

Integrated Load Switches Versus Discrete MOSFETs

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Drivers and Load Switches

ABSTRACT

The most common approach to load switching solutions is to use a Power MOSFET surrounded by discrete resistors and capacitors; however, in most cases using a fully integrated load switch has significant advantages. While both discrete and integrated load switching solutions perform the same basic function (turn on and turn off), distinctions exist, such as the transient behavior and total solution size. This application report highlights many drawbacks and limitations of a discrete switching solution and discusses how they can be overcome with an integrated load switch.

Contents

1	Summary of Load Switching.....	2
2	PMOS Discrete Circuit #1	3
2.1	Performance	3
2.2	Adding a Resistor to Slow the Output Rise Time.....	5
2.3	V_{th} Voltage Disadvantage	6
2.4	Active Low Disadvantage	6
3	PMOS Discrete Circuit #2	6
3.1	Performance	7
3.2	V_{IN} Leakage Disadvantage	9
3.3	Adding a Resistor to Slow the Output Rise Time.....	9
4	PMOS Discrete Circuit #3	10
4.1	Performance	11
4.2	Disadvantage when Applying V_{IN}	12
5	PMOS Discrete Circuit #4	14
6	NMOS Discrete Circuits	15
7	Load Switches	16
7.1	Performance	17
7.2	Size Advantage	19
7.3	Feature Advantages	19
8	Conclusion	21
9	References	22

1 Summary of Load Switching

A typical system involves a power supply and multiple loads which require various load currents. In most cases, the system must independently control which loads are on, when they are turned on, and how quickly they turn on. As previously mentioned, this power switching, as Figure 1 shows, can be implemented using a discrete MOSFET circuit or an integrated load switch.

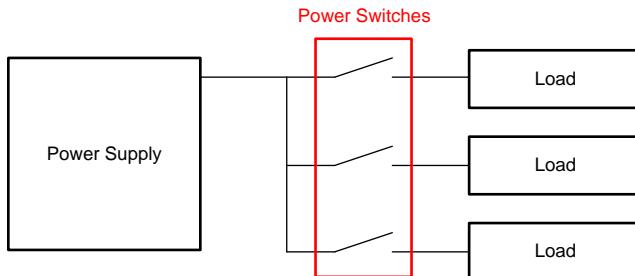


Figure 1. Power Switching

A discrete MOSFET circuit contains several components to control the turnon and turnoff of a discrete power MOSFET. These circuits can be enabled or disabled by using a GPIO signal from a microcontroller. Figure 2 shows several of these circuits.

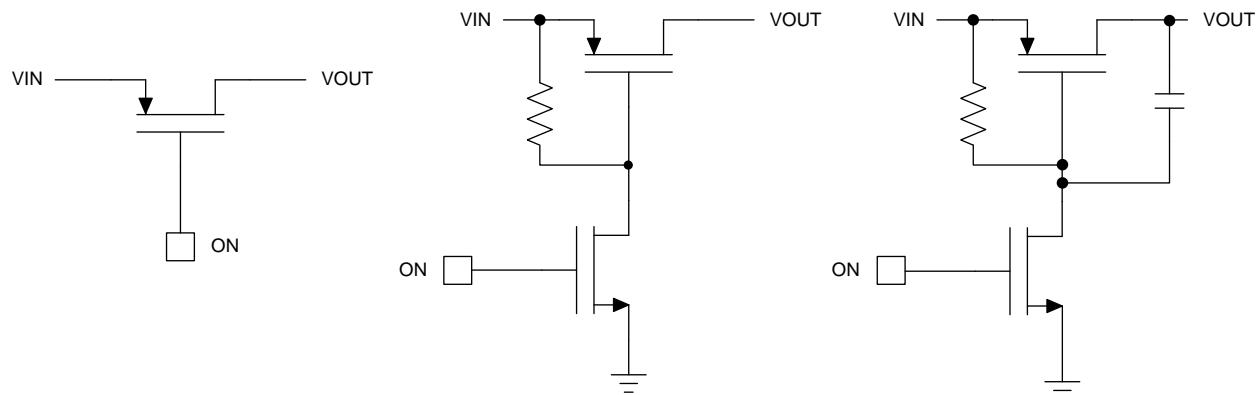


Figure 2. PMOS Discrete Circuits

Load switches can also be used to open and close the connection between the power rail and the corresponding load. These integrated devices have several benefits and features while they are enabled, disabled, or even switching between the two states. Figure 3 shows a load switch circuit.

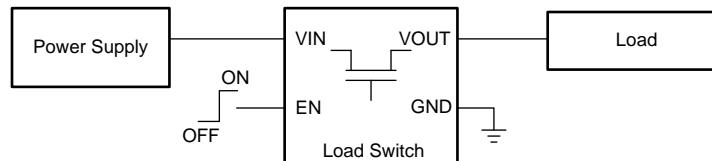


Figure 3. Load Switch Circuit

The following sections use switching waveforms to show and compare the discrete circuits and integrated load switches when used for power switching.

2 PMOS Discrete Circuit #1

The simplest discrete circuit that can be used for power switching is a PMOS transistor whose gate is driven by a GPIO.

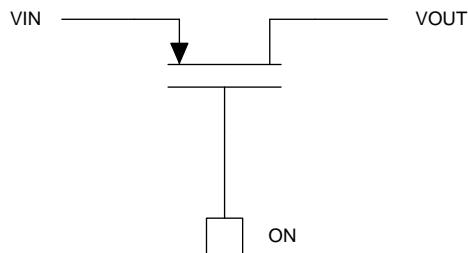


Figure 4. PMOS Discrete Circuit #1

The benefit of this solution is simplicity. Only one component is required and the operation is simple—when the GPIO is high, the PMOS is turned off, and when the GPIO is pulled low, the PMOS is turned on.

2.1 Performance

The performance of the PMOS solution is evaluated by looking at the way the PMOS transistor is able to switch on with a load attached. For the purpose of this application report, a resistive load of $1\ \Omega$ and capacitive load of $4.7\ \mu\text{F}$ are used. Figure 5 shows this type of circuit.

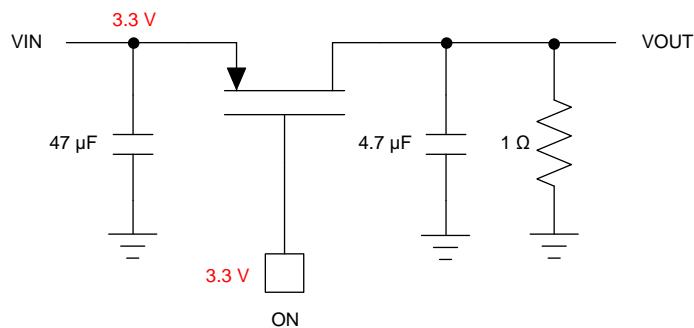


Figure 5. PMOS Discrete Circuit #1 with a Resistive and Capacitive Load

The input capacitance was chosen to be 10 times higher than the output capacitance to show a solution with strong compensation for transient currents seen during start up. [Figure 6](#) shows the typical turn on behavior of this circuit.

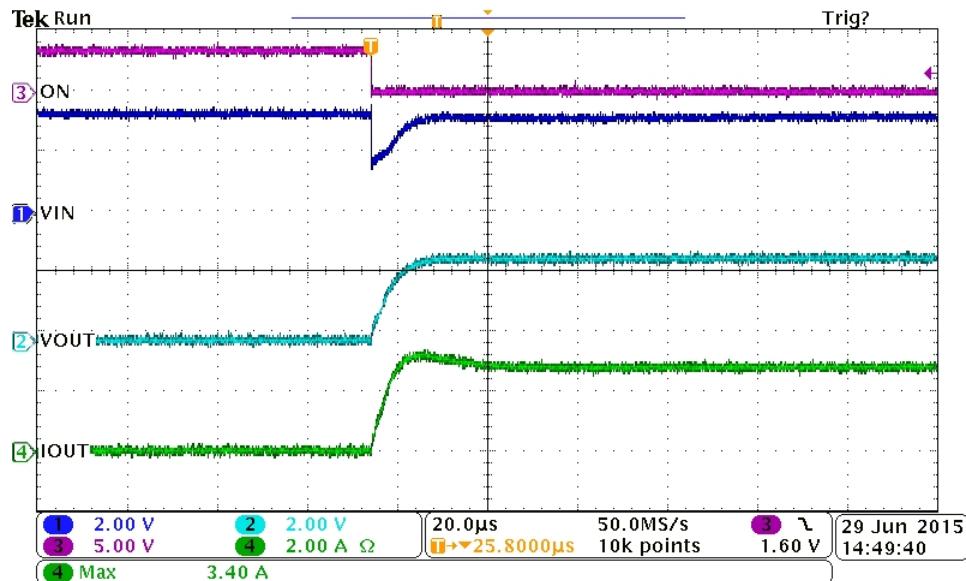


Figure 6. Turn on Behavior for PMOS Discrete Circuit #1

When the GPIO signal (ON) is brought low, the PMOS transistor is turned on and its load is connected to the power supply (VIN). Because the PMOS has no controlled turn on, the voltage on the power supply decreases heavily due to the sudden demand for current. As the current ramps up to its final value, the voltage on VIN stabilizes. [Figure 7](#) shows the stabilizing behavior of the PMOS Discrete circuit.

The resistive load is removed and the capacitive load is left on the output when observing the magnitude of the inrush current.

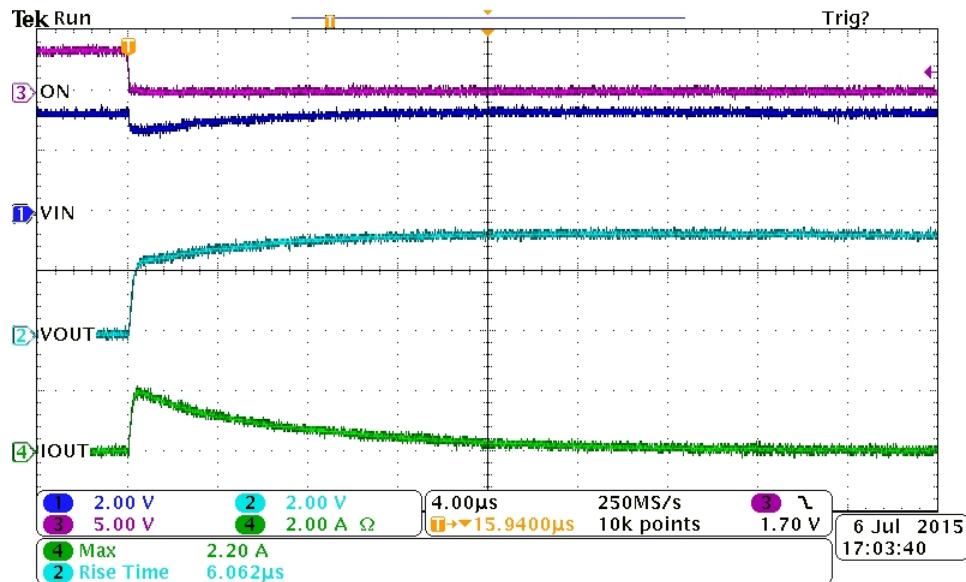


Figure 7. Inrush Current for PMOS Discrete Circuit #1

With only a small capacitance of 4.7 μ F, the uncontrolled turnon manages to generate over 2 A of inrush current. As the output capacitance increases, the inrush current also increases at the same rate. Use [Equation 1](#) to calculate inrush current.

$$I_{\text{INRUSH}} = C_{\text{LOAD}} \times \frac{dV}{dt}$$

where

- I_{INRUSH} = amount of inrush current caused by a capacitance
 - C_{LOAD} = total capacitance
 - dV = change in voltage during ramp up
 - dt = rise time (during voltage ramp up)
- (1)

This current can lead to input voltage decreases, power supply failure, or PCB trace damage. If the input voltage at the load switch becomes lower than expected, such as in the case of the MOSFET startup, then other modules or subsystems on the same power rail may reset because of a low input voltage and which transitions the system into an undesired state. For more information on the negative effects of inrush current, see the [Managing Inrush Current Application Note](#).

2.2 Adding a Resistor to Slow the Output Rise Time

A resistor is added to the gate of the PMOS to help slow down the rise time of the output voltage (and reduce the inrush current). This additional resistor limits the amount of current that charges or discharges the gate and turns the PMOS off or on.

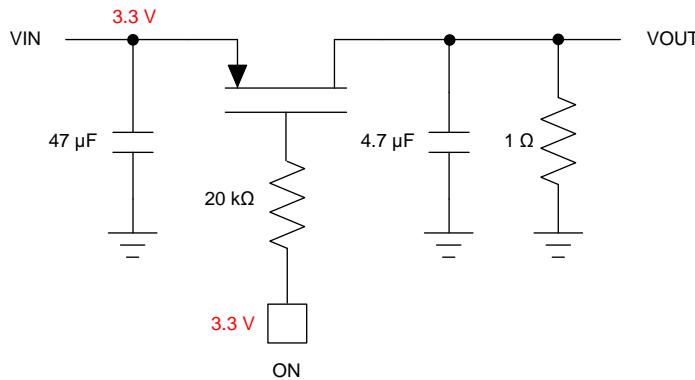


Figure 8. PMOS Discrete Circuit #1 with a 20-kΩ Resistor on the PMOS Gate

Figure 9 shows the effect of a 20-kΩ resistor on the gate of the PMOS.

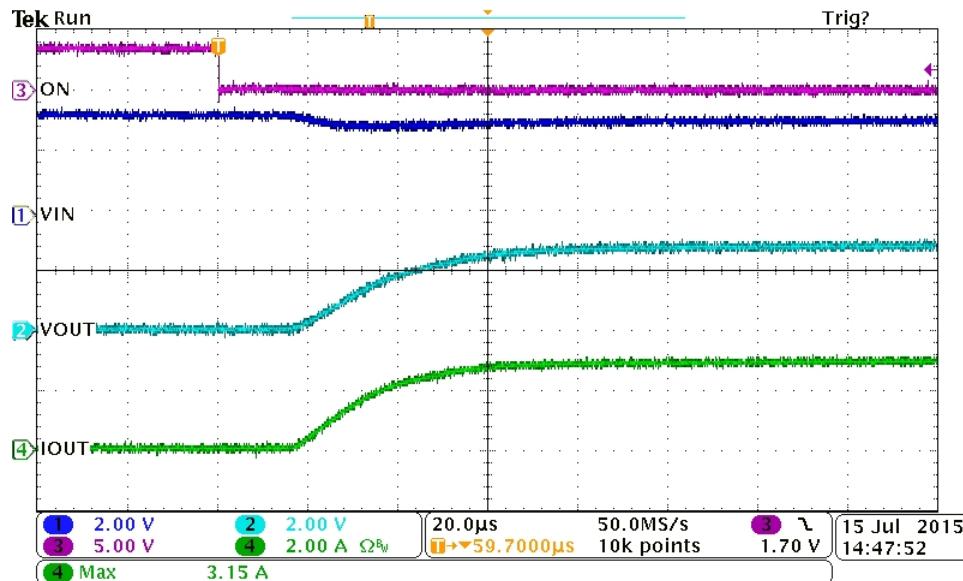


Figure 9. Turnon Behavior of PMOS Discrete Circuit #1 with a 20-kΩ Resistor on the PMOS Gate

With the 20-k Ω resistor added, the rise time increases. The power supply is now able to manage the inrush current without any significant voltage drop. While this resistance may work for the 4.7- μ F load, a higher output capacitance requires a higher rise time and therefore more resistance on the gate.

While adding resistance to the gate of the PMOS helps in increasing the rise time of the output, it also increases the fall time when the PMOS is turned off. This can be a disadvantage for systems which need the output load discharged quickly for faster system operation.

2.3 V_{th} Voltage Disadvantage

Aside from the decreasing voltage on the input power rail, this circuit has a few additional disadvantages. One disadvantage is the restriction on the input voltage range of the circuit. This is limited by the V_{th} turn on threshold of the MOSFET. The maximum input voltage which can be applied to the MOSFET is the V_{OH} voltage of the GPIO added to the V_{th} voltage of the MOSFET. If the voltage is any higher than this, then the PMOS stays on even when the GPIO toggles high.

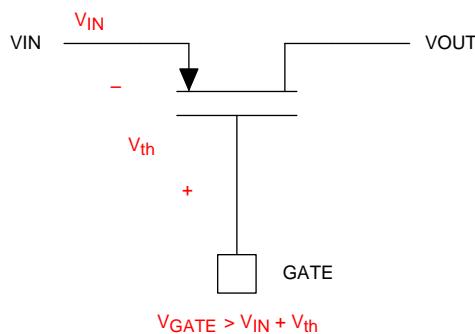


Figure 10. VIN and GPIO Voltage Requirements for PMOS Discrete Circuit #1

The minimum input voltage that can be applied to the PMOS is determined by the desired MOSFET performance. In general, a higher V_{GS} voltage yields a lower on-resistance across the PMOS and causes less of a voltage drop from V_{IN} to V_{OUT} . While this is desired, it is difficult to implement in this circuit with a low V_{IN} voltage because the GPIO cannot be pulled any lower than 0 V and the V_{GS} voltage is the value of V_{IN} . Additionally, many times the GPIO voltage is higher than 0 V because of GPIO variance and the inability to pull the pin all the way down to 0 V, resulting in a higher on-resistance and more voltage drop across the PMOS.

2.4 Active Low Disadvantage

Another disadvantage is that the GPIO signal from the microprocessor must always be present to prevent the PMOS from turning on. This means that the microprocessor cannot be powered off or put to sleep to save power for the rest of the system. Also, if the input of the MOSFET comes up before the microprocessor has had a chance to power up and pull its GPIO control high, then the MOSFET circuit allows power to pass through, even if this behavior is not desired. If the discrete circuit is being controlled by a power good signal instead, then this signal must be active low.

3 PMOS Discrete Circuit #2

The next circuit that is investigated involves an additional resistor and NMOS transistor.

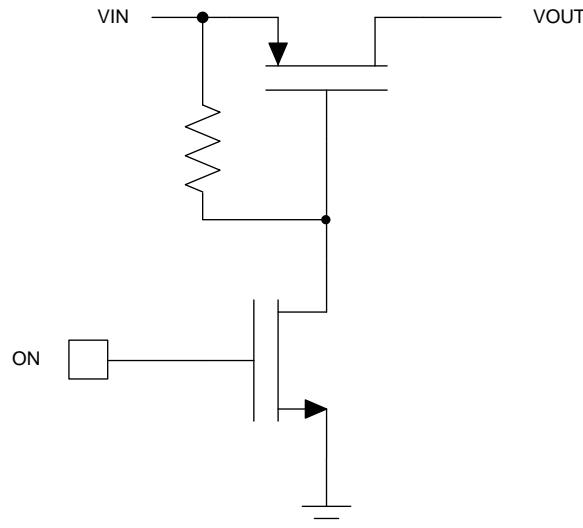


Figure 11. PMOS Discrete Circuit #2

With this circuit, the GPIO pulls the gate of the NMOS high and connects the gate of the PMOS transistor to ground. This turns on the PMOS and allows power to flow from VIN to VOUT. When the GPIO signal pulls the gate of the NMOS low, V_{IN} pulls the gate of the PMOS high and prevents power from flowing through the MOSFET. Rather than using an NMOS transistor to drive the PMOS, an NPN BJT can also be used.

3.1 Performance

Once again, performance is evaluated by observing the switching characteristics of the circuit. [Figure 12](#) shows how this circuit is evaluated with the same input and output conditions as the first discrete solution.

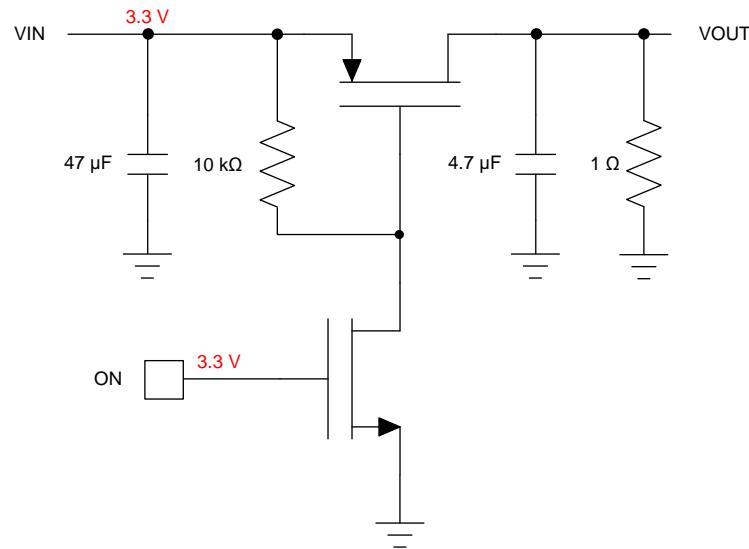


Figure 12. PMOS Discrete Circuit #2 with a Resistive and Capacitive Load

Figure 13 shows the turn on performance of this circuit.

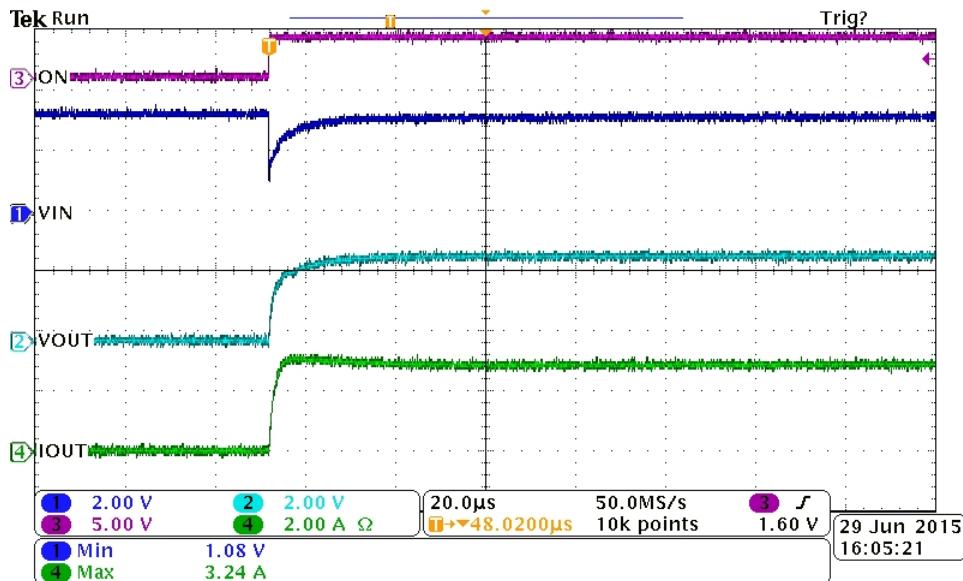


Figure 13. Turn on Behavior for PMOS Discrete Circuit #2

Although the voltage on VIN drops in the same way as the first circuit, this drop does not last as long and is less severe. The inrush current can be observed in Figure 14.

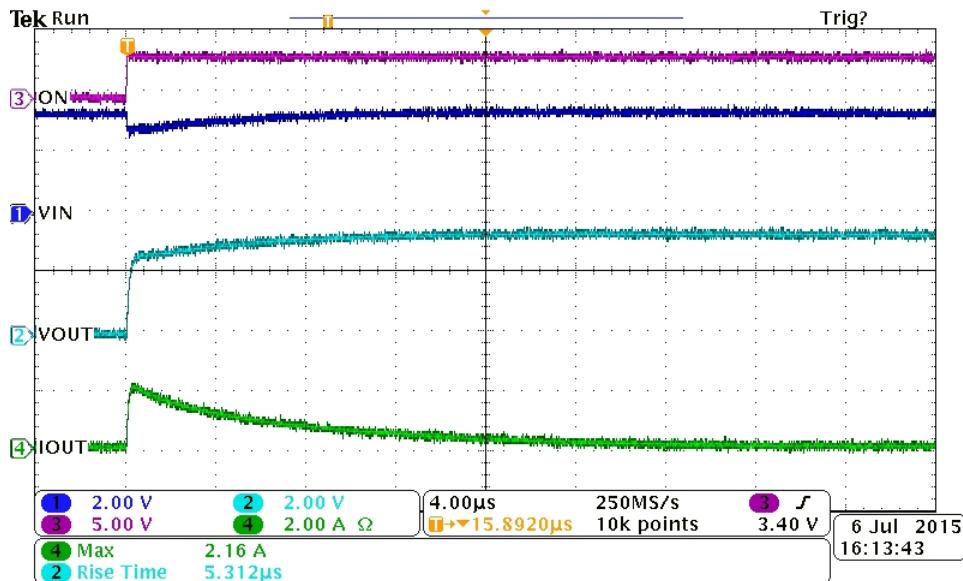


Figure 14. Inrush Current for PMOS Discrete Circuit #2

Once again, over 2 A of inrush current is measured on turn on.

Overall, this circuit solves several problems that the first circuit had. Because an NMOS transistor is being driven, the logic is active high and does not require a constant GPIO voltage to prevent power from passing through to the load. The maximum bound on the VIN voltage is also removed since the gate of the PMOS is coupled to VIN when the PMOS is turned off instead of the GPIO voltage. This circuit also improves the on-resistance performance of the PMOS because the variance in the GPIO signal voltage no longer affects the gate of the PMOS. However, for low values of V_{IN} , the V_{GS} of the circuit would still be small during turn on and would lead to a large on-resistance and voltage drop across the PMOS.

3.2 VIN Leakage Disadvantage

One disadvantage with this circuit is a VIN leakage path that is present when the PMOS is turned on. Because the NMOS is enabled, current is able to flow from VIN, through the resistance from source to gate, and down to ground.

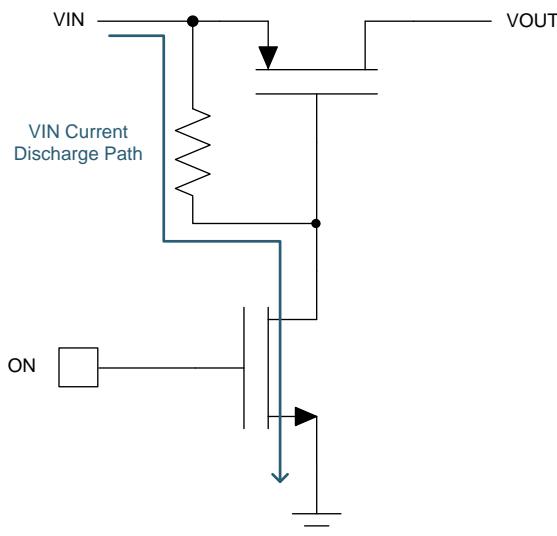


Figure 15. PMOS Discrete Circuit #2 VIN Leakage Path

Leakage is an issue for power conscious designs because it reduces the efficiency of the switch solution and adds additional power dissipation to the rest of the system.

3.3 Adding a Resistor to Slow the Output Rise Time

Once again, a 20-k Ω resistor is added to the gate of the PMOS to slow down the charge of the gate and increase the rise time of the output. Figure 16 shows the 20-k Ω resistor when applied to the PMOS discrete circuit.

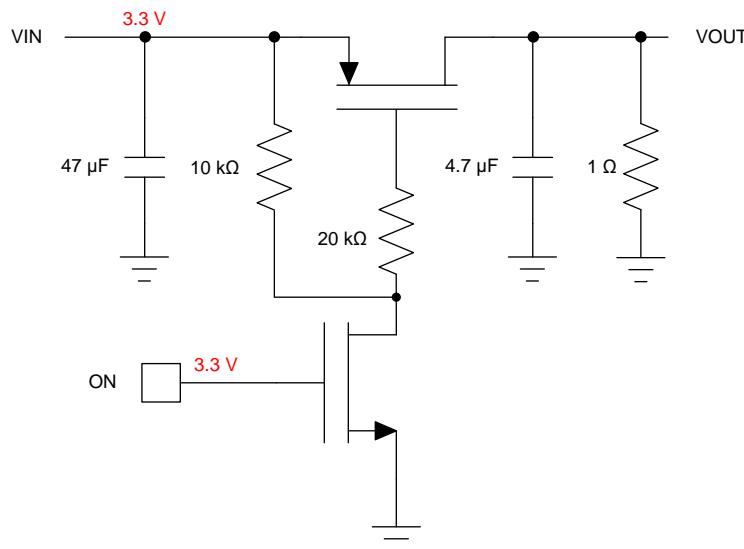


Figure 16. PMOS Discrete Circuit #2 with a 20-k Ω Resistance on the PMOS Gate

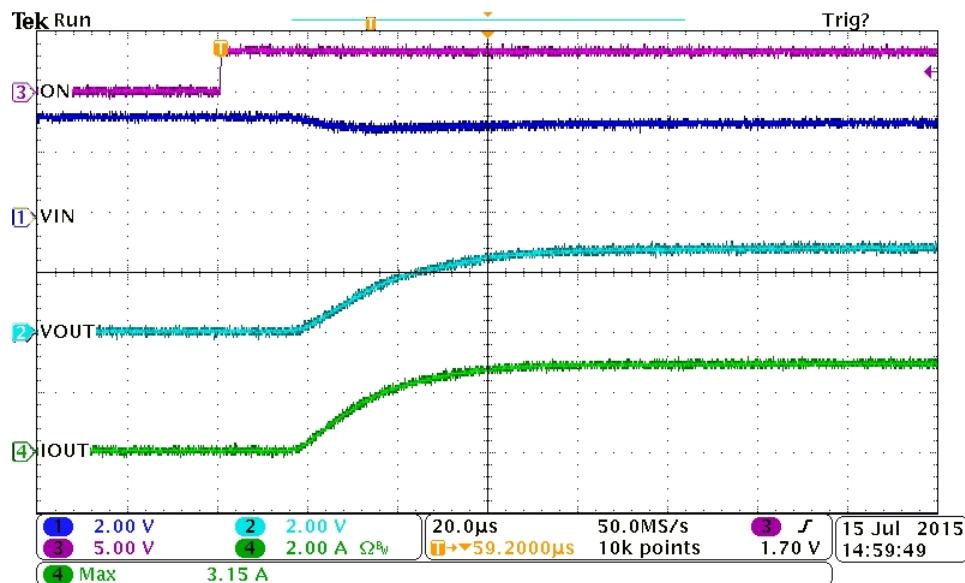


Figure 17. Turn on Behavior of PMOS Discrete Circuit #2 with a 20-k Ω Resistance on the PMOS Gate

With the 20-k Ω resistance added, the rise time is increased and the power supply is able to manage the inrush current without any significant voltage dip. Again, a higher output capacitance require more resistance on the gate to slow the rise time of the output. As with circuit #1, the slower rise time also leads to a slower fall time which may not be desirable for the system.

4 PMOS Discrete Circuit #3

Despite all of the improvements the second discrete circuit made over the first, the power supply still suffers from a decrease in voltage when there is no resistance present on the gate of the PMOS. The decrease is because of the quick turn on of the PMOS transistor and the inrush current which is generated by the load capacitance. An additional capacitor can be added to help control the turnon.

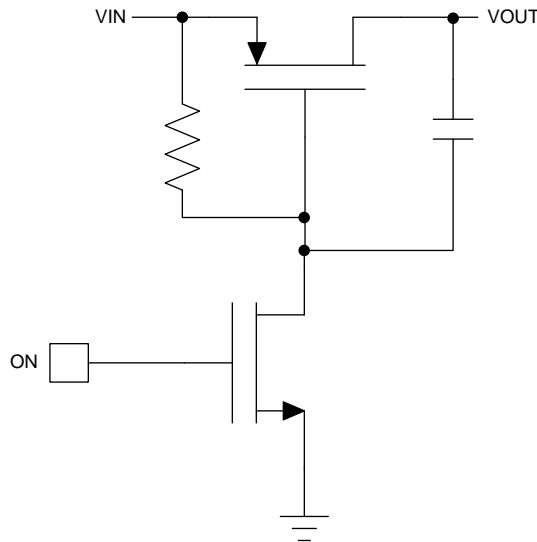


Figure 18. PMOS Discrete Circuit #3

The additional capacitor slows the discharge of the PMOS gate and provides a controlled rise time on VOUT that limits the inrush current and helps prevent changes in the input voltage during switching. Again, a BJT can be used in place of the NMOS transistor.

4.1 Performance

For evaluation, the following input and output conditions were used.

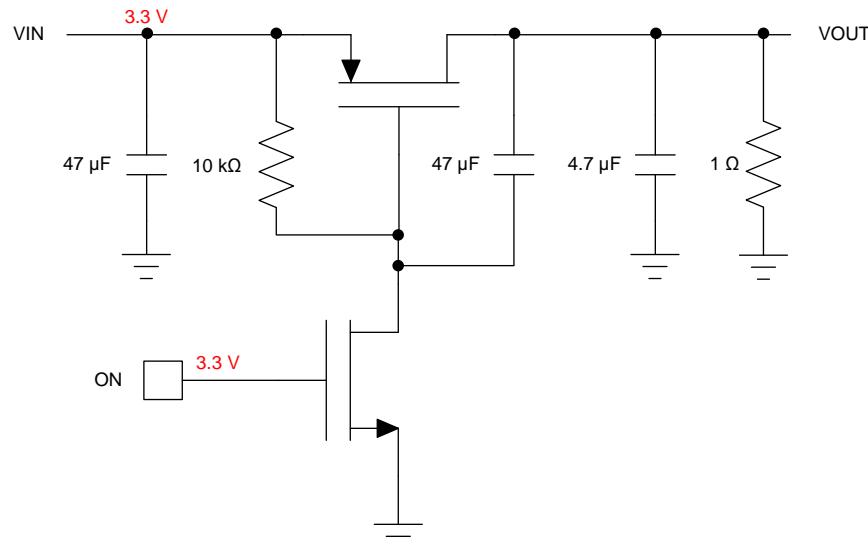


Figure 19. PMOS Discrete Circuit #3 with a Resistive and Capacitive Load

Figure 20 shows the turn on behavior of the discrete solution.

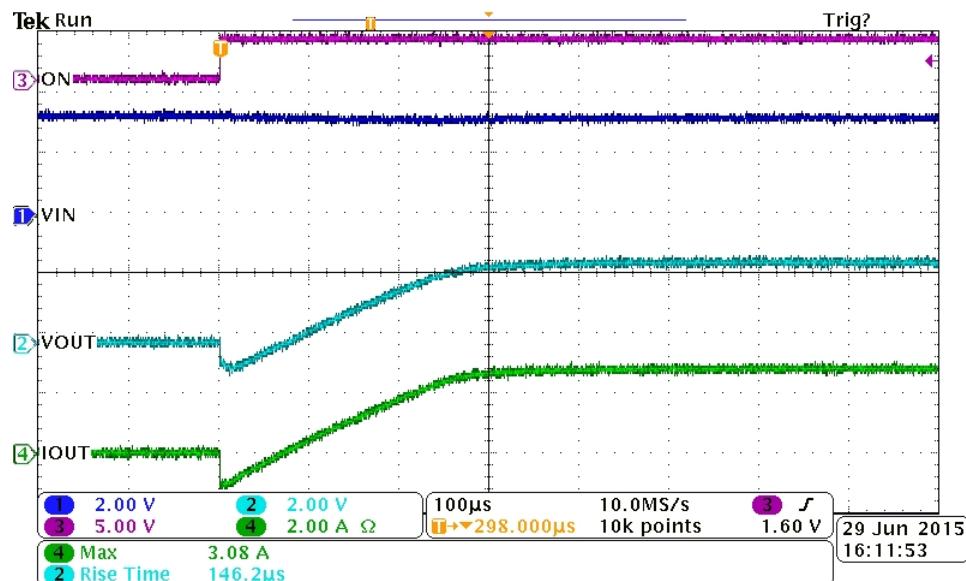


Figure 20. Turn on Behavior for PMOS Discrete Circuit #3

In contrast to the first and second circuits, the PMOS discrete circuit does not suffer from a VIN voltage dip and can control the amount of inrush current generated by the load. The downside here is the negative voltage and current decrease seen at the output.

When VIN is applied to the circuit and ON is low, the capacitor between the gate and drain of the PMOS becomes charged to the value of VIN. When ON goes high and the circuit is turned on, the gate of the PMOS is pulled down from VIN to ground. Because the voltage across the capacitor cannot change instantaneously, the voltage on the output of the PMOS is also pulled down, which results in a negative voltage on VOUT. Once the gate of the PMOS has been discharged, the output voltage is able to ramp up to the value of VIN.

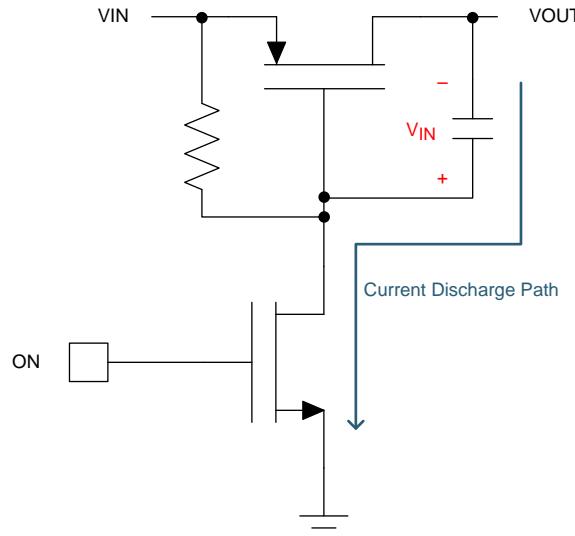


Figure 21. Negative Voltage and Current on PMOS Discrete Circuit #3

A smaller capacitance leads to smaller negative currents and voltages, but it also decreases the ability of the circuit to handle inrush current by reducing its rise time. The negative voltage can not only damage the devices downstream of the load switch, but could also lead to latch up and ESD issues for the components in the system.

As with circuit #2, this circuit also has a discharge path from VIN to ground that causes current to leak from VIN when the PMOS is turned on.

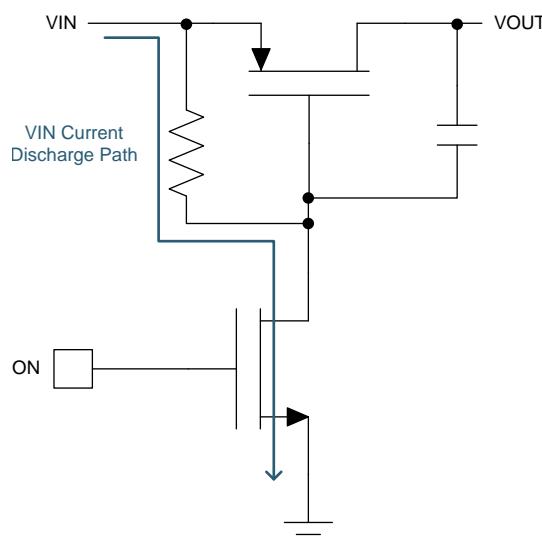


Figure 22. PMOS Discrete Circuit #3 VIN Leakage Path

4.2 Disadvantage when Applying V_{IN}

Another unique disadvantage to this circuit is the behavior when VIN is first applied to the circuit. Before VIN is present, the gate of the PMOS is a high impedance node.

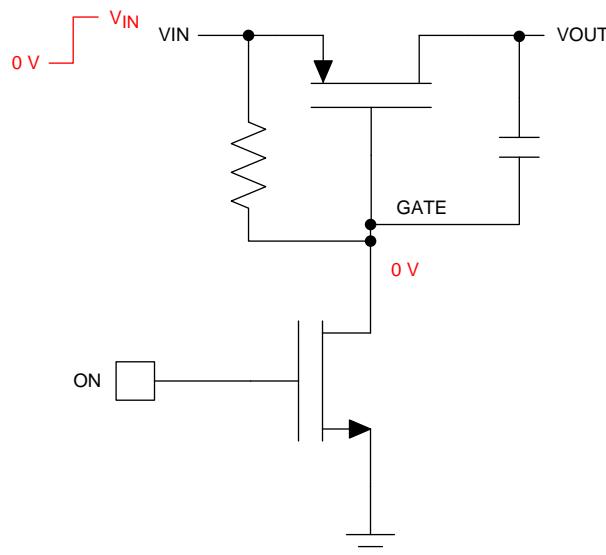


Figure 23. VIN Voltage Step Causes VOUT Voltage Before PMOS Gate Can Charge to VIN

The moment VIN is applied, a negative V_{GS} immediately appears across the PMOS causing it to turn on even when the GPIO control signal is low. As the bulk gate capacitance slowly charges up to VIN, the switch eventually turns off. Once the gate is charged, the GPIO control signal can be used normally to turn the switch on and off with inrush current control. However, when VIN is first applied, the PMOS turn on without inrush current control and without regards to the GPIO control signal. [Figure 24](#) shows a screenshot of this behavior.

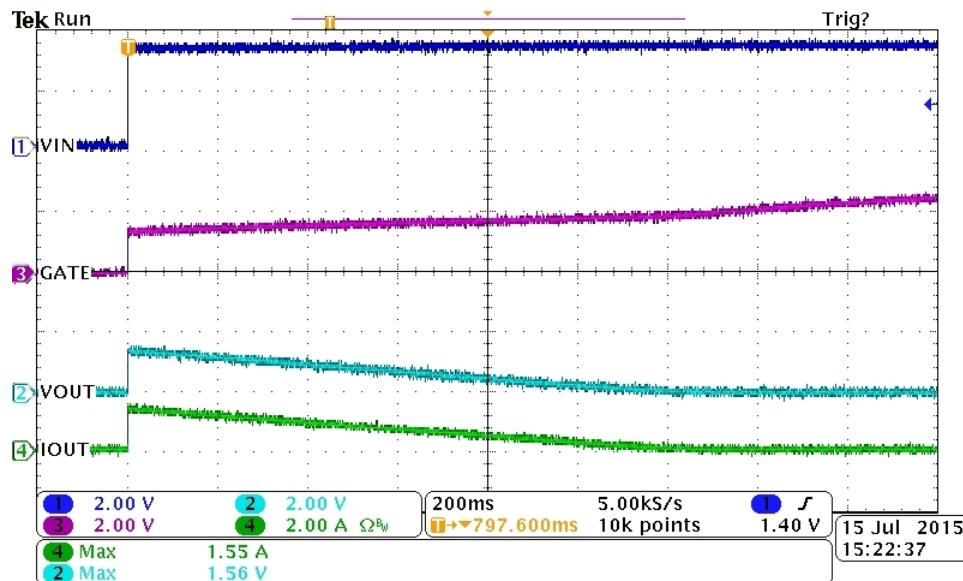


Figure 24. VIN Voltage Step Behavior for PMOS Discrete Circuit #3

As VIN goes high, the gate voltage cannot keep up due to the delay caused by the gate capacitance and capacitor between the gate and drain. Therefore, the PMOS is able to turn on briefly before the gate can reach a voltage high enough to turn the PMOS off. This causes a significant amount of inrush current and output voltage which can potentially turn on undesired loads and cause stress on the power supply. This event is especially prevalent in systems with a replaceable battery since putting in a new battery can cause VIN to go from 0 V to the battery voltage very quickly.

5 PMOS Discrete Circuit #4

Another discrete method to manage the inrush current is by moving the capacitor on the input side. By connecting a capacitor from the source to the gate of the PMOS, this creates an RC delay which reduces the inrush current and slows the switching speed of the PMOS. A resistor from the gate of the PMOS to the bottom FET is also included to slow down the output rise time, similar to the second discrete circuit in [Section 3.3](#).

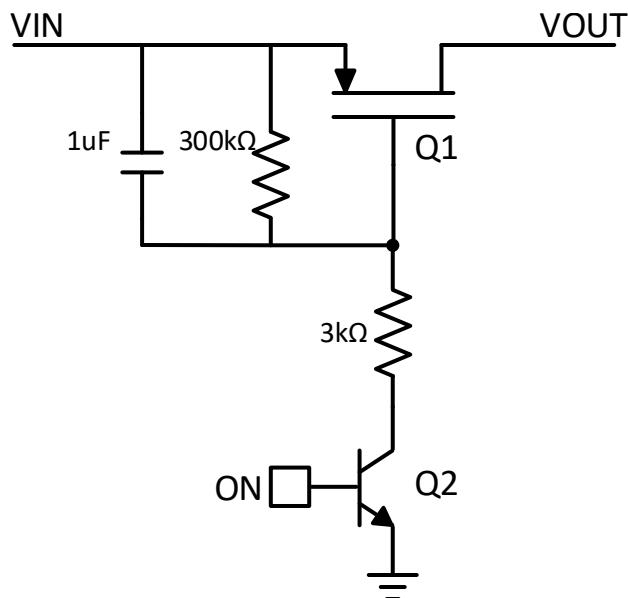


Figure 25. PMOS Discrete Circuit #4

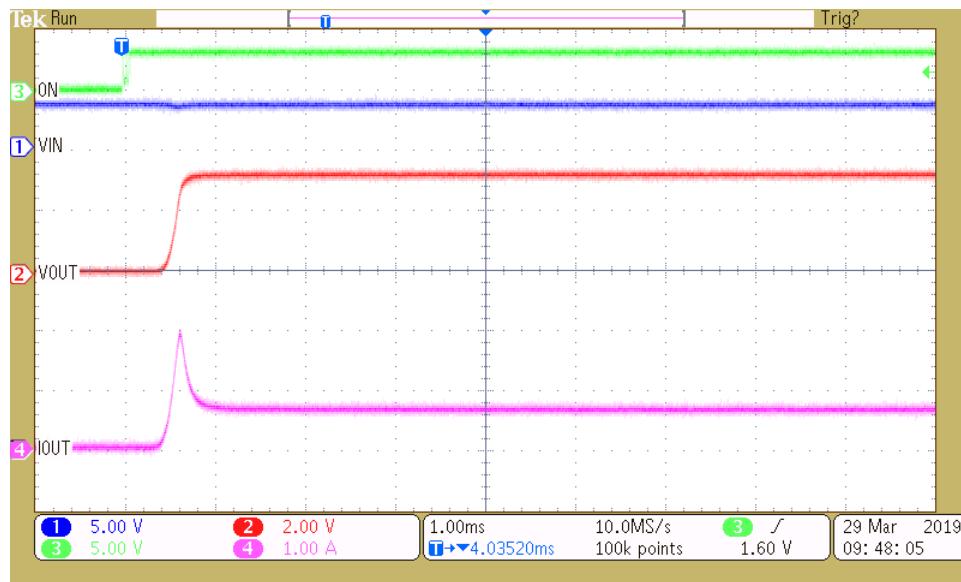


Figure 26. Turn on Behavior of PMOS Discrete Circuit #4

One disadvantage to this discrete implementation is the nonlinearity of the inrush current. Since the ramp rate is dependent on the RC delay on the gate, the switch starts to turn on slowly and exponentially increase until the FET becomes fully on. This nonlinear dv/dt of VOUT causes a nonlinear inrush current spike.

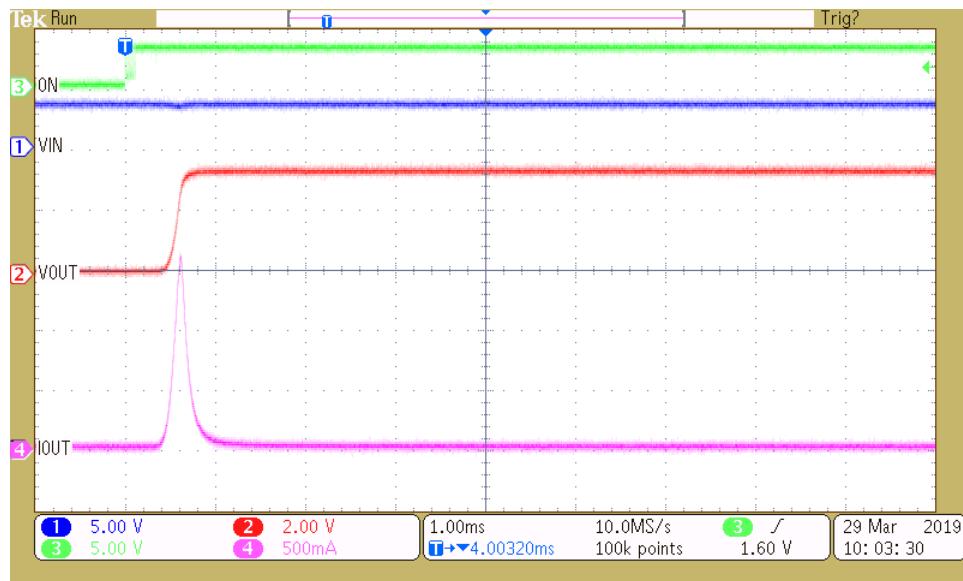


Figure 27. Inrush Current for PMOS Discrete Circuit #4

As shown in [Figure 27](#), the inrush current spikes when starting into a capacitive load.

6 NMOS Discrete Circuits

A discrete power switching solution can also be put together by using an NMOS as the main pass FET. With an NMOS, the voltage on the gate needs to be higher than the input voltage to turn it on. This means that lower voltages can be switched without requiring a large voltage on the gate. For example, an NMOS transistor with a V_{GS} turn on requirement of 1 V could have a 3.3 V GPIO controlling the gate and switch low voltage rails such as 1.8 V, 1.2 V, or even 0.8 V.

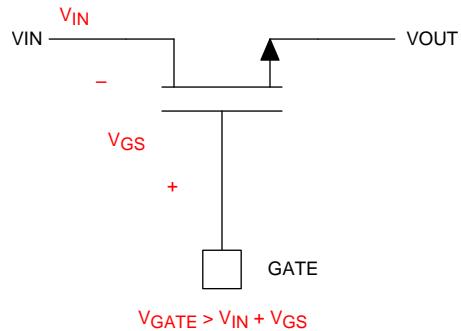


Figure 28. NMOS V_{GS} Requirements for Turn On

While these voltages can be switched, a higher gate voltage may be desired for a higher V_{GS} voltage and lower on-resistance. To switch a high voltage rail (5 V or above), an even higher voltage rail needs to be available in the system to switch the gate of the NMOS. If one is not available, a discrete charge pump can be used to drive the voltage up to an appropriate level for that transistor.

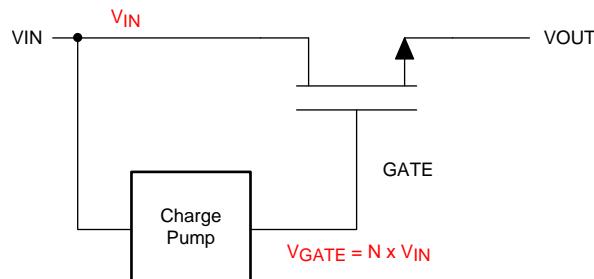


Figure 29. NMOS Charge Pump Circuit

With a charge pump, a high V_{GS} for the NMOS can be achieved, and this drives the on-resistance of the circuit lower. However, this comes at the cost of a larger solution size, increased BOM count, and higher cost when compared to the PMOS solution.

7 Load Switches

After evaluating several discrete circuits for load switching, a comparison can be made to the integrated load switch solution.

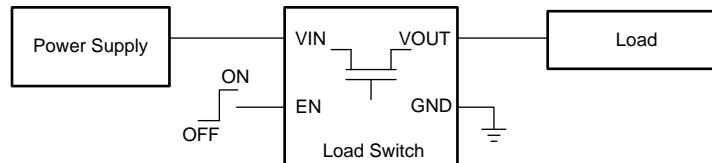


Figure 30. Load Switch Circuit

One advantage for using a load switch is the reduced complexity. To incorporate all of the advantages of the above circuits, only one device needs to be used. A load switch is able to provide a lower input voltage range, can uses low voltage GPIO signals, and uses a controlled rise time to manage the inrush current.

Another advantage to using an integrated load switch is the linear soft start (SS) capability. In comparison to a discrete solution, the linear soft start minimizes the inrush current and provides a simple and precise way to measure the inrush current. In systems that have maximum inrush current and maximum turn-on time restrictions, discrete solutions may have a difficult time to meet these requirements. Adding a large RC time constant might reduce inrush current but drastically increase rise time, while a smaller RC constant would decrease the rise time at the expense of an increased inrush current. A linear control scheme provided by integrated load switches offers the possibility to satisfy both of these requirements.

Table 1. TPS22919 Load Switch vs Discrete FET Comparison

	TPS22919	PMOS #4 DISCRETE SOLUTION
BOM Count	1	5
Solution Size	4.1mm ²	17.08 mm ²
Rise Time	Linear, ~1ms	RC Based
Thermal Shutdown	✓	
Short Circuit Protection	✓	
Quick Output Discharge (QOD)	✓	Requires external components

7.1 Performance

Figure 31 shows the TPS22919 load switch configured at 5 V with a 1 A, 100 μ F load.

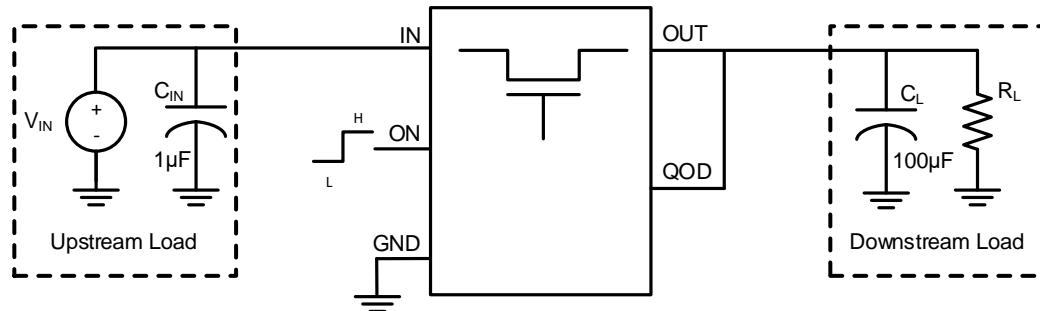


Figure 31. TPS22919 with Downstream Load

The screenshot in Figure 32 was taken using the configuration from Figure 31. The controlled rise time ensures a lower inrush current and no voltage dip on the input without any external components needing to be used.

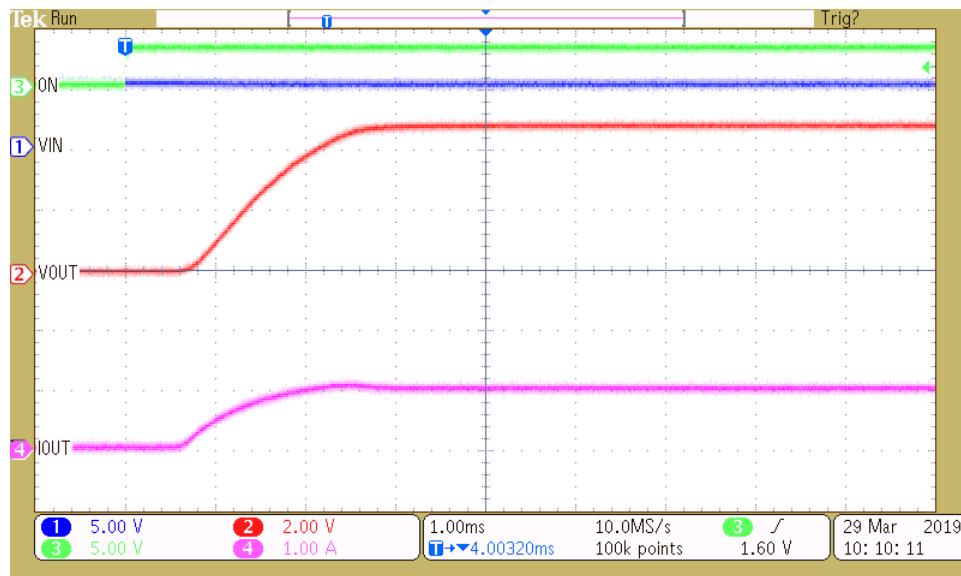


Figure 32. Turn on of TPS22919

Figure 33 demonstrates the inrush current control on the TPS22919. As the output rises, the TPS22919 limits the inrush current generated from the 100 μ F output capacitor to about 300 mA.

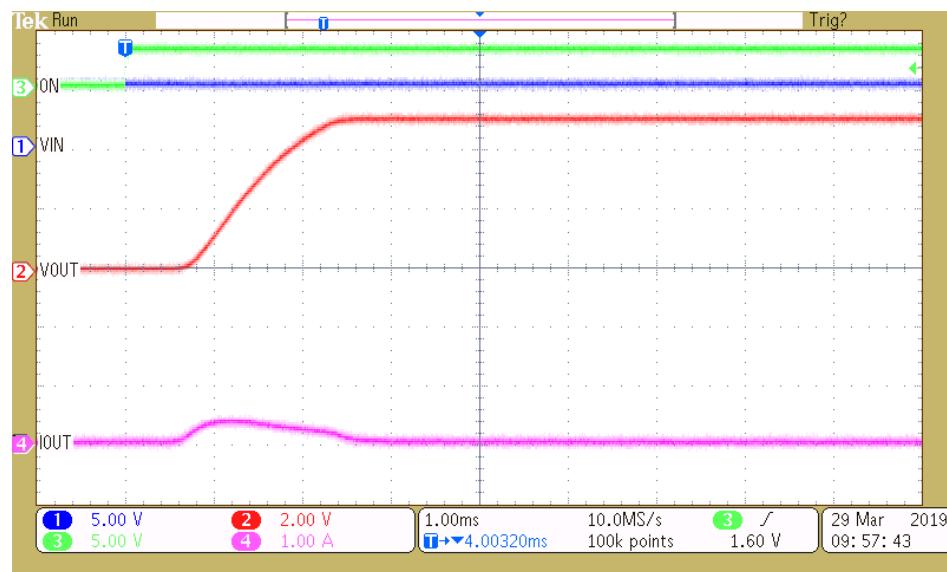


Figure 33. Inrush Current Control on TPS22919

In comparison, when observing the VOUT ramp behavior of PMOS circuit #4 with the same output load, the current spikes to roughly 1.8 A during turn on.

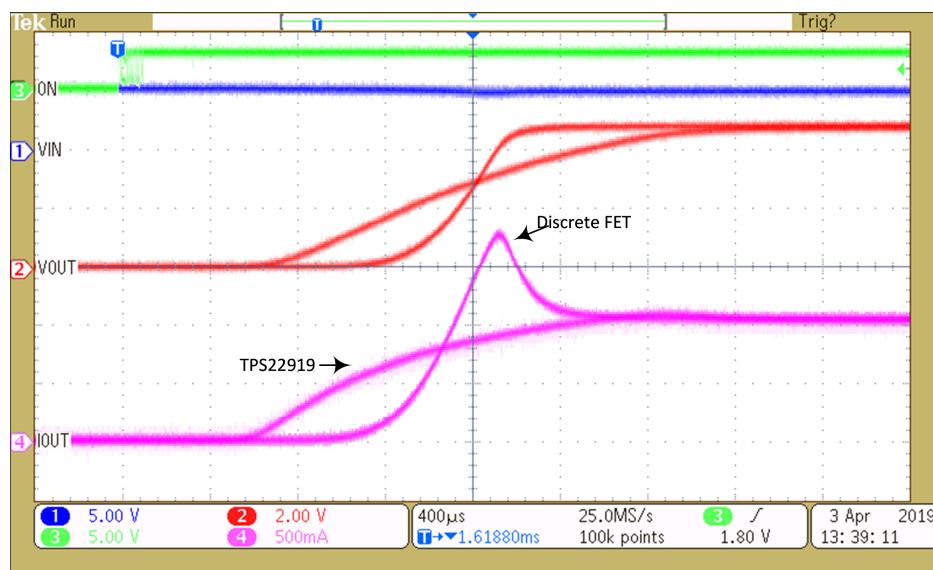


Figure 34. TPS22919 vs Discrete FET

In Figure 35, when starting at 1.8 V into a 100 μ F capacitive load, the discrete solution causes a nonlinear 450 mA inrush current spike, while the TPS22919 limits the current to 200 mA, reducing the spike by 77%.

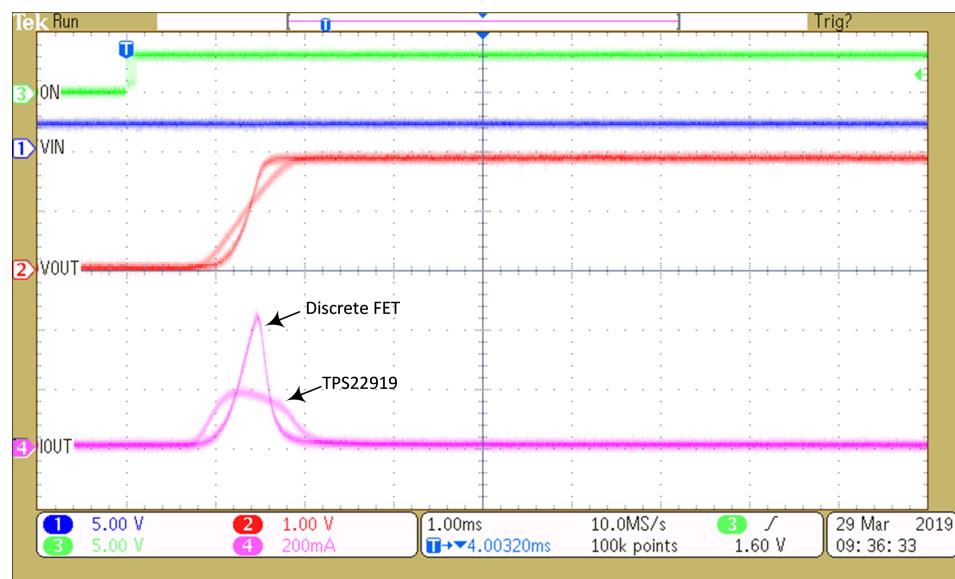


Figure 35. TPS22919 vs Discrete FET Inrush Current Control

7.2 Size Advantage

Another advantage of using a load switch solution is the reduced number of components and solution size. Figure 36 compares the solution size of both switching solutions. In this example, the discrete FET solution, shown as PMOS Discrete #4, consists of six components with a total solution size of 17 mm². In comparison, the TPS22919 load switch consists of the single IC, with a 76% reduction in solution size.

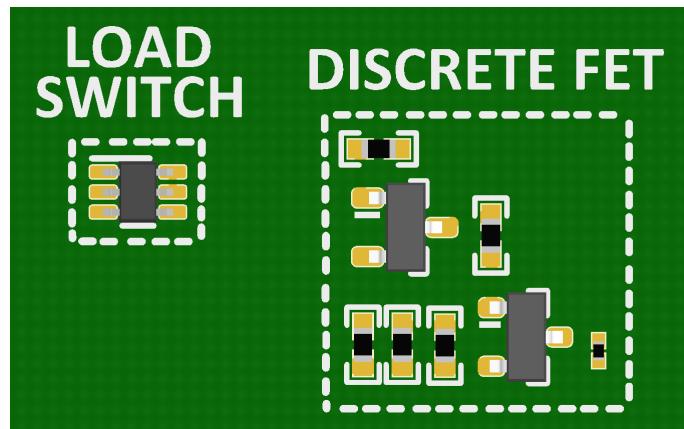


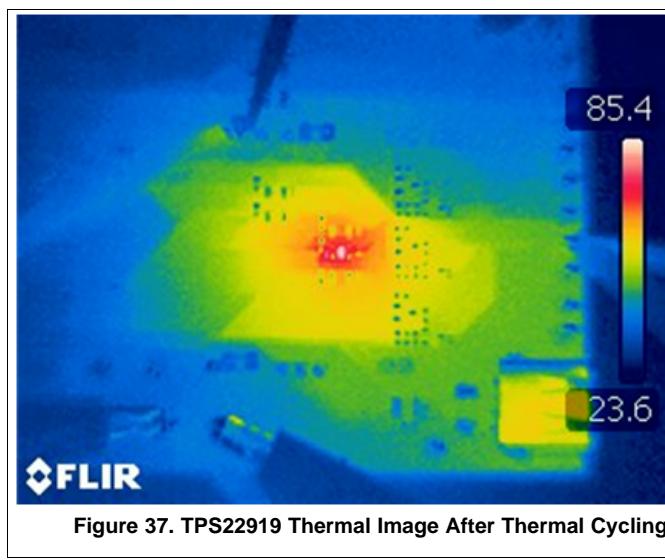
Figure 36. Size Comparison between the TPS22919 and an Equivalent Discrete Solution

7.3 Feature Advantages

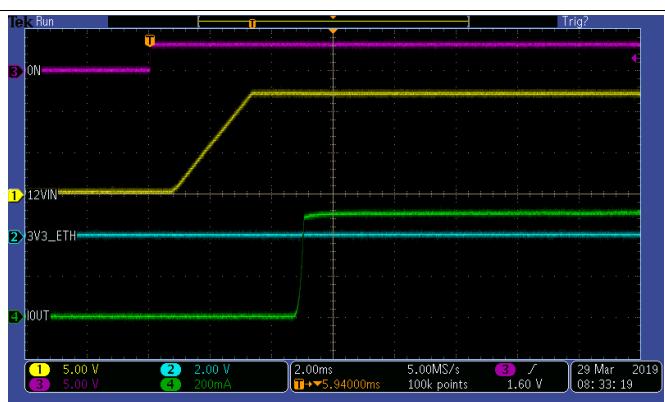
There are several features which are integrated into load switches that are not found in any of the above discrete circuits. To add reverse current blocking to a discrete solution, an additional MOSFET is needed to create a back to back configuration. The TPS22916 and TPS22953 are two examples of load switches with integrated reverse current blocking.

Quick output discharge is a load switch feature which discharges V_{OUT} through an internal path to ground when the switch is disabled. This provides a known state on the output and ensures that all loads have been discharged and are turned off. To add this feature discretely, an external FET needs to be included on the output to discharge V_{OUT} when the body FET is disabled. The TPS22919 has this feature integrated into the device.

The TPS22919 also contains additional features not found on the discrete solution. One feature is thermal protection. During operation, the junction temperature can rise due to many factors, including a high current load, large inrush current during startup, or during a fault condition. Thermal protection turns off the switch to protect itself by reducing the power dissipation, also potentially avoiding damage to upstream and downstream components. In comparison, a discrete FET cannot protect itself if it exceeds its thermal junction temperature. In this case, the FET could potentially break, causing a short and damaging the downstream load or peripheral.



The TPS22919 also contains transient protection features. In the case of a *Power Into Short* or a *Hot Short* event, the TPS22919 protects itself while the discrete FET becomes damaged. In Figure 39, the discrete FET passes more than 10 A downstream before getting damaged in a Power Into Short event. For more information regarding a comparison between the TPS22919 and discrete FETs, refer to TI's [Power Switching Reference Design for TVs](#).



8 Conclusion

While a discrete MOSFET solution can be used for power switching, it can also cause a high amount of inrush current, a negative voltage on the output, or an undesired output voltage on system startup. A load switch provides a controlled rise time (and therefore less inrush current), a smaller solution size, a wider range on VIN, and several additional features which can benefit the desired application. [Table 2](#) summarizes all of the circuits evaluated and shows their turnon behavior.

Table 2. Load Switch Comparison Table

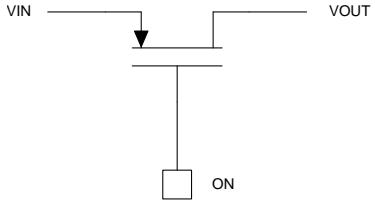
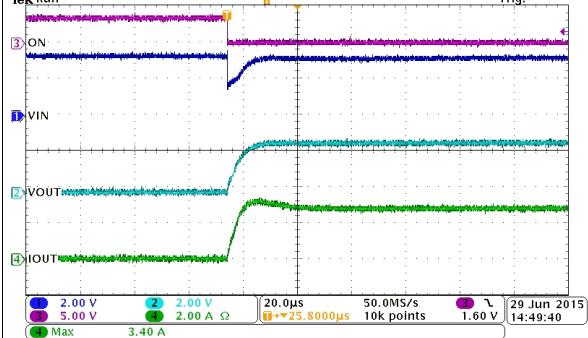
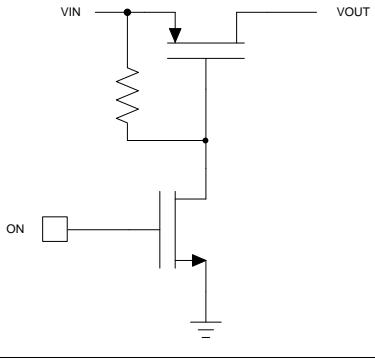
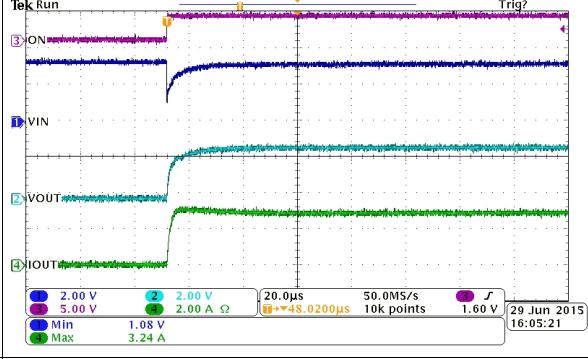
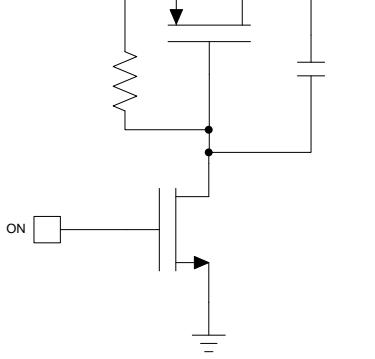
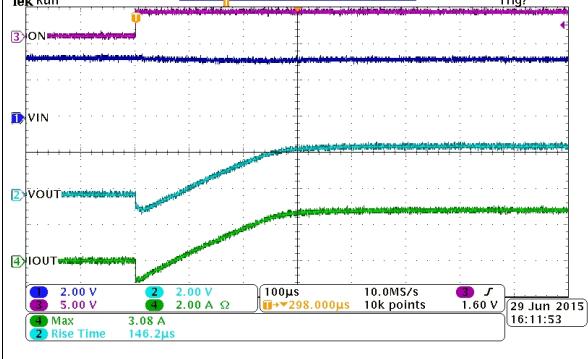
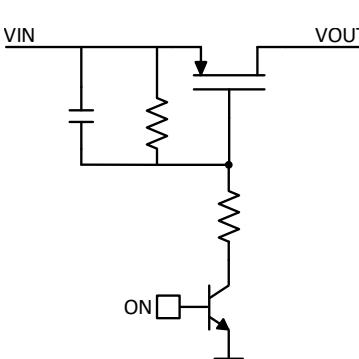
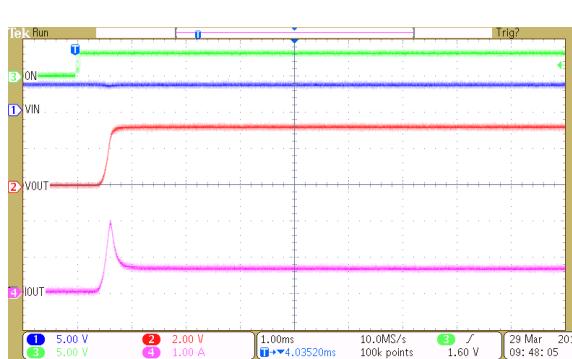
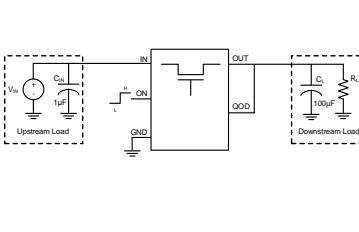
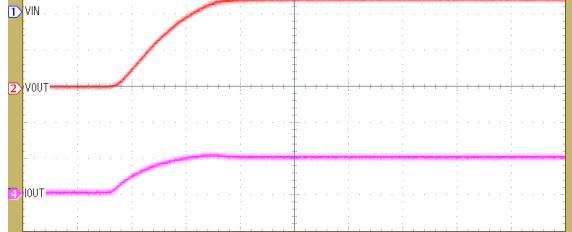
CIRCUIT	TURN ON BEHAVIOR	SUMMARY
		Advantages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simple Disadvantages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No inrush current control - V_{GS} concerns - Active Low
		Advantages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expands VIN range Disadvantages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No inrush current control - V_{GS} concerns - Leakage path through the source to gate resistor
		Advantages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inrush current control Disadvantages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Negative voltage on VOUT - VOUT voltage on VIN startup - V_{GS} concerns - Leakage path through the source to gate resistor

Table 2. Load Switch Comparison Table (continued)

CIRCUIT	TURN ON BEHAVIOR	SUMMARY
		Advantages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inrush current control Disadvantages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nonlinear inrush current control - Longer Slew Rate
		Advantages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inrush current control - Wide VIN range - Small solution, low BOM count - Quick Output Discharge (optional) - Thermal Shutdown (optional) - Reverse Current Blocking (optional) - Short-Circuit Protection (optional)

9 References

1. [Basics of Load Switches Application Note](#)
2. [Load Switch Thermal Considerations User's Guide](#)
3. [Power Switching Reference Design for TVs](#)

Revision History

NOTE: Page numbers for previous revisions may differ from page numbers in the current version.

Changes from Original (December 2018) to A Revision	Page
• Added PMOS Discrete Circuit #4 section.....	14
• Added paragraph and table to section 6	16
• Changed caption on figure 31	17
• Replaced "Turn on of TPS22919" image.	17
• Added figure 34.	18
• Added figure 34.	18
• Added figure 35.	19
• Added paragraph in section 7.2.....	19
• Added paragraphs in section 7.3.	19
• Added figure 37.	20
• Added figure 38.	20
• Replaced paragraphs in section 7.3.....	20
• Added image 39.	20
• Added image 40.	20
• Changed content in Comparison Table.	21
• Changed references.	22

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