



Incentivizing Stable Path Selection in Future Internet Architectures

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ABSTRACT

By delegating path control to end-hosts, future Internet architectures offer flexibility for path selection. However, a concern arises that the distributed routing decisions by end-hosts, in particular load-adaptive routing, can lead to oscillations if path selection is performed without coordination or accurate load information. Prior research has addressed this problem by devising local path-selection policies that lead to global stability. However, little is known about the viability of these policies in the Internet context, where selfish end-hosts can deviate from a prescribed policy if such a deviation is beneficial from their individual perspective. In order to achieve network stability in future Internet architectures, it is essential that end-hosts have an incentive to adopt a stability-oriented path-selection policy.

In this work, we perform the first incentive analysis of the stability-inducing path-selection policies proposed in the literature. Building on a game-theoretic model of end-host path selection, we show that these policies are in fact incompatible with the self-interest of end-hosts, as these strategies make it worthwhile to pursue an oscillatory path-selection strategy. Therefore, stability in networks with selfish end-hosts must be enforced by incentive-compatible mechanisms. We present two such mechanisms and formally prove their incentive compatibility.

Keywords

Path-aware Internet, path selection, traffic oscillation, game theory, mechanism design, network stability

INTRODUCTION

The past 20 years of research on next-generation Internet architectures have shown the benefits of path awareness and path control for end-hosts, and multiple path-aware network architectures have been proposed. Many of these architectures, including RON [1], Platypus [16], MIRO [19], Pathlets [8], Segment Routing [5], and SCION [2], allow end-hosts to select the inter-domain paths over which their data packets are forwarded. One principal argument for such path control is that it enables load-adaptive routing, i.e., allows

the end-hosts to avoid congested links, and should therefore lead to a relatively even traffic distribution. However, load-adaptive routing creates new challenges, in particular the introduction of instabilities under certain conditions. Instability due to load-adaptive routing typically appears in the form of *oscillations*, i.e., periodic up- and downswings of link utilization, leading to a large variance of the traffic load in a short time span. According to the IETF, a central obstacle to deployment of path-aware network architectures are ‘oscillations based on feedback loops, as hosts move from path to path’ [3]. Indeed, such oscillations can be shown to occur if path-selection decisions are taken on the basis of outdated load information [7, 18], which is the case in any real system.

Such oscillations are undesirable for many reasons, both from the perspective of end-hosts and network operators. If oscillation occurs when a link is near its capacity limit, a danger of queue build-up, jitter, and, as a result, unpredictable performance emerges. Moreover, oscillation temporarily leads to a heavily skewed load distribution over paths, causing higher overall queuing latency than with a more equal traffic distribution. Due to the large variance of the load level over time, network operators have to perform substantial overprovisioning of link capacities, which is undesirable from a business perspective. Moreover, oscillation of inter-domain traffic imposes additional overhead for intra-domain traffic engineering (e.g., MPLS circuit setup), as oscillating inter-domain flows may constantly switch between inter-AS interfaces. From the end-host perspective, oscillation causes packet loss and thus forces the congestion-control algorithms to recurring restarts, negatively affecting throughput.

To avoid these damaging effects, researchers have devised numerous schemes to guarantee stability of load-adaptive routing. However, to the best of our knowledge, no scheme so far has aimed at providing stability in Internet architectures with end-host path control. Several systems have been designed under the assumption of network-based path selection, i.e., hop-by-hop forwarding according to decisions taken by intermediate routers [6, 9, 13, 14]. These systems achieve convergence by appropriately adjusting how much traffic is forwarded to each next hop towards a destination and cannot be used if packets must be sent along paths selected by end-hosts. Other systems allow end-point path selection, but are targeted at an intra-domain context

where the end-points (typically ingress and egress routers) are under the control of a network operator [4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 15]. In an intra-domain context, network operators are able to prescribe arbitrary path-selection procedures that generate stability. Conversely, in an inter-domain context, the end-points are not under control of network operators and can thus not be forced to adopt a non-oscillatory path-selection strategy. Instead, as end-hosts must be assumed to be selfish, they can only be expected to adopt path-selection strategies that optimize performance *from their individual perspective*.

OUR CONTRIBUTION

This paper revisits the theoretical study of the dynamic effects of end-point path selection, for the first time focusing the analysis on inter-domain networks where the end-points are selfish and uncontrolled. We present a game-theoretic model that allows us to investigate which path-selection strategies (PSS) will be adopted by selfish end-hosts. In particular, we introduce the notion of equilibria to path-selection strategies (*PSS equilibria*). Based on this model, we show that the non-oscillatory path-selection strategies traditionally proposed in the literature on stable source routing [4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 15] are incompatible with the self-interest of end-hosts and thus do not form PSS equilibria. Assuming that such non-oscillatory path-selection strategies are universally adopted, an end-host can increase its utility by deviating in favor of a strategy that is oscillatory.

These results indicate that stability in load-adaptive routing over multiple domains cannot be achieved by exclusively relying on end-hosts' path-selection behavior. Instead, network operators have to *incentivize* end-hosts to adopt one of the well-known convergent path-selection strategies with *stabilization mechanisms*. These mechanisms have to be *incentive-compatible*, i.e., the mechanisms must create an incentive structure such that it is in an end-host's self-interest to adopt a non-oscillatory path-selection strategy. In this work, we leverage insights from mechanism design to develop two such stabilization mechanisms, namely the *Flow-Loyalty Oscillation-Suppression System* (FLOSS) and the *Computation-Requiring Oscillation Suppression System* (CROSS), and formally prove their incentive compatibility. While these mechanisms build on existing insights from intra-domain traffic engineering, their methods of incentivization represent a novel approach to achieve stability in inter-domain networks with load-adaptive routing. While FLOSS requires end-hosts to make *reservations* for the paths they intend to use, which are only granted to a subset of applicants, CROSS imposes a *computational cost* on switching between paths. To complement our mainly theoretical work, we also discuss how our findings could be practically applied.

The full version of this paper has been published in *Performance Evaluation (PEVA)* [17].

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. We gratefully acknowledge funding from ETH Zurich, from the Zurich Information Security and Privacy Center (ZISC), from SNSF for project ESCALATE (200021L182005), and from WWTF for project WHATIF (ICT19-045, 2020–2024).

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