

Chapter 7A: Bluetooth Mesh Topology and Client Applications

This chapter covers the basics of the Bluetooth mesh network topology.

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7A.1 Overview

Traditional Bluetooth LE devices use point-to-point communication. That is, each pair of devices send data back and forth to each other. Each of these connections has a GAP Central and a GAP Peripheral.

In contrast, in a mesh network every device in the mesh can communicate (either directly or indirectly) with every other device in the network. Some devices in the network can relay messages that they receive so that the overall communication range is extended beyond the radio range of each individual device. In theory, the range of a mesh network is unlimited as long as you have at least one relay device within range of every device in the network.

In Bluetooth Mesh, messages are sent using advertising packets. That is, no connections are made. Rather, data is broadcast by a sending device using advertising packets which can be received by any devices that are in range of the sender.

Devices in a mesh network are called "nodes". Devices that are not part of a mesh network (yet) are called "unprovisioned devices". The process of provisioning a node will also be covered later.

A mesh network can have one or more subnets that enable isolation of related groups of nodes. A subnet is a group of nodes that can communicate with each other at the network layer because they share a network key. The difference between a network and a subnet is that a node may belong to more than one subnet by having more than one network key.

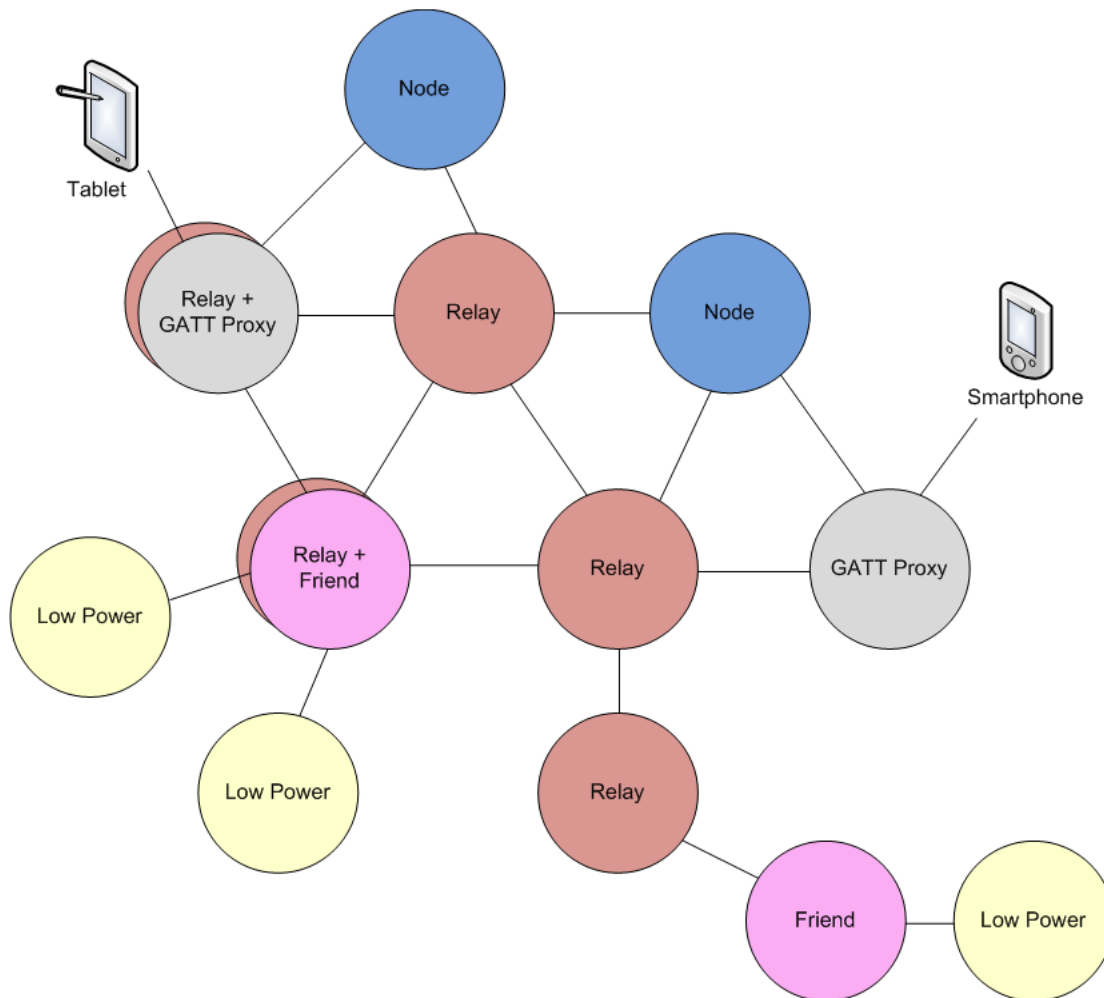
7A.2 Mesh Specs

Before going into more detail, it is worth noting that the Bluetooth SIG provides three specifications that contain every detail of the mesh protocol. These are:

1. [Mesh Profile](#) – defines fundamental requirements for mesh networking
2. [Mesh Model Specification](#) – defines models which are used to define basic functionality of nodes in a mesh network
3. [Mesh Device Properties](#) – defines device properties required for the mesh model spec

7A.3 Nodes

The following figure shows an example mesh network topology. Each of the types of node will be discussed in detail in the following sections. It is suggested that you refer to this figure while reading the descriptions.



Each node in a mesh network can send and receive messages. Each node may also implement one or more of the following features depending on its capabilities:

1. Relay
2. GATT Proxy
3. Friend
4. Low Power

Relay, GATT Proxy and Friend features can all be implemented on the same node. Typically, it doesn't make sense for a Low Power node to implement any of the other features as you will see in a minute.



7A.3.1 Standard Node

The standard node functionality involves sending and receiving mesh messages. Every node in the network must be able to act as a standard node.

Message Caching

Each node must maintain a message cache containing all recently received messages. If a message is received more than once, it is immediately discarded. In this way, if a message is relayed by multiple nodes to a final destination, the destination only acts on the message one time.

7A.3.2 Relay Node

Relay nodes can receive a message for the network and then retransmit it to other devices in range. This is the method by which mesh networks can cover larger distances than the range of any single device. For a network to operate, every node must be within range of at least one relay so that its messages can be forwarded on to nodes that it cannot directly communicate with.

It is common for all except low power nodes to implement a relay feature in order to maximize the possible paths through a mesh network.

Due to the message caching described above, a relay node will only relay a given message one time.

TTL

Each message has a field called the Time To Live (TTL). This is used to determine how many times a given message will be retransmitted. By understanding the basic topology of a mesh network, the TTL can be used to prevent messages from being retransmitted too many times. This allows the mesh network to be more efficient.

In fact, there are heartbeat messages sent periodically which include, among other things, information that allow receiving nodes to determine how many hops away the sender is. Networks can use this information to adapt TTL settings to optimize the network.

Security

A relay node only decodes enough of the message to decide what to do with it. For example, it decodes the addresses for the message but not the payload if it is not intended for that node. In fact, due to the security architecture, the relay node cannot decode the payload for any messages that are not from the same network application (e.g. lighting). Security will be discussed in detail later.

7A.3.3 GATT Proxy Node

Many existing BLE devices support traditional BLE GATT communication but not mesh communication. Most smartphones and tablets fall into this category. Since you may want to interact with a mesh network from one of those devices, the GATT proxy was created. A GATT proxy node has both a mesh interface and a GATT interface. The GATT interface is used to communicate with BLE devices that don't possess a mesh stack and then relay those messages to/from the mesh network. That is, the GATT proxy acts as a bridge between the mesh network and the traditional BLE GATT device.

7A.3.4 Friend and Low Power Nodes

Friend and Low Power Nodes are used to optimize power consumption for constrained devices. Devices that are power constrained (e.g. a battery powered device) are designated as low power nodes. Every low power node in the network must be associated with exactly one friend node. Friend nodes are devices which are not power constrained (e.g. a device plugged into AC power) that support 1 or more low power nodes depending on its capabilities (e.g. available RAM).

When a low power node is added to a mesh network it broadcasts a request for a friend. Each friend in range that can handle a new low power node replies and the low power node selects the best friend based on how many messages the friend can store; the RSSI and the timing accuracy.

Once the relationship is established, the friend node will receive and store messages for any low power nodes that it is associated with. The low power node will periodically ask the friend node for any messages that the friend has stored for it. In this way, the low power node does not need to listen continuously for mesh packets. Instead, it can be in a low power mode most of the time and can wake up only periodically for a very short time.

For example, consider a battery powered mesh connected thermostat. It will measure the actual temperature and may send a mesh message with the temperature once per minute. This can be done with very low power consumption since the device can be sleeping all the time except for a short period each minute to send the value. However, it must also be possible to change the set point of the thermostat. In this case, instead of sending messages, the thermostat must be listening for messages. If it listens constantly for messages the power consumption will be unacceptably high, but if it only listens occasionally for messages it will likely miss messages. By making the thermostat a low power node we get the best of both worlds - it can send messages once a minute and receive any stored messages regarding the set point from its friend node. No messages are missed even though the thermostat is awake only a very small percentage of the time.

7A.4 Provisioning and Configuration/Management

To get a new device up and running on a Bluetooth Mesh network, it must be provisioned and configured. These are often thought of as a single step, but they are unique processes with different protocols. These will each be described separately below.

7A.4.1 Provisioning

Provisioning is the process by which a device is made a member of the mesh network and becomes a node. To be a node on a mesh network, a device needs to have the network key (and other associated network security information like the IV index) and it needs to have a unicast address assigned to its primary element. Provisioning can be done using either a GATT connection (PB-GATT) or an advertising channel (PB-ADV) as the bearer. (PB = Provisioning Bearer).

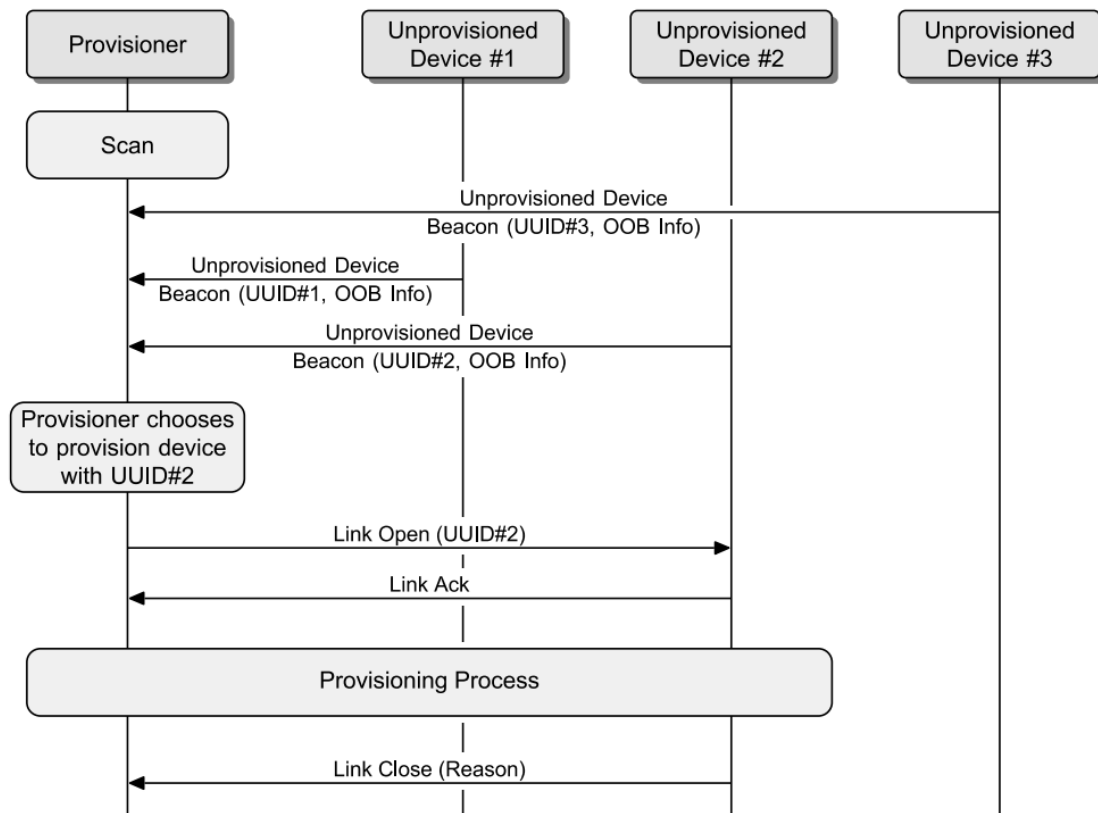
Provisioning is most commonly done using an application on a smartphone or a tablet. Note that smartphones currently do not support provisioning over an advertising channel, so from a practical standpoint, all devices should support provisioning over GATT. The Bluetooth Mesh spec strongly recommends that unprovisioned devices support both.

Beaconing

Any unprovisioned device will indicate its availability to be provisioned by sending out advertising packets of the type "Mesh Beacon".

Link Establishment

A provisioner will scan for unprovisioned devices and will choose (usually via input from the user) which device to provision. The provisioner sends a Link Open message to the device to be provisioned which will in turn respond with a Link ACK message. Once provisioning completes, the provisioner sends a Link Close message. These steps are illustrated in the figure below.



(This figure is taken from the Bluetooth Mesh Profile Specification)

The remaining steps detailed below occur within the box labeled "Provisioning Process" in the figure above.

Invitation

The provisioner sends an invitation to the device being provisioned in the form of a provisioning invite protocol data unit (PDU). The device being provisioned responds with information about itself in the form of a provisioning capabilities PDU.

Exchanging Public Keys

The provisioner and the device to be provisioned exchange public keys either directly or using an out-of-band (OOB) method.

Authentication

Authentication is performed using an OOB method that depends on the capabilities of the device being provisioned. For example, if the device to be provisioned has some output mechanism, it creates a random number and indicates that number to the user (e.g. it may flash an LED a random number of times, beep a random number of times, or show the number on a display). The user then enters that number into the provisioner.



If the device has some input mechanism, then the provisioner creates a random number and presents it to the user. The user then inputs that number on the device (e.g. by pressing a button the specified number of times or entering the number using a keypad).

Either way, once the random number has been generated on one side and entered on the other, a cryptographic exchange happens between the two devices using that random number.

Distribution of Provisioning Data

Once authentication is done, a session key is derived by each device from its private key and the public key from the other device. The session key is used to secure subsequent distribution of the data needed to complete provisioning. Once provisioning is completed, the provisioned device has the network's key (NetKey), a security parameter called the IV index, and its Unicast address which was allocated by the provisioner. The device is now a node and is a part of the network. The provisioner then sends a Link Close message as described previously.

7A.4.2 Configuration/Management

Once provisioning is done, the same smartphone or tablet (i.e. the provisioner) then uses the mesh network to configure the new node. This includes distribution of application keys, assigning group addresses to models, etc.

Note that smartphones currently do not support Bluetooth mesh directly so at least one device should be configured as a GATT Proxy to allow a smartphone to do configuration once provisioning is done. The only alternative currently is to have a gateway on the mesh network that allows the smartphone to access the mesh network indirectly.



7A.5 Cypress Mesh Helper Programs

There are several programs provided by Cypress that can be used for provisioning, configuration, and communication for mesh networks. There are:

- Host Applications (these communicate with the kit over the HCI UART interface):
 - Client Control Mesh (Windows)
 - Mesh Client (Windows, MacOS, Linux)
- Peer Applications (these communicate with the kit over BLE):
 - Mesh Client (Windows 10)
 - Android application
 - iOS application

More information on these apps can be found here:

<https://www.cypress.com/documentation/software-and-drivers/bluetooth-mesh-helper-applications>

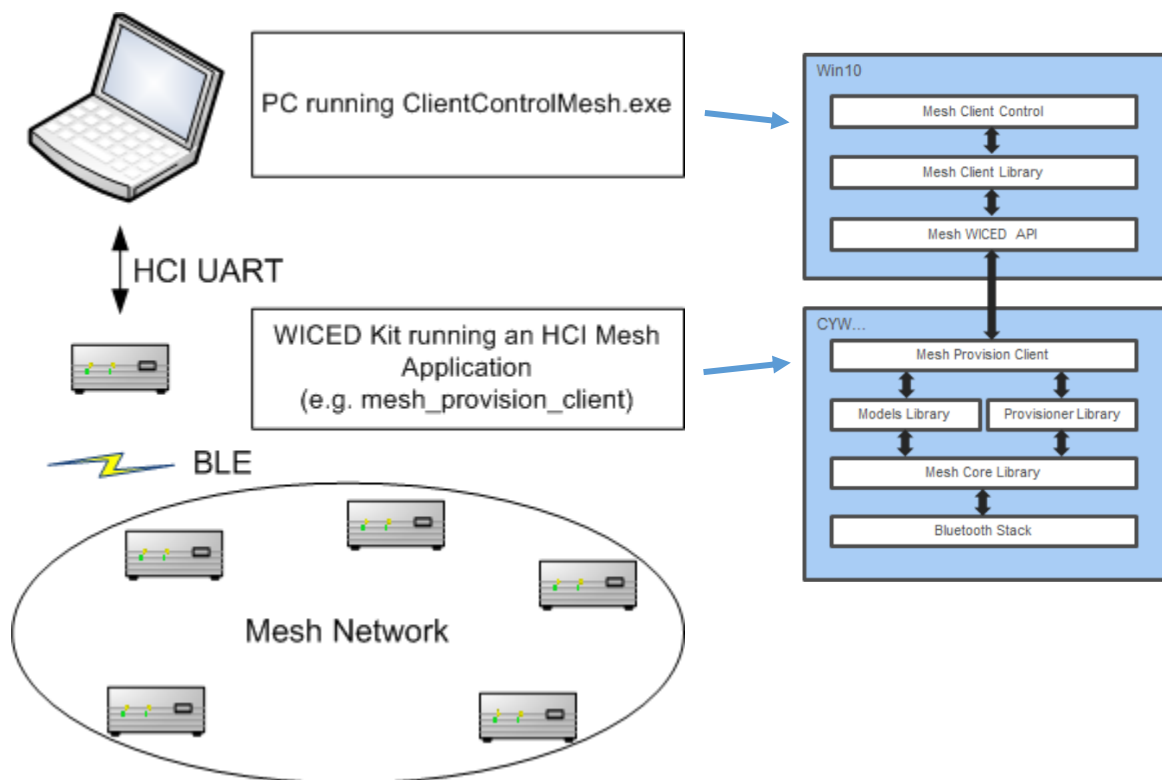
7A.5.1 Client Control Mesh Host App (Windows Only)

This application is an extension of the Client Control application that can be used for other WICED Bluetooth applications. A link to launch ClientControlMesh can be found in the Tools section of the Quick Panel.

The source code and executable are available in the wiced_btsdk at:

wiced_btsdk/tools/btsdk-host-apps-mesh/VS_ClientControl

To use it, you must first program a kit with an application that accepts HCI commands from the PC and then translates them to the appropriate Mesh commands to send out over the radio to the Mesh network. For example, the mesh_provision_client application (part of the Mesh-Snip starter application group) supports a provisioning client, OnOff client, level client, light lightness client, etc. That kit can receive commands from a PC over the HCI UART and will in turn send the appropriate messages to the Mesh network.



The application has tabs for Configuration (provisioning, etc.), Models (for interacting with any model), and Light Control (specific for lighting applications). It allows very low-level interaction with the mesh network as you can see in the screenshots below. Note that if you put the helper application (e.g.

mesh_provision_client) on a CYW920819EVB-02 board, the default HCI baud rate is 3000000 while on a CYBT-213043-MESH it is 921600.

Mesh Client Control

Light Control Models **Configuration**

COM Port Baud rate

Local address NetKey IV Index Net Key index ☐ Key refresh ☐ IV Update

Scan Unprovisioned Identity duration ☐ Use GATT

Device Public Key

☐ Reliable

Extended Scan Auth method Size Destination address App Key index

BD Addr Type Filter type Filter address

Composition Data Page Relay Retransmit count Interval (ms) Key refresh phase

Default TTL Secure Network Beacon Friend GATT Proxy

Node Identity NetKey Network transmit count Interval (ms) LPN Poll Timeout Addr

Model Publication Element Addr Publish Addr App Key Idx Master securit Publish TTL Period Retransmit count Interval (ms)

Company Model ID ☐ Use virtual address

Model Subscription Element Addr Address

Company Model ID ☐ Use virtual address

NetKey

AppKey Index

Company Model ID Element Addr

Heartbeat subscription Source Destination Period (sec)

Heartbeat publication destination Count TTL Period (sec)

Publication features ☐ Proxy ☐ Relay ☐ Friend ☐ Low Power Mode ☐ Net key idx

Health Fault Company ID ID Period divisor Attention timer

NOTE:
Use Baud rate of 3000000 for CYW920819EVB-02 board and 921600 for CYBT-213043-MESH board.

Mesh Client Control

Light Control **Models** Configuration

COM Port Baud rate ☐ Reliable ☐ Use publication info App Key index

Battery Level Time to discharge Time to charge Prop ID Value

User

Local North Local East Altitude Global Latitude Longitude Altitude

Floor # Update time Precision ☐ Mobile

On/Off Default Transition Time ☐ Use default transition time

On Power Up Transition Time Delay

Level Delta ☐ Continue Current Subsecs Uncertainty

Lightness ☐ Linear Current Zone Offset

Last Default Range Min

Light HSL Hue Saturation

Target Get Hue Range Saturation Range

Light CTL Temperature Default Get Temp Range

Light xyl xyl x y Range x

Light LC Mode Occupancy mode Light On/Off

Sensor Property ID Value Setting values : Property ID Raw Data

Cadence values : Column values : Col Raw Series values Raw ValX1 Raw ValX2

☐ Trigger Type Trigger Delta Trigger Delta Up Min Interval Fast Cadence High Low

☐ CTL TTL: 00 DST: 0001 PDU: 05 00 00 50 73 20 0F 0F 0F 0F 0F 0F 0F 0F 0F 0F ☐ smic Addr: 1202

☐ IV UPDT 01 02 03

NOTE:
Use Baud rate of 3000000 for CYW920819EVB-02 board and 921600 for CYBT-213043-MESH board.

Mesh Client Control

Light Control

Models

Configuration

COM Port

Baud rate

3000000

Application

Browse...

Download

Network

User

WIN-GIL

Create

Delete

Open

Close

Current group

Group

Create

Delete

Import

Export

Connect

Provision UUID

Static public key

Static OOB data

Identity duration

1

Scan Unprovisioned

Provision and configure

Device configuration

Friend

GATT Proxy

Relay

Net beacon

Retransmit count

3

Interval (ms)

100

Default TTL

63

Network transmit count

3

Interval (ms)

100

Publish period

Master securit

Publish TTL

63

Retransmit count

0

Interval (ms)

500

Rename

New name

Reconfigure

Move Device

from

to group

Configure Subscription

Use Device

Configure Publication

On/Off

Get

Set

Identify

Level

Get

Set

Get Info

Lightness

Get

Set

Lightness Hue Saturation

Get

Set

Lightness Color Temperatur Delta UV

Get

Set

Vendor data

Set

Sensor

Get

Configure

Light Controller

DFU Start

DFU Stop

Get Status

NOTE:

Use Baud rate of 3000000 for CYW920819EV8-02 board and 921600 for CYBT-213043-MESH board.

Clear trace

OK

Cancel

Apply

Help

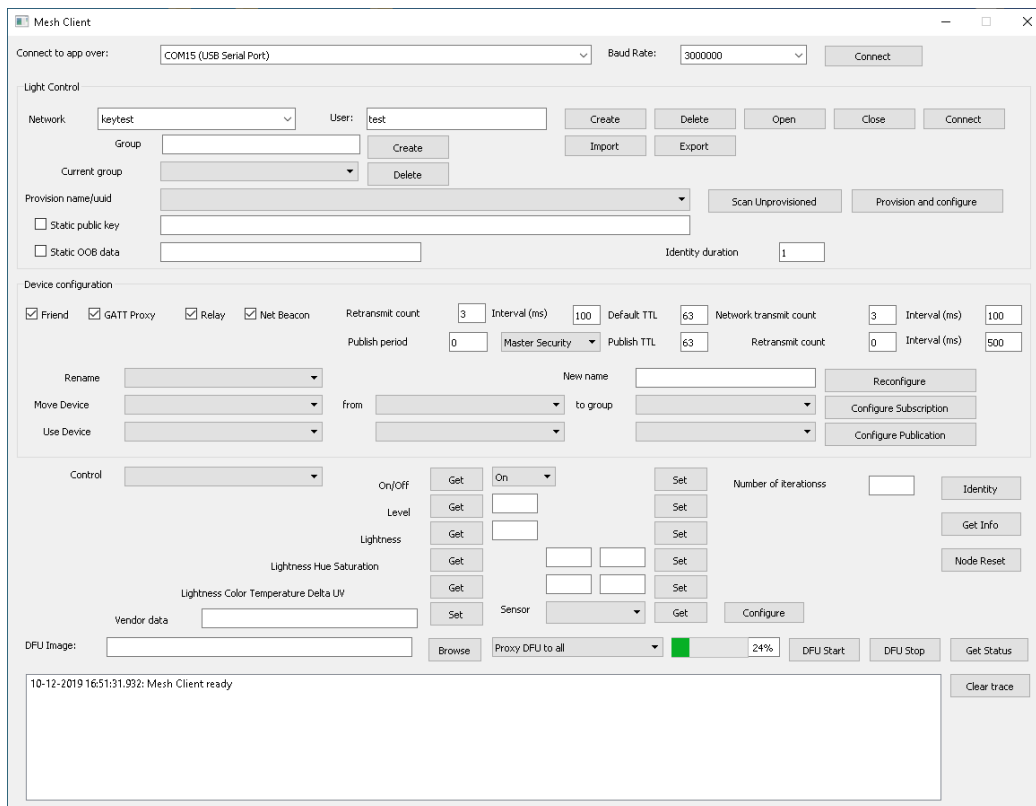
7A.5.2 Mesh Client Host App (Windows, MacOS, Linux)

As with the ClientControlMesh application, this application uses the HCI interface to talk to a kit containing BLE Mesh functionality. That kit will communicate over the BLE network to the provision and control a kit with a Mesh application programmed onto it.

This application doesn't show up in the Quick Panel (yet) but the executable can be launched from:

wiced_btsdk/tools/btsdk-host-apps-mesh/VS_ClientControl/<windows/Linux64/macos>/mesh_client

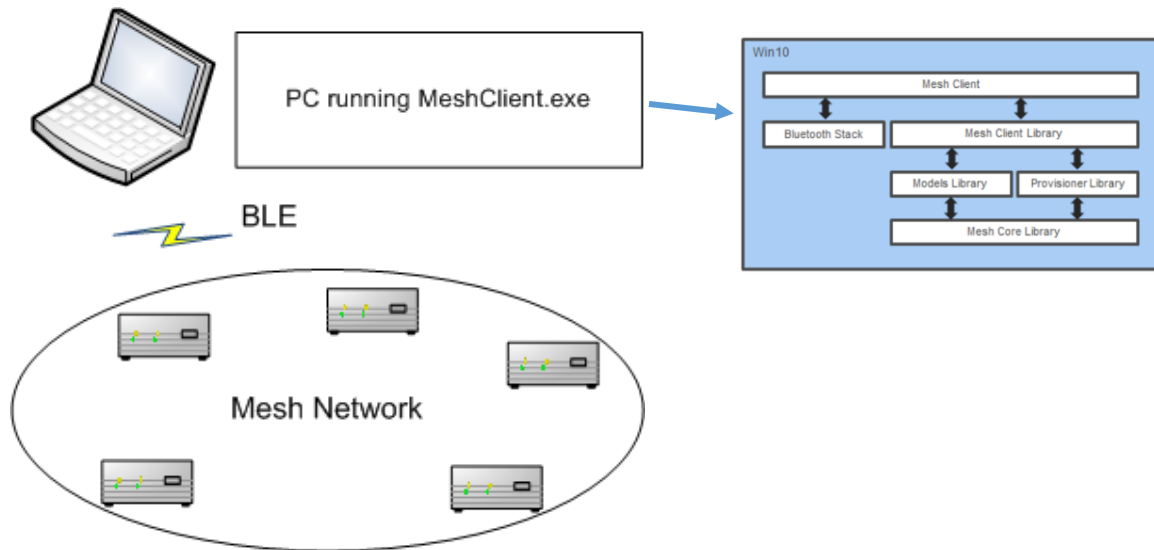
Unlike ClientControlMesh, this application has only a single tab that allows provisioning, general Mesh network control, and lighting control. The upside is that it will run on Windows, MacOS and Linux platforms.



The screenshot shows the Mesh Client application window. It features a top section for connecting to an app over a serial port (COM15) with a baud rate of 3000000. Below this is a 'Light Control' section with fields for Network (keytest), User (test), Group, and Current group, along with buttons for Create, Delete, Open, Close, and Connect. There are also buttons for Import and Export. The 'Provision name/uuid' field is empty, and there are checkboxes for 'Static public key' and 'Static OOB data'. The 'Identity duration' is set to 1. The 'Device configuration' section includes checkboxes for Friend, GATT Proxy, Relay, and Net Beacon, and fields for Retransmit count, Interval (ms), Default TTL, Network transmit count, Publish period, Master Security, Publish TTL, and Retransmit count. There are also fields for Rename, Move Device, and Use Device, along with buttons for Reconfigure, Configure Subscription, and Configure Publication. The 'Control' section has a dropdown for Control, buttons for On/Off, Level, Lightness, Lightness Hue Saturation, and Lightness Color Temperature Delta UV, and a 'Sensor' dropdown. The 'DFU Image' section has a 'Browse' button, a 'Proxy DFU to all' checkbox, a progress bar at 24%, and buttons for DFU Start, DFU Stop, and Get Status. A 'Clear trace' button is at the bottom right. A log window at the bottom shows the message '10-12-2019 16:51:31.932: Mesh Client ready'.

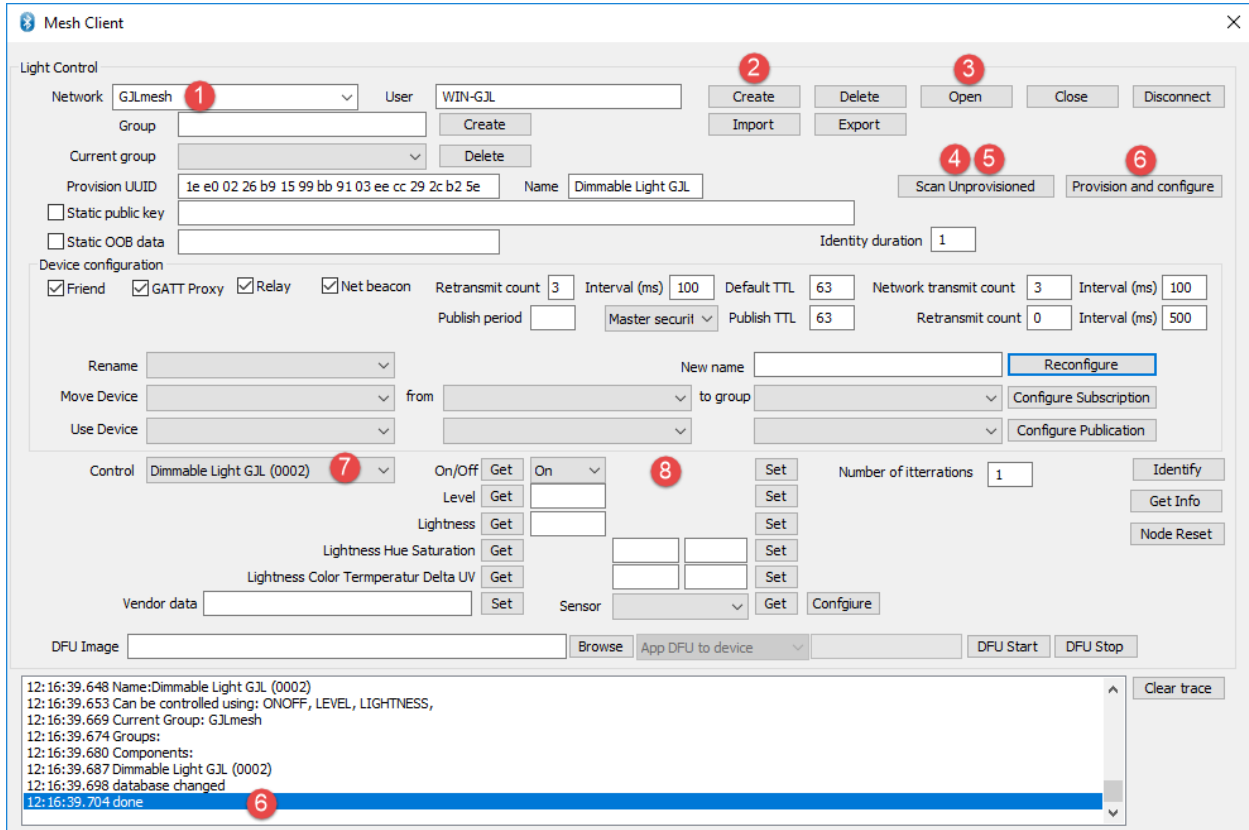
7A.5.3 Mesh Client Peer App (Windows 10 only)

This application communicates with the specified mesh network directly using the BLE radio of the computer.



Note that support for BLE was added in Windows 10 so you can't use this with earlier versions of Windows. It can create mesh networks, provision devices and control lighting devices. This tool can be launched from the Quick Panel. The executable and source code can be found at:

[wiced_btsdk/tools/btsdk-peer-apps-mesh/Windows/MeshClient](https://github.com/cypress-io/wiced_btsdk/tree/master/tools/btsdk-peer-apps-mesh/Windows/MeshClient)



The screenshot shows the Mesh Client application window. It has a 'Light Control' section at the top with fields for Network (GJLmesh), User (WIN-GJL), Group, Current group, Provision UUID, and Name (Dimmable Light GJL). There are buttons for Create, Delete, Open, Close, Disconnect, Import, and Export. Below this is a 'Device configuration' section with checkboxes for Friend, GATT Proxy, Relay, and Net beacon, and various numerical settings for Retransmit count, Interval (ms), Default TTL, Network transmit count, Publish period, Master security, Publish TTL, and Retransmit count. There are also fields for Rename, Move Device, and Use Device. At the bottom, there is a 'Control' section with a dropdown menu showing 'Dimmable Light GJL (0002)' and buttons for On/Off Get, On/Off Set, Level Get, Level Set, Lightness Get, Lightness Set, Lightness Hue Saturation Get, Lightness Hue Saturation Set, Lightness Color Temperature Delta UV Get, Lightness Color Temperature Delta UV Set, Vendor data Set, and Sensor Get. There are also buttons for Reconfigure, Configure Subscription, Configure Publication, Identify, Get Info, and Node Reset. At the very bottom, there is a log window showing a series of timestamps and messages, with the last message being '12:16:39.704 done'.

The basic flow for using the application is:

1. Enter a name for your network
2. Click *Create*
3. Click *Open*
4. Click *Scan Unprovisioned*
5. Wait until your device appears in the list and click *Stop Scanning*
 - a. If there are multiple unprovisioned devices you may need to stop and restart multiple times until you see the device you are looking for.
6. Click *Provision and configure*
 - a. This step will take a few seconds – wait until it is complete before continuing.
7. Select your device in the *Control* dropdown.
8. Use *On/Off Get*, *On/Off Set*, *Level Get*, *Level Set*, etc. to control your device.

7A.5.4 Cypress Mesh Controller App (Android)

The Cypress Android app is provided with the BTSDK. Source code is available in the SDK for those who want an example to create their own custom Android mesh app.

The app communicates with the mesh network using the device's BLE capabilities. Since smartphones don't (yet) have mesh capability, the app uses GATT connections for provisioning and relies on the presence of a GATT proxy for mesh configuration and communication.

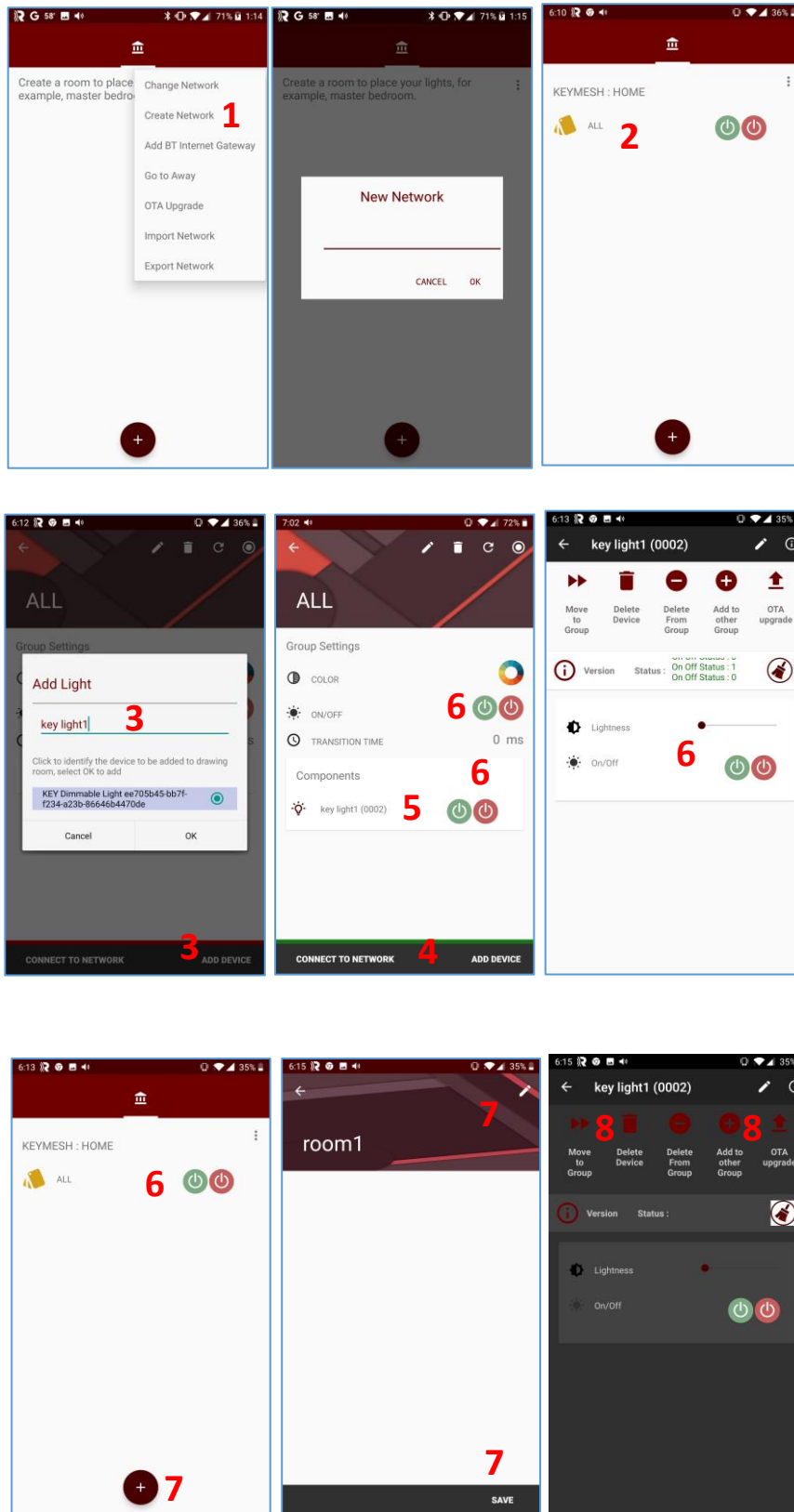
The app can create mesh networks, provision, configure, and control devices. The installable file is located at:

wiced_btstack/tools/btstack-peer-apps-mesh/Android/src/bin/MeshController.apk

Since the app is not (yet) in the Android Play Store, it is necessary to install it manually by dragging the .apk file onto the phone's filesystem and then executing it to install the app. You will need to allow installation of 3rd party applications for this to work.

The basic flow for using the application is:

1. Create a network
2. Add or select a group (ALL is created by default)
3. Add a device to the group
 - a. This will take a few seconds. Wait until it completes before proceeding
4. Connect to the network if it doesn't happen automatically (bar will be green when connected)
 - a. Note: You must have a GATT proxy provisioned on the network to connect to it.
 - b. Note: As soon as you provision a device with a GATT proxy, the app will connect to it. If you then provision a device that doesn't have a GATT proxy, it will not re-connect so you will have to re-connect manually using the button.
5. Select the device
6. Control the device
 - a. Note: you can control all devices simultaneously at the group level or individually at the device level.
 - b. Note: At the device level, you can adjust the lightness in addition to the on/off control.
7. Optional: Click the "+" to add additional Groups (i.e. Rooms)
8. Optional: Move or Add devices to other Groups



7A.5.5 Cypress Mesh App (iOS)

The Cypress iOS app is similar to the Android app. The app communicates with the mesh network using the device's BLE capabilities. Since smartphones don't (yet) have mesh capability, the app uses GATT connections for provisioning and relies on the presence of a GATT proxy for mesh configuration and communication.

The app can create mesh networks, provision/configure devices and can control lighting devices. The source code for the application is located at:

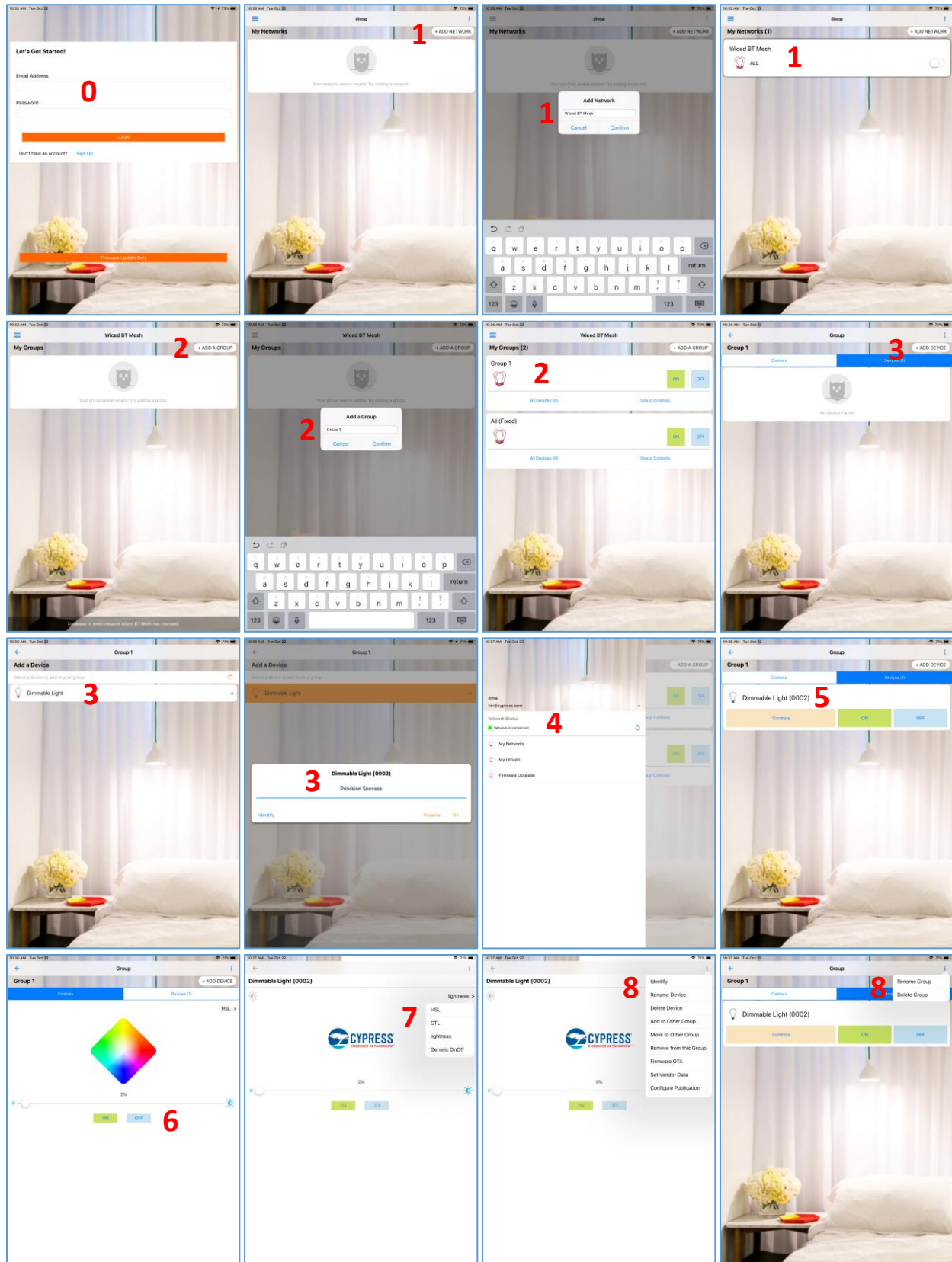
`wiced_btstack/tools/btstack-peer-apps-mesh/iOS/MeshApp`

This app is on the Apple App Store under the name *Cypress MeshApp*, a link to the app store page can be found here:

<https://www.cypress.com/documentation/software-and-drivers/bluetooth-mesh-helper-applications>

The basic flow for using the application is similar to the Android app:

0. Login or create and account
 - a. The account is local to the device – it is just used to identify different users on that device. If you re-install the app or delete the app's data, you will need to recreate the account.
1. Create a network
2. Add a group (ALL is created by default) and select it
3. Add a device to the group
 - a. This will take a few seconds. Wait until it completes before proceeding
4. Connect to the network if it doesn't happen automatically
 - a. Note: You must have a GATT proxy provisioned on the network to connect to it.
 - b. Note: As soon as you provision a device with a GATT proxy, the app will connect to it. If you then provision a device that doesn't have a GATT proxy, it will not re-connect so you will have to re-connect manually using the button.
5. Select the device
6. Control the device
 - a. Note: you can control all devices simultaneously at the group level or individually at the device level.
 - b. Note: At the device level, you can adjust the lightness in addition to the on/off control.
7. Optional: You can change the light control display using the drop down at the Device level.
8. Optional: Use the menus at the Group and Device level to rename groups, move or add devices to other groups, etc.



7A.6 Demo

A mesh network with several lights and rooms will be demonstrated to the class at this point.

7A.7 Exercises

Exercise 7A.1 Create Network with a LightDimmable Device

In this exercise you will create your own (very small) mesh network.

1. In ModusToolbox IDE, create a new application (group) for:
 - a. Target Hardware: CYBT-213043-MESH
 - b. Starter Application: Mesh-Demo-213043MESH
 - i. Hint: This will create a set of mesh demo applications including LightDimmable, OnOff Switch, Dimmer, etc.
2. Find and select the project called "Mesh_Demo_213043Mesh.light_dimmable."
3. Open the file "light_dimmable.c" and find the "device_name". Change the name so that it has your initials in it (e.g. "<Inits> Dimmable Light").
4. Program the application to one of the CYBT-213043-MESH kits.
 - a. Hint: You should open a terminal window for the UART to see messages. **The default UART baud rate for the mesh applications is 921600.**
 - i. Hint: If your terminal emulator does not support 921600, from ModusToolbox, open the file in libraries/mesh_app_lib/mesh_app_hci.c and search for 921600. Change that value to one that is supported and rebuild/reprogram.
5. Run the Mesh Lighting application to provision the device.
 - a. Hint: If you don't see any devices listed after ~10 seconds, exit the app, stop/restart BLE and then try again.