

# MocoExtendProblem: Interface Between OpenSim and MATLAB for Rapidly Prototyping Direct Collocation Goals

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## Summary

MocoExtendProblem (MEP) is a more convenient MATLAB framework for prototyping and developing direct collocation goals for OpenSim Moco. MEP features several tools for testing and prototyping and using novel MocoGoals without resorting to rebuilding all of opensim or generating an .omoco file from C++ and loading the problem into MATLAB. Instead, users can structure their custom goals, build these with the visual studio and the MEX compiler and add them to existing MATLAB scripts.

This repository features :

- A set of C++ and MATLAB scripts and models for prototyping and testing custom goals
- a build.m script that compiles goals in the custom\_goals or custom\_goals45 and procedurally constructs the c++/MATLAB and compiles the MEX interface.
- Compatibility with OpenSim 4.2-4.4 and 4.5
- The ability to include MEP as a submodule, build, and use valid custom goals
- Custom goals previously developed in our labs are in the custom\_goals directory

## Statement of need

OpenSim is an open-source software platform for biomechanical modeling and simulation (Seth et al., 2018). The platform enables researchers and healthcare professionals to investigate how biological and non-biological structures respond to different loads, postures and activities. It has been used to study a wide range of biomechanical problems, such as the mechanics of walking and running (e.g. Falestie et al., 2019), the impact of injury or disease on movement (e.g. Johnson et al., 2022), and the effectiveness of rehabilitation exercises (Spomer et al, 2023).

Direct collocation is a numerical optimization method used in dynamic systems and control engineering. It involves representing the system dynamics as a set of algebraic equations, which are then discretized over time, and solved as a nonlinear optimization problem to obtain the optimal control inputs. The method aims to find a numerical solution that satisfies the system constraints and optimizes a performance measure. Optimization paradigms like direct collocation have begun to play a critical role in expanding our understanding of biological locomotion through the in-silico testing of novel therapies and predictive capabilities.

Within OpenSim is the software toolkit Moco (Dembia et al., 2020), which employs direct collocation with IPOPT (i.e. optimization software; Wächter and Biegler, 2006) in order to solve trajectory optimization problems that could range from tracking experimental motion capture

40 data for solving generalized coordinates, actuator controls, and kinetics to fully predictive  
41 simulations. Moco employs CasADi (Andersson et al., 2019) to transform MocoProblem  
42 consisting of control goals and constraints into sets of matrices for nonlinear optimization.  
43 While direct collocation is powerful and OpenSim can be used to generate a broad range of  
44 dynamically-consistent simulations, it can be daunting for some users to modify and rebuild  
45 novel direct collocation goals.

46 We developed MEP so researchers, clinicians, and students without experience compiling  
47 C++ can still write and test custom goals. By contrast, OpenSim's interfaces for MATLAB  
48 are developed using SWIG, as opposed to MEX, which can be daunting for even seasoned  
49 biomechanists. Running build.m will compile custom goals developed and placed in the  
50 custom\_goals directory, or if using OpenSim 4.5, MEP will search the custom\_goals45. This  
51 distinction for pre- and post- 4.5 MEP is to handle where scaling arguments are moved to the  
52 abstract MocoGoal.

53 No further modifications to CMakeLists.txt are required; however cmake and msbuild.exe  
54 from Visual Studio 2019 or higher needs to be added to the system PATH. build.m will  
55 procedurally construct both extend\_problem.m and ExtendProblem.cpp by parsing the header  
56 files of the discovered goals within the custom\_goals directory. Both ExtendProblem.cpp and  
57 extend\_problem.m generate bindings to instantiate custom goals placed in the custom\_goals  
58 directory. Custom Goals will be compiled with VS2019+ and then MATLAB's MEX compiler  
59 is used to compile the MEX function. ExtendProblem.cpp leverages the C++ library mexplus  
60 (Yamaguchi, 2014) to gain access to MEX entry points entry and exit points through C++  
61 macros.

62 To incorporate extend\_problem goals into an existing script, a C-style pointer to the instantiated  
63 MocoProblem is passed as a constructor argument to the extend\_problem.m class that wraps  
64 the MEP MEX. Class methods of extend\_problem.m (Figure 1; blue) are then used to add  
65 custom goals to the MocoProblem.



**Figure 1:** MEP Framework organization. The end user runs the build.m script (orange) that subsequently calls methods in the utils folder (red) which are tasked with reading the custom\_goals and custom\_goals45 folder (green) and procedurally construct the mex and the interface class that calls the mex (blue). Each custom goal (green) is essentially handled as its own compiled plugin.

- 66 To create a new goal with MEP: 1. copy one of the goals in the custom\_goals folder 2. rename  
 67 all files to that of your custom goal's name 3. regex replace (or by hand) mentions of the  
 68 original copied goal name to that of your goal's name in each of the 5 files, being careful

69 to also modify the include guards in the dll and register types header files 4. Reimplement  
70 initializeOnModelImpl, calcIntegrandImpl, calcGoalImpl such that they describe your custom  
71 goal.

72 In order to run a new custom goal, obtain the C-style pointer from OpenSim's existing SWIG  
73 interface and pass this as a constructor argument to extend\_problem.

```
cptr = uint64(problem.getCPtr(problem));  
ep = extend_problem(cptr);  
ep.addMocoCustomGoal('custom_goal',weight,power,divide_by_distance);
```

74 This paradigm has implications for OpenSim and MATLAB developers beyond the scope of  
75 just incorporating novel MocoGoals; these same tools can be used to develop other tools or  
76 expand other classes and easily incorporate them into existing MATLAB-OpenSim scripts. We  
77 have posted all tools, instructions and simulation results related to this project on GitHub and  
78 SimTK.org/MEP.

## 79 Showcases

80 To demonstrate the utility of this framework, we utilized a two-dimensional (2-D) full-body  
81 human musculoskeletal model operated through the MATLAB-OpenSim API to simulate a  
82 half walking gait cycle (Denton and Umberger, 2023). The base code uses Moco's built-  
83 in MocoControlEffortGoal and MocoAverageSpeedGoal to generate tracking and predictive  
84 simulations of a dynamically-consistent walking step that minimizes the sum of the squared  
85 control effort, at an average speed of 1.3 m s<sup>-1</sup>. Additionally each objective function has an  
86 implicit acceleration minimization and auxiliary derivative cost term which help to smooth  
87 model kinetics and remove transient oscillations in ground reaction forces.

88 Since Moco lacks any built-in gait stability goals, we developed three custom stability goals  
89 using MEP to prototype and compile into a new extend\_problem class that adds these to an  
90 existing MocoProblem. The first is a base of support (BOS) criterion in which the center  
91 of mass is optimized to lay between the average of the two mass centers for the calcaneus  
92 projected to the ground reference frame, the second is a zero-moment-point goal (ZMP)  
93 criterion that assumes the model is an inverted pendulum and the center of mass tracks the  
94 computed zero-tilting moment location, and the third is a marker acceleration minimization  
95 goal (ACCmarker) that minimizes the explicit accelerations of the marker's station location.

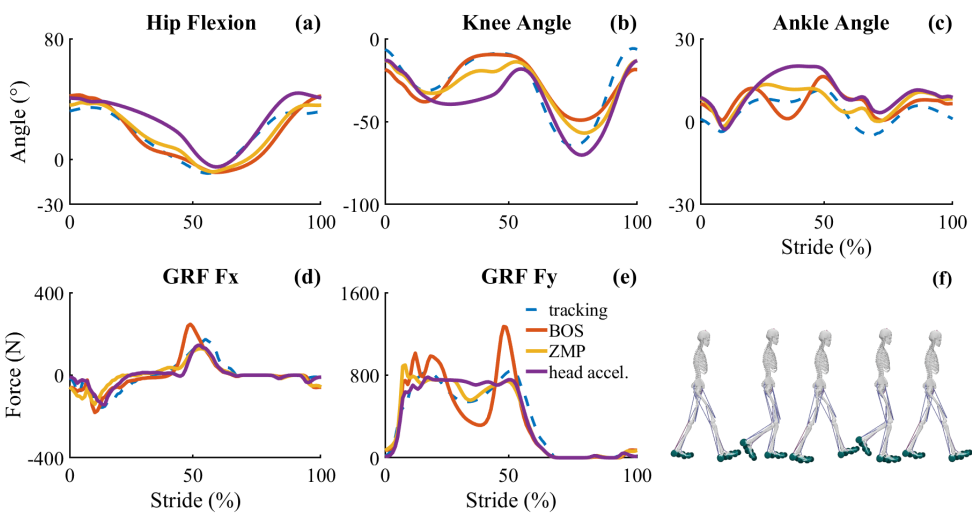
96 MEP's build.m was used to generate an extendproblem.cpp and extend\_problem.m class which  
97 wraps the custom goal to create a new, multi-objective function based on the sum of squared  
98 control effort + stability criteria, such that:

$$J_{BOS} = W_1 EFF^2 + W_2 ACC_{smoothing} + W_3 BOS \quad (1)$$

$$J_{zmp} = W_1 EFF^2 + W_2 ACC_{smoothing} + W_3 ZMP \quad (2)$$

$$J_{acc} = W_1 EFF^2 + W_2 ACC_{smoothing} + W_3 ACC_{marker} \quad (3)$$

99 The results of each multi-objective predictive simulation, in which the stability criterion was  
100 compiled using MEP, is shown against the results from a tracking simulation Figure 2. The  
101 tracking simulation objective cost was a weighted sum of the tracking error (i.e. squared sum  
102 of simulation from experimental kinematic and ground reaction force data) and sum of the  
103 squared control efforts.



**Figure 2:** Sagittal plane hip, knee and ankle angles (a-c), vertical and A-P ground reaction forces (d-e), the 11 degree-of-freedom, 18 muscle sagittal plane human walking model used for tracking and predictive simulations (f).

	Objective cost	Effort cost	Smoothing cost	Stability cost
$J_{BOS}$	3.048285	2.234377	0.008309	0.795659
$J_{ZMP}$	3.384394	2.679968	0.008816	0.686290
$J_{accel}$	3.814449	3.680096	0.010208	0.114528

[Objective cost and term breakdown for three predictive simulations using MEP.]{}  
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If you want to cite a software repository URL (e.g. something on GitHub without a preferred citation) then you can do it with the example BibTeX entry below for Smith et al. ([2020](#)).  
For a quick reference, the following citation commands can be used: - @author:2001 -> "Author et al. (2001)" - [@author:2001] -> "(Author et al., 2001)" - [@author1:2001; @author2:2001] -> "(Author1 et al., 2001; Author2 et al., 2002)"

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**References**

Smith, A. M., Thaney, K., & Hahnel, M. (2020). Fidgit: An ungodly union of GitHub and figshare. In *GitHub repository*. GitHub. <https://github.com/arfon/fidgit>