action:** Interpolate between the 25 Hz ROS points and the 1 kHz servo tick using deterministic linear math. Interpolation duration is derived from the inter-arrival time of ROS waypoints to maintain temporal consistency.

Implementation Example:

```

// Interpolator.h
class LinearInterpolator {
public:
    // Called when a new ROS command is popped from the queue
    void set_target(float target_pos, float target_vel, uint32_t
current_time_ms, uint32_t expected_duration_ms) {
        start_pos_ = current_pos_;
        target_pos_ = target_pos;

        // Dynamically compute step delta based on inter-arrival time
        // expectation
        step_delta_ = (target_pos_ - start_pos_) /
(expected_duration_ms);
    }
};

```

```

        feedforward_vel_ = target_vel;
        steps_remaining_ = expected_duration_ms;
    }

    // Called precisely every 1ms inside the Control ISR
    void tick_1ms(float& out_pos_cmd, float& out_vel_ff) {
        if (steps_remaining_ > 0) {
            current_pos_ += step_delta_;
            steps_remaining--;
        } else {
            // Reached target, hold position, zero feedforward velocity
            current_pos_ = target_pos_;
            feedforward_vel_ = 0.0f;
        }
    }

    out_pos_cmd = current_pos_;
    out_vel_ff = feedforward_vel_;
}

private:
    float current_pos_ = 0.0f;
    float target_pos_ = 0.0f;
    float step_delta_ = 0.0f;
    float feedforward_vel_ = 0.0f;
    uint32_t steps_remaining_ = 0;
};
```

4 & 5. Signal Processing & Control Layer (The 1 kHz Servo Loop)

- **Action:** A dedicated Alpha-Beta observer for smooth velocity estimation, feeding a strict 1 kHz Timer ISR executing the locked P + Feedforward control law. The ISR contains no dynamic memory allocation, logging, or string-based branching to guarantee bounded execution time.

Implementation Example:

```

// AlphaBetaFilter.h
class AlphaBetaFilter {
public:
    AlphaBetaFilter(float alpha, float beta, float dt)
        : alpha_(alpha), beta_(beta), dt_(dt) {}

    // Called at 1kHz. Unwraps raw absolute encoder angles and filters.
    void update(float raw_encoder_angle_rad) {
        // 1. Handle MT6816 Multi-turn wrapping (e.g. crossing 2PI
        boundary)
        float delta = raw_encoder_angle_rad - last_raw_angle_;
        if (delta > PI) turn_offset_ -= 2.0f * PI;
        if (delta < -PI) turn_offset_ += 2.0f * PI;
        last_raw_angle_ = raw_encoder_angle_rad;

        float unwrapped_measurement = raw_encoder_angle_rad + turn_offset_;
```

```
// 2. Observer Prediction Step
estimated_pos_ += estimated_vel_ * dt_;

// 3. Innovation (Measurement Error)
float residual = unwrapped_measurement - estimated_pos_;

// 4. Observer Update Step
estimated_pos_ += alpha_ * residual;
estimated_vel_ += (beta_ / dt_) * residual;
}

float get_position() const { return estimated_pos_; }
float get_velocity() const { return estimated_vel_; }

private:
    float estimated_pos_ = 0.0f;
    float estimated_vel_ = 0.0f;
    float last_raw_angle_ = 0.0f;
    float turn_offset_ = 0.0f;
    float alpha_, beta_, dt_;
};

// Main.cpp (Hardware Timer ISR Context)
// Rule: NO dynamic memory allocation, NO string generation, NO serial
printing inside ISR.
void run_control_loop_isr() {
    float current_velocities[6]; // Used to feed supervisor

    for (int i = 0; i < 6; i++) {
        // 1. Read Hardware Abstraction Layer
        float raw_pos = encoder_hal[i].read_angle();

        // 2. Update Observer
        observer[i].update(raw_pos);
        float actual_pos = observer[i].get_position();
        float actual_vel = observer[i].get_velocity();
        current_velocities[i] = actual_vel;

        // 3. Get 1ms Interpolated Setpoint
        float cmd_pos, cmd_vel_ff;
        interpolator[i].tick_1ms(cmd_pos, cmd_vel_ff);

        // 4. Strict Control Law (P + FF)
        float pos_error = cmd_pos - actual_pos;
        float velocity_command = cmd_vel_ff + (Kp[i] * pos_error);

        // 5. Motor Hal Output
        if (supervisor.get_state() == SafetySupervisor::NOMINAL) {
            motor_hal[i].set_velocity(velocity_command);
        } else {
            motor_hal[i].set_velocity(0.0f); // Fast stop on fault
        }
    }
}
```

```
// Update supervisor with highest priority state
supervisor.update(millis(), current_velocities);
}
```

6. Hardware Abstraction Layer (HAL)

- **Action:** Strict boundaries separating the `QuadTimer` capture logic and `FlexPWM` step generation from the generic signal and control math.

Implementation Example:

```
// EncoderHAL.h
// Pure virtual interface allowing macros() simulation or QuadTimer actuals
class EncoderHAL {
public:
    virtual void init() = 0;
    virtual float read_angle() = 0; // Returns raw radians [0, 2PI)
};

// QuadTimerEncoder.h (Phase 3 Target)
class QuadTimerEncoder : public EncoderHAL {
public:
    void init() override {
        // Complex i.MXRT1062 register configuration for edge capture
        // e.g. TMR1_CTRL0 = ...
    }

    float read_angle() override {
        // Read captured high/low ticks directly from hardware registers
        // Zero CPU overhead.
        uint32_t high_ticks = TMR1_CAPT0;
        uint32_t period_ticks = TMR1_CAPT1;
        float duty = (float)high_ticks / (float)period_ticks;
        return duty * 2.0f * PI;
    }
};
```

Phased Migration Plan (Optimized for Risk Reduction)

Phase 1 — Refactor Architecture (Current Priority)

- Break the existing `realtime_servo_teensy.ino` prototype into defined modules (Transport, Supervisor, Interpolation, Control, HAL).
- Maintain the existing `micros()` encoder logic temporarily.

Phase 1.5 — ESP32 Hardware PWM Injection (Accelerated)

- Implement `PwmCaptureEncoder.h` using Teensy `attachInterrupt()` to measure PWM pulse widths.
- Assign 6 physical digital input pins on the Teensy.
- Develop an ESP32 firmware utilizing the LEDC peripheral to generate 6 synthetic, noisy PWM signals representing robotic joint movement.
- Wire the 6 ESP32 PWM outputs to the 6 Teensy interrupt inputs.
- *Validation Required:* Hook an oscilloscope to `ISR_PROFILER_PIN` and prove that the 1 kHz ISR timing remains strictly bounded (< 15 µs) even while the CPU is bombarded with 6 simultaneous external hardware interrupts. This proves the Alpha-Beta filter can handle real hardware edge-capture latency without starving the control loop.

Phase 2 — Increase Loop to 1 kHz

- Bump the `IntervalTimer` to 1000 Hz.
- Implement the linear interpolation and Alpha-Beta observer.
- Validate the control logic runs at 1 kHz without CPU starvation using the ESP32 synthetic PWM simulator.

Phase 3 — QuadTimer Encoder HAL

- Implement the i.MXRT1062 specific `QuadTimer` capture logic.
- Establish strict `Pin Zoning Architecture` to prevent QuadTimer/FlexPWM XBAR collisions as the system scales to include E-stops, limits, and step generation.
- *Validation Required:* Explicitly validate the MT6816 PWM frequency mode and duty encoding scheme (including stability across temperature, as magnetic encoders drift) via oscilloscope/simulator before merging.
- Swap out the `micros()` HAL for the `QuadTimer` HAL.

Phase 4 — STEP/DIR Hardware Integration & Safety (Current)

- Implement explicit hardware FlexPWM (Zone 2) for generating STEP/DIR signals for the MKS Servo42C drives, entirely decoupled from the 1 kHz sensing/control ISR.
- Implement a rigorous Direction-Change timing guard (~2 µs pause before resuming steps) to prevent missing pulse counts on direction flips.
- Integrate the legacy Limit Switch map (Zone 4) discovered from the open-loop firmware (`LIMIT1` to `LIMIT6` with explicit LOW/HIGH trigger polarities for active inductive sensors).
- **Homing & Calibration Layer:** Implement the rigorous 2-stage limit sweep (Fast Seek → Hit → Backoff → Slow Seek) as a distinct architectural layer that establishes the URDF zero-frame before the `ControlLaw` is permitted to engage. This layer enforces the *coupled mechanical dependencies* found in legacy `main.cpp` (e.g., J6 must be moved out of the way before J5 can safely home without a physical collision).
- **MotorHAL / ActuatorModel:** Design an actuation layer that explicitly encapsulates the exact non-integer gear reduction ratios (e.g., J3's `18.0952381`) to convert abstract kinematic radians (from the Interpolator) into absolute FlexPWM step counts with zero accumulated floating-point drift.
- Formally freeze the ASCII Serial Protocol specification (`<SEQ, pos, vel...>`) including decimal precision and field order. The Transport Layer assumes a byte-stream agnostic interface supporting UART, USB CDC, or bulk endpoints to prevent ROS ↔ MCU drift.

Phase 5 — USB Transport Evolution

- Migrate the ROS 2 host to use high-speed libusb.
 - Replace the UART `Serial.read()` backend with the Teensy 480 Mbps PHY, increasing the ROS control and feedback rate to 100 Hz.
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The Role of the ESP32 Simulator

The ESP32 PWM Simulator is not just a stepping stone; it is a **long-term strategic asset**. It will be maintained as a regression/CI tool to pump synthetic, perfectly known PWM trajectories into the Teensy. This allows us to quantify the exact phase lag and jitter of the Alpha-Beta filter mathematically, without physical motor dynamics skewing the data.

Future Work & Research Extensions (Post-Thesis Roadmap)

To extend the platform beyond the thesis baseline and elevate it to an industrial-grade robotics platform, the following extensions are explicitly identified as future work:

Control & Motion Stability

- **Embedded Motion Profiling:** Implementation of S-curve planners (jerk limiting) inside the trajectory interpolation layer to reduce torch vibration and smooth cornering behaviors.
- **Time-Optimal Splines:** Transitioning from linear to cubic Hermite splines or jerk-limited profiles as processing margins allow.
- **Adaptive Gain Scheduling:** Adjusting velocity feedforward and proportional gains continuously based upon the payload or specific joint inertia (e.g., J1 gearbox vs J5 direct transmission).

Estimation & Sensing

- **Encoder Linearity Calibration:** Construction of an embedded Look-Up Table (LUT) mapping intrinsic Magnetic Encoder Non-Linearity (INL) and applying runtime sine/cosine corrections for flawless kinematic fidelity.
- **Multi-Sensor Fusion Architecture:** Providing a structured observer graph to accept not just encoder readings, but also external tracker feeds, vision corrections, or force-torque metrics.

Real-Time Infrastructure

- **Host ↔ MCU Clock Synchronization:** Implementing a ping-pong timestamping or "PTP-lite" protocol to synchronize the ROS PC and Teensy 4.1 clocks. This allows for timestamped joint states (`<ACK, seq, p, v, timestamp_us>`) and rigorous latency/drift analysis.
- **Deterministic Telemetry Logging:** A specialized mode that logs timestamped observer states at the absolute 1 kHz control tick (bypassing USB transport jitter) to provide immaculate datasets for thesis evaluation.
- **DMA-based Encoder Capture:** Refactoring the QuadTimer capture to stream directly into memory via Direct Memory Access (DMA), completely offloading the CPU from signal processing.

Safety & Reliability (Industrial Hardening)

- **Blackbox Fault Logging:** Implementing a circular telemetry buffer storing the last 5 seconds of control states that automatically dumps over serial upon a fault (thermal, tracking error, or stall).

- **Torque Estimation:** Implicitly estimating joint torques by monitoring step-loss or tracking error growth, enabling soft dynamic limits.

System Integration

- **High-Rate ROS 2 Transport over USB HS:** Moving entirely from UART serial strings to a zero-copy transport or micro-ROS configuration taking full advantage of the i.MXRT1062 480 Mbps PHY.