

US Patent & Trademark Office

Patent Public Search | Text View

United States Patent Application Publication

20250260319

Kind Code

A1

Publication Date

August 14, 2025

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SELECTIVE STOPBAND AVOIDANCE IN SWITCHING CONVERTER CONTROLLER

Abstract

A switching converter controller includes: a stopband controller having a stopband controller input and a stopband controller output, the stopband controller is configured to provide stopband information at the stopband controller output responsive to a reference signal; a pulse-frequency modulation (PFM) controller having a first PFM controller input, a second PFM controller input and a PFM controller output, the first PFM controller input configured to receive a feedback error signal, the second PFM controller input coupled to the stopband controller output, and the PFM controller configured to selectively adjust a clock signal at the PFM controller output based on the feedback error signal and the stopband information; and a driver circuit having a driver circuit input coupled to the PFM controller output and configured to receive the clock signal, and having a driver circuit output adapted to be coupled to a power stage switch.

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Family ID: 86499477

Appl. No.: 19/193157

Filed: April 29, 2025

Related U.S. Application Data

parent US continuation 17537802 20211130 parent-grant-document US 11863069 child US 18374325

parent US division 18374325 20230928 parent-grant-document US 12316221 child US 19193157

Publication Classification

Int. Cl.: H02M3/157 (20060101); H02M1/00 (20070101)

U.S. Cl.:

CPC H02M3/157 (20130101); H02M1/0041 (20210501);

Background/Summary

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION [0001] This application is a divisional of U.S. application Ser. No. 18/374,325 filed Sep. 28, 2023, which is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 17/537,802 filed Nov. 30, 2021, now U.S. Pat. No. 11,863,069 granted Jan. 2, 2024, both of which are hereby incorporated herein by reference in their entirety.

BACKGROUND

[0002] As new electronic devices are developed and integrated circuit (IC) technology advances, new IC products are commercialized. One example IC product is a switching converter, which provides an output voltage based on an input voltage. Switching converters include a controller and a power stage, and are used in various electronic device to regulate power to one or more loads.

[0003] Because switching converters use a clock to generate the output voltage from the input voltage, there is noise at the switching frequency which may cause interference to the other sensitive circuits. For example, the sensitive circuits may be supplied by the switching converter and/or are nearby the switching converter. In some scenarios, the noise is not acceptable to a given application. To manage noise issues, fixed-frequency switching converters may be used, where the switching frequency is selected to be far away from the sensitive frequencies. However, fixed-frequency switching converters have limited efficiency.

SUMMARY

[0004] In one example embodiment, a switching converter controller comprises a stopband controller having a stopband controller input and a stopband controller output, the stopband controller input is configured to receive a reference signal, and the stopband controller is configured to provide stopband information at the stopband controller output responsive to the reference signal. The switching converter controller also comprises a pulse-frequency modulation (PFM) controller having a first PFM controller input, a second PFM controller input and a PFM controller output, the first PFM controller input configured to receive a feedback error signal, the second PFM controller input coupled to the stopband controller output, and the PFM controller configured to selectively adjust a clock signal at the PFM controller output based on the feedback error signal and the stopband information. The switching converter controller also comprises a driver circuit having a driver circuit input and a driver circuit output, the driver circuit input coupled to the PFM controller output and configured to receive the clock signal, and the driver circuit output adapted to be coupled to a power stage switch.

[0005] In another example embodiment, a system comprises a switching converter controller having: a driver circuit; and a control loop coupled to driver circuit. The control loop is configured to: provide a clock signal to the driver circuit; and selectively adjust a frequency of the clock signal responsive to a stopband detection signal indicating a switching frequency of the switching converter controller is within a predetermined stopband.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0006] FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a system in accordance with an example embodiment.

[0007] FIG. 2 is a diagram of a switching converter controller in accordance with an example embodiment.

[0008] FIGS. 3-8 are graphs showing switching converter parameters as a function of time in accordance with example embodiments.

[0009] FIG. 9 is a flowchart showing a switching converter controller method in accordance with an example embodiment.

[0010] FIGS. 10A and 10B are flowcharts showing switching converter controller methods in accordance with example embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0011] Some example embodiments include a switching converter controller configured to selectively adjust its switching frequency to avoid one or more predetermined stopbands. As used herein, a “stopband” is a band of frequencies to be avoided. The same reference numbers (or other reference designators) are used in the drawings to designate the same or similar (structurally and/or functionally) features. FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a system 100 in accordance with an example embodiment. The system 100 represents any electrical device with a load 164, a power supply 102 (e.g., a battery or other direct-current (DC) power source), and power management circuitry including a power stage 154 and a switching converter controller 104. As shown, the power stage 154 includes: a power stage input 156; a first drive signal input 158; a second drive signal input 160; an inductor 166; switch(es) 168 having respective control terminals coupled to the first drive signal input 158 or the second drive signal input 160; and a power stage output 162. In different example embodiments, the topology (e.g., the arrangement of the inductor 166 and switch(es) 168) of the power stage 154 may vary. Example topologies for the power stage 154 include a boost converter topology, a buck converter topology, or a buck-boost converter topology. In a buck converter topology, VOUT at the power stage output 162 is less than the input voltage (VIN) provided to the power stage input 156 by the power supply 102. In a boost converter topology, VOUT is greater than VIN. In a buck-boost converter topology, VOUT may be greater than or less than VIN.

[0012] Relative to switchless power management options, the switching converter controller 104 and power stage 154 can more efficiently provide power from the power supply 102 to the load 164. However, some undesirable switching noise may be introduced to the load 164 and/or other components of the system 100. To reduce or avoid switching noise at one or more predetermined stopbands, the switching converter controller 104 includes a control loop 106 having a stopband controller 126. More specifically, in the example of FIG. 1, the control loop 106 includes: a feedback error circuit 108; a pulse-frequency modulation (PFM) controller 116 coupled to the feedback error circuit 108; a peak current (I.sub.peak) controller 134 coupled to the PFM controller 116; and a stopband controller 126 coupled to the PFM controller 116.

[0013] In the example of FIG. 1, the stopband controller 126 includes a first stopband controller input 128 configured to receive an enable signal. The enable signal is optional. In some example embodiments, the enable signal is de-asserted when the control loop 106 performs PWM operations and/or other control options instead of PFM operations. The stopband controller 126 is configured to determine when the switching frequency of the switching converter controller 104 is within a predetermined stopband. For example, the switching frequency of the switching converter controller 104 may be determined by analyzing the frequency of a clock signal (“CLK”) provided by the control loop 106 to a driver circuit 142 and a second stopband controller input 130 of the stopband controller 126. Other techniques for determining the frequency of the switching converter controller 104 are possible (e.g., analysis of the frequency of a high-side control signal “HS_CS” at a first driver circuit output 150, analysis of the frequency of a low-side control signal “LS_CS” at a second driver circuit output 152, or resulting switch activity). Once the switching frequency is obtained, the stopband controller 126 is configured to compare the switching frequency with one or more predetermined stopbands stored by the stopband controller 126. If the switching frequency of

the switching converter controller **104** is within a predetermined stopband, the control loop **106** may adjust the frequency of CLK up or down to avoid the stopband based on stopband information (SB information) output from a stopband controller output **132** of the stopband controller **126**. [0014] In some example embodiments, stopband detection operations of the stopband controller **126** involve detecting that the switching frequency of the switching converter controller **104** is within a predetermined stopband for a number of stopband detection cycles. In different example embodiments, the stopband controller **126** may also: delay stopband detection operations for a time interval after a stopband is detected (to reduce the number of changes to the frequency of CLK due to stopband detection); adjust the direction of change to the frequency of CLK; and/or adjust the amount of change to the frequency of CLK. In some example embodiments, the control loop **106** may also account for a maximum peak current (related to the inductor **166** of the power stage **154**), where the maximum peak current is based on a target efficiency for the switching converter controller **104** and/or a target VOUT ripple.

[0015] As desired, the stopband controller **126** may be selectively enabled or disabled. When enabled, the operations of the stopband controller **126** are used with the PFM controller **116**. In some example embodiments, the PFM controller **116** only adjusts the frequency of CLK when feedback error is equal to or less than a threshold. In such example embodiments, if the feedback error is greater than the threshold, the frequency of CLK is maintained by the PFM controller **116** while the peak current controller **134** performs peak current modulation and provides a related control signal (CS1) to the driver circuit **142**. In one example, CS1 is asserted responsive to a peak current being reached. With CS1 asserted, a high-side switch of the power stage **154** may be turned off (e.g., by de-asserting HS_CS). In different example embodiments, the switching converter controller **104** or control loop **106** may provide other control signals (e.g., PWM control signals, multi-phase control signals, zero crossing detection signals, and/or other control signals) to the driver circuit **142** via additional driver circuit inputs **148**. In operation, the driver circuit is configured to provide drive signals (e.g., for a high-side switch and/or a low-side switch corresponding to the switch(es) **168**) at the first driver circuit output **150** and the second driver circuit output **152**.

[0016] In the example of FIG. 1, the operations of the switching converter controller **104** are based at least in part on VOUT and VIN. Accordingly, the switching converter controller **104** may include: a first input **170** configured to receive VOUT from the power stage output **162**; and a second input **172** configured to receive VIN from the power supply **102** or the power stage input **156**. The control loop **106** includes a feedback error circuit **108** having: a first feedback error circuit input **110** configured to receive VOUT (or a scaled version of VOUT); a second feedback error circuit input **112** configured to receive a reference voltage (VREF); and a feedback error circuit output **114**. In operation, the feedback error circuit **108** is configured to provide a feedback error at the feedback error circuit output **114** responsive to VREF and VOUT. In some example embodiments, the feedback error is a current (I.sub.error). As an option, I.sub.error is adjusted based on a feedforward signal, which may be a function of VOUT and/or VIN.

[0017] In the example of FIG. 1, I.sub.error is one of the inputs to the PFM controller **116**. More specifically, the PFM controller **116** has a first PFM controller input **118**, a second PFM controller input **120**, a first PFM controller output **122**, and a second PFM controller output **124**. The first PFM controller input **118** is coupled to a stopband controller output **132** of the stopband controller **126**. The second PFM controller input **120** is coupled to the feedback error circuit output **114** and is configured to receive I.sub.error. The first PFM controller output **122** is coupled to a first driver circuit input **144** of the driver circuit **142** and is configured to provide CLK to the first driver circuit input **144**. The second PFM controller output **124** is coupled to a first peak current controller input **136** of the peak current controller **134**. In some example embodiments, the first peak current controller input **136** receives a minimum peak current (I.sub.peak_min) from the PFM controller **116**. A second peak current controller input **138** of the peak current controller **134** is configured to

receive a slope compensation signal or ramp. The peak current controller output **140** of the peak current controller **134** is configured to provide CS1 to a second driver circuit input **146** of the driver circuit **142**. In some example embodiments, CS1 results from peak current modulation operations of the peak current controller. For example, peak current modulation may be performed by the peak current controller **134** based on I.sub.peak.min and the slope compensation signal when feedback error (e.g., I.sub.error) is greater than a threshold. When feedback error (e.g., I.sub.error) is equal to or less than a threshold, the PFM controller **116** is configured to adjust the frequency of CLK based on the stopband information provided by the stopband controller **126**.

[0018] FIG. 2 is a diagram of a switching converter controller **104A** (an example of the switching converter controller **104** in FIG. 1) in accordance with an example embodiment. In FIG. 2, the switching converter controller **104A** includes analog circuitry **201** and a stopband controller **126A** (an example of the stopband controller **126** in FIG. 1) with digital circuitry. As shown, the stopband controller **126A** includes an oscillator **258**, a frequency counter **262**, and stopband detection logic **270**. More specifically, the oscillator **258** has an oscillator output **260**, which outputs a reference clock signal (CLK.sub.REF). The stopband controller **126A** also includes a frequency counter **262** having: a first frequency counter input **264**, a second frequency counter input **266**, and a frequency counter output **268**. The first frequency counter input **264** is coupled to the oscillator output **260** and is configured to receive CLK.sub.REF. The second frequency counter input **266** is coupled to a second stopband controller input **130** and is configured to receive CLK from the first PFM controller output **122**. In some example embodiments, CLK.sub.REF has a higher frequency than CLK. In operation, the frequency counter **262** is configured to count the number of periods of CLK.sub.REF (the period of CLK.sub.REF being known) that fit into one period of CLK to determine a frequency value for CLK. The frequency value is output from the frequency counter output **268** to a stopband detection logic input **272** of the stopband detection logic **270**.

[0019] In some example embodiments, the stopband detection logic **270** includes stopband detection logic output **274** coupled to the stopband controller output **132**. In operation, the stopband detection logic **270** is configured to provide stopband information at the stopband detection logic output **274** responsive to a comparison of the frequency value (received from frequency counter **262**) with a predetermined stopband. The stopband information indicates when the frequency value is within the predetermined stopband. In some example embodiments, the stopband controller **126A** is configured to provide the stopband information to the stopband controller output **132** responsive to determining that a switching frequency of the switching converter controller is within a predetermined stopband for multiple stopband detection cycles. In some example embodiments, the stopband controller **126A** is configured to: determine whether a switching frequency of the switching converter controller is within a predetermined stopband; and responsive to determining that the switching frequency of the switching converter controller is within the predetermined stopband, provide a stopband detected signal (e.g., the stopband information includes the stopband detected signal) to the stopband controller output **132** and delay stopband detection operations for a time interval. In some example embodiments, the stopband controller **126A** is configured to: store a programmable number of predetermined stopbands; compare a frequency value determined from the reference signal to the programmable number of predetermined stopbands; and output a stopband detected signal to the stopband controller output **132** responsive to the frequency value being within one of the programmable number of predetermined stopbands.

[0020] In some example embodiments, the stopband controller **126A** is configured to: store a programmable stopband size for each of the programmable number of predetermined stopbands; and output a stopband detected signal and a respective stopband size (e.g., the stopband information includes the stopband detected signal and the respective stopband size) to the stopband controller output **132** responsive to the frequency value being within one of the programmable number of predetermined stopbands.

[0021] In the example of FIG. 2, the analog circuitry **201** includes: a feedback error circuit **108A**

(an example of the feedback error circuit **108** in FIG. 1); a PFM controller **116A** (an example of the PFM controller **116** in FIG. 1); a peak current controller **134A** (an example of the peak current controller **134** in FIG. 1); and a driver circuit **142A** (an example of the driver circuit **142** in FIG. 1). The feedback error circuit **108A** includes the first feedback error circuit input **110**, the second feedback error circuit input **112**, and the feedback error circuit output **114**. The first feedback error circuit input **110** is configured to receive VOUT (e.g., from a power stage output such as the power stage output **162**). The second feedback error circuit input **112** is configured to receive VREF. In operation, the feedback error circuit **108A** is configured to output a feedback error signal (e.g., I.sub.error or part of I.sub.error) to the feedback error circuit output **114** responsive to VOUT and VREF.

[0022] In some example embodiments, the feedback error circuit **108A** includes an error amplifier **106** having a non-inverting (+) input, an inverting (−) input, and an output. In the example of FIG. 2, the non-inverting input of the error amplifier **206** is coupled to the second feedback error circuit input **112**. The inverting input of the error amplifier **106** is coupled to the first feedback error circuit input **110** via a voltage divider that includes resistors R1 and R2. With R1 and R2, the inverting input of the error amplifier **208** receives a scaled version of VOUT.

[0023] In the example of FIG. 2, the output of the error amplifier **206** is coupled to loop compensation circuitry **208** and a voltage-to-current converter **210**. The loop compensation circuitry **208** is coupled between the output of the error amplifier **206** and ground. In the example of FIG. 2, the loop compensation circuitry **208** includes a third resistor (R3) and a first capacitor (C1) in series. In other example embodiments, the loop compensation circuitry **208** varies. As shown, the voltage-to-current converter **210** includes a transistor (M1) having a control terminal coupled to the output of the error amplifier **206**. A first current terminal of M1 is coupled to the feedback error circuit output **114** via a current mirror. A second current terminal of M1 is coupled to a first side of a current source **212**. The second side of the current source **212** is coupled to ground. In some example embodiments, a feedforward signal (not shown) may be applied to the feedback error at the feedback error circuit output **114**. When used, the feedforward signal helps account for fast changes to VIN and/or VOUT.

[0024] In the example of FIG. 2, the PFM controller **116A** includes the first PFM controller input **118**, the second PFM controller input **120**, the first PFM controller output **122**, and the second PFM controller output **124**. The first PFM controller input **118** is coupled to the stopband controller output **132** and is configured to receive stopband information (e.g., a stopband detected signal, stopband size, stopband response instructions) as appropriate. The second PFM controller input **120** is coupled to the feedback error circuit output **114**. The first PFM controller output **122** is coupled to: the first driver input **144** of the driver circuit **142**; and a clamp controller **222**. The second PFM controller output **124** is coupled to the peak current controller input **136**. In some example embodiments, the PFM controller **116A** is configured to provide a minimum peak current (I.sub.peak_min) to the second PFM controller output **124**.

[0025] In some example embodiments, the PFM controller **116A** includes a PFM modulator **242**. The PFM modulator **242** includes a first PFM modulator input **244**, a second PFM modulator input **246**, and a PFM modulator output **248**. In the example of FIG. 2, the first PFM modulator input **244** is coupled to a peak current clamp **230**. The second PFM modulator input **246** is coupled to the feedback error circuit output **114** via a current mirror **240**. In other words, the first PFM modulator input **244** receives a reference signal, while the second PFM modulator input **246** receives a feedback error signal (I.sub.error or a scaled version of I.sub.error). In some example embodiments, the reference signal is a maximum peak current (I.sub.peak_max) provided by the peak current clamp **230**. In some example embodiments, the PFM modulator **242** is configured to adjust a frequency of CLK at the PFM modulator output **248** responsive to the reference signal and feedback error, where the reference signal may vary to account for stopband detection. If the feedback error is greater than a threshold, the PFM modulator **242** may be configured to maintain

the frequency of CLK regardless of stopband detection. In such case, the peak current controller **134A** is configured to perform peak current modulation while the frequency of CLK is clamped to a fixed value.

[0026] In the example of FIG. 2, the peak current controller **134A** includes a comparator **218** having: an inverting (−) input coupled to the first peak current controller input **136**; and a non-inverting (+) input to the second peak current controller input **138**. The inverting input of the comparator **218** is also coupled to a transistor (M2). In some example embodiments, M2 is a replica of a high-side power transistor of a power stage (i.e., M2 is a replica of one of the switch(es) **168** the power stage **154** in FIG. 1). M2 may be scaled relative to the high-side power transistor based on a replica ratio. The non-inverting input of the comparator **218** is coupled to the switch node of the high-side power transistor. Thus, the voltage at the second peak current controller input **138** is the drop across the high-side power transistor, which is directly proportional to the current in the inductor. Current flowing through M2 via the first peak current controller input **136** is defined by a control loop (e.g., the control loop **106** in FIG. 1), which acts as a reference for the inductor current. When the inductor current is equal to the current through M2 times a replica factor, the voltage at the inverting and non-inverting inputs of the comparator **218** are the same.

[0027] During switching converter operations, the logic **250** of the driver circuit **142A** turns on the high-side power transistor at the rising edge of CLK. When the high-side power transistor turns on, the inductor current rises and as a result, the voltage at the second peak current controller input **138** rises. When voltage at the second peak current controller input **138** crosses the voltage at the first peak current controller input **136**, the comparator **218** asserts CS1 at the peak current controller output **140**. Responsive to CS1 being asserted, the logic **250** turns off the high-side power transistor and turns on the low-side power transistor. In operation, the peak current controller **134A** is configured to perform peak current modulation response to I.sub.peak_min received at the first peak current controller input **136**, a slope compensation signal received at the second peak current controller input **138**, and the operations of M2. The peak current modulation operations result in CS1 being selectively asserted at the peak current controller output **140**. As shown, the peak current controller output **140** is coupled to the second driver circuit input **146** of the driver circuit **142A**.

[0028] In the example of FIG. 2, I.sub.peak_min is controlled by the peak current clamp **230**, which includes a first peak current clamp input **232**, a second peak current clamp input **234**, a first peak current clamp output **236**, and a second peak current clamp output **238**. The first peak current clamp input **232** is coupled to a clamp controller output **228** of a clamp controller **222**. As shown, the clamp controller **222** also includes: a first clamp controller input **224** coupled to the PFM modulator output **248**; and a second clamp controller input **226** coupled to the first PFM controller input **118** (to receive stopband information). In operation, the clamp controller **222** is configured to provide a clamp control signal at the clamp control output **228** responsive to the stopband information and/or CLK. As shown, the second peak current clamp input **234** of the peak current clamp **230** is coupled to the feedback error circuit output **114** via the current mirror **240**. The first peak current clamp output is coupled to the first PFM modulator input **244**. The second peak current clamp output **238** is coupled to the second PFM controller output **124**. In some example embodiments, the peak current clamp **230** is configured to provide I.sub.peak_max to the first peak current clamp input **236** and I.sub.peak_min to the second peak current clamp output **238** responsive to a clamp control signal received at the peak current clamp input **232** and a feedback error received at the second peak current clamp input **234**.

[0029] In the example of FIG. 2, the driver circuit **142A** includes the first driver circuit input **144**, the second driver circuit input **146**, the first driver circuit output **150**, and the second driver circuit output **152**. In some example embodiments, the driver circuit **142A** includes logic **250** coupled to the first driver circuit input **144**, the second driver circuit input **146**, and possibly the additional driver circuit inputs **148**. The logic **250** is coupled to: a first drive circuit **252** having an output coupled to the first driver circuit output **250**; and a second drive circuit **252** having an output

coupled to the second driver circuit output **252**. In operation, the driver circuit **142A** is configured to provide drive signals (e.g., HS_CS and/or LS_CS) at the first driver circuit output **150** and the second driver circuit output **152** responsive to CLK received by the first driver circuit input **144**, CS1 received by the second driver circuit input **146**, and/or other control signals received by additional driver circuit inputs **148**. The other control signals are provided by other control options **256**, which may be included with the analog circuitry **201**. Examples of the other control options **256** include PWM control, multi-phase control, zero crossing detection, and/or other control options.

[0030] In different example embodiments, the topology of a switching converter controller such as the switching converter controller **104** may vary. Regardless of the particular topology, a switching converter controller topology may include a stopband controller such as the stopband controller **126A** to determine a switching frequency of the switching converter controller. If the switching frequency of the switching converter controller is within a predetermined stopband, the frequency of CLK provided to the driver circuit **142A** may be selectively adjusted to avoid the stopband. In some example embodiments, adjusting the frequency of CLK involves adjusting a reference signal (e.g., a maximum peak current) used by a PFM modulator as described herein.

[0031] In some example embodiments, a first switching frequency (Fsw1) of a switching converter controller (e.g., the switching converter controller **104** in FIG. 1, or the switching converter controller **104A** in FIG. 2) is given as:

$$[00001] \text{ Fsw1} = \frac{2 \times I_{\text{load}} \times V_{\text{OUT}}}{I_{\text{peak1}}^2 \cdot \text{Math. } L}, \quad \text{Equation(1)}$$

[0032] where I.sub.load is the output current to the load, VOUT is the output voltage to the load, I.sub.peak1 is a first peak current for the power stage inductor (e.g., inductor **166**), and L is the value of the power stage inductor. Meanwhile, a second switching frequency (Fsw2) of a switching converter controller (e.g., the switching converter controller **104** in FIG. 1, or the switching converter controller **104A** in FIG. 2) is given as:

$$[00002] \text{ Fsw2} = \frac{2 \times I_{\text{load}} \times V_{\text{OUT}}}{I_{\text{peak2}}^2 \cdot \text{Math. } L}, \quad \text{Equation(2)}$$

[0033] where I.sub.peak2 is a second peak current for the power stage inductor (e.g., inductor **166**). In some example embodiments, avoiding stopbands is based on changing I.sub.peak as indicated in Equations 1 and 2, it can be seen that changing I.sub.peak. As another option, the amount of change to I.sub.peak may be strategically controlled depending on stopband size, a stopband detection pattern, and/or other criteria.

[0034] FIGS. 3-8 are graphs showing switching converter parameters as a function of time in accordance with example embodiments. In FIG. 3, graph **300** shows I.sub.peak, I.sub.load, and switching frequency (Fsw) as a function of time. Fsw is the switching frequency of the switching converter controller **104** in FIG. 1, the switching converter controller **104A** in FIG. 2, or related power stage switches. Stopband detection cycles or samples are also represented in graph **300**. As shown in graph **300**, Fsw decreases as I.sub.load decreases, resulting in Fsw eventually being detected within a predetermined stopband **302** at time t1. After a second detection of Fsw within the predetermined stopband **302** at time t2, I.sub.peak is decreased (e.g., the value of the reference signal used by the PFM modulator **242** is decreased), which results in an increase in Fsw. By adjusting I.sub.peak responsive to Fsw being detected within the predetermined stopband **302**, Fsw can be moved away from the predetermined stopband **302** during scenarios in which I.sub.load decreases and settles.

[0035] In some example embodiments, stopband detection operations are paused or delayed after Fsw is detected as being within the predetermined stopband **302**. Also, in different example embodiments, the number of stopband detection samples needed before a change in I.sub.peak is initiated may vary. With the decrease in I.sub.peak, Fsw settles outside of the predetermined stopband **302**. In graph **300**, an interval **304** that includes t1 and t2 is shown, where the duration of

the interval **304** is less than 1 ms.

[0036] In FIG. 4, graph **400** shows I.sub.peak, I.sub.load, and Fsw as a function of time. Stopband detection cycles or samples are also represented in graph **400**. As shown in graph **400**, Fsw decreases as I.sub.load decreases, resulting in Fsw eventually being detected within a predetermined stopband **402** at time t1. After a second detection of Fsw within the predetermined stopband **402** at time t2, I.sub.peak is decreased (e.g., the value of the reference signal used by the PFM modulator **242** is decreased), which results in an increase in Fsw. In some example embodiments, stopband detection operations are paused or delayed after Fsw is detected as being within the predetermined stopband **402**. Also, in different example embodiments, the number of stopband detection samples needed before a change in I.sub.peak is initiated may vary. After the increase in Fsw due to the decrease in I.sub.peak, I.sub.load and Fsw continue to decrease. At times t3 and t4, Fsw is again detected as being within the predetermined stopband **402**. In response, I.sub.peak is increased, which causes Fsw to decrease below the predetermined stopband **402**. By adjusting I.sub.peak up or down responsive to Fsw being detected within the predetermined stopband **402**, Fsw can be moved away from the predetermined stopband **402** during scenarios in which I.sub.load is decreasing.

[0037] In FIG. 5, graph **500** shows I.sub.peak, I.sub.load, and Fsw as a function of time. As shown in graph **500**, Fsw decreases as I.sub.load decreases, resulting in Fsw eventually being detected within a predetermined stopband **504** at time t1. After a second detection of Fsw within the predetermined stopband **504** at time t2, I.sub.peak is decreased (e.g., the value of the reference signal used by the PFM modulator **242** is decreased), which results in an increase in Fsw. In graph **500**, the adjustment to I.sub.peak starting at time t2 results in Fsw being increased and detected within a predetermined stopband **502** at times t3 and t4. Responsive to the stopband detection at time t4, I.sub.peak is increased, which results in Fsw being decreased. At times t5 and t6, Fsw is detected as being within the predetermined stopband **504**. Responsive to the stopband detection at time t6, I.sub.peak is decreased, which results in Fsw being increased. At times t7 and t8, Fsw is detected as being within the predetermined stopband **502**. Responsive to the stopband detection at time t8, I.sub.peak is decreased again, which results in Fsw being increased and settling above the predetermined stopbands **502** and **504**.

[0038] In some example embodiments, stopband detection operations are paused or delayed for a time after a change in I.sub.peak due to stopband detection (e.g., at times t2, t4, t6, and t8 in FIG. 5). Also, in different example embodiments, the number of stopband detection samples needed before a change in I.sub.peak is initiated may vary. As another option, the number of predetermined stopbands may vary. With graph **500**, I.sub.peak is adjusted up or down as needed responsive to stopband detections to move Fsw out of the predetermined stopbands **502** and **504** during scenarios in which I.sub.load decreases and settles.

[0039] In FIG. 6, graph **600** shows I.sub.peak, I.sub.load, and Fsw as a function of time. As shown in graph **600**, Fsw decreases as I.sub.load decreases, resulting in Fsw eventually being detected within a predetermined stopband **604** at times t1 and t2. Responsive to the stopband detection at times t1 and t2, I.sub.peak is decreased from a maximum peak current (I.sub.peak_max), which results in Fsw being increased. At times t3 and t4, Fsw is detected as being within a predetermined stopband **602**. Responsive to the stopband detection at times t3 and t4, I.sub.peak is increased to I.sub.peak_max, which results in Fsw being decreased. At times t5 and t6, Fsw is detected as being within a predetermined stopband **604**. Responsive to the stopband detection at times t5 and t6, I.sub.peak is decreased from I.sub.peak_max again, which results in Fsw being increased. At times t7 and t8, Fsw is detected as being within the predetermined stopband **602**. Responsive to the stopband detection at times t7 and t8, I.sub.peak is decreased again, which results in Fsw being increased above of the predetermined stopband **602**. However, due to I.sub.load decreasing, Fsw decreases and is detected as being within the predetermined stopband **602** at times t9 and t10. Responsive to the stopband detection at times t9 and t10, I.sub.peak is increased, which results in

Fsw being decreased. At times **t11** and **t12**, Fsw is detected as being within the predetermined stopband **604**. Responsive to the stopband detection at times **t11** and **t12**, I.sub.peak is increased to I.sub.peak_max, which results in Fsw being decreased out of the predetermined stopband **604**. [0040] In some example embodiments, I.sub.peak_max is selected based on a target efficiency and target VOUT ripple for a switching converter controller. In the example of FIG. **6**, I.sub.peak adjustments do not go above I.sub.peak_max. In some example embodiments, stopband detection operations are paused or delayed for a time after a change in I.sub.peak due to stopband detection (e.g., at times **t2**, **t4**, **t6**, **t8**, **t10**, and **t12** in FIG. **6**). Also, in different example embodiments, the number of stopband detection samples needed before a change in I.sub.peak is initiated may vary. As another option, the number of predetermined stopbands may vary. With graph **600**, I.sub.peak is adjusted up or down as needed responsive to stopband detections to move Fsw out of the predetermined stopbands **602** and **604** during scenarios in which I.sub.load is decreasing at different rates. Also, I.sub.peak_max is accounted for (i.e., I.sub.peak does not go above I.sub.peak_max).

[0041] In FIG. **7**, graph **700** shows I.sub.peak, I.sub.load, and Fsw as a function of time. As shown in graph **700**, Fsw increases as I.sub.load increases, resulting in Fsw eventually being detected within a predetermined stopband **702** at times **t1** and **t2**. Responsive to the stopband detection at times **t1** and **t2**, I.sub.peak is decreased, which results in Fsw being increased and settling above the predetermined stopband **702**. With graph **700**, I.sub.peak is adjusted up or down as needed responsive to stopband detections to move Fsw out of the predetermined stopband **702** during scenarios in which I.sub.load is increasing. In some example embodiments, stopband detection operations are paused or delayed for a time after a change in I.sub.peak due to stopband detection (e.g., at times **t1** and **t2** in FIG. **7**). Also, in different example embodiments, the number of stopband detection samples needed before a change in I.sub.peak is initiated may vary. With graph **700**, I.sub.peak is adjusted up or down as needed responsive to stopband detections to move Fsw out of the predetermined stopband **702** during scenarios in which I.sub.load is increasing.

[0042] In FIG. **8**, graph **800** shows I.sub.peak, I.sub.load, and Fsw as a function of time. As shown in graph **800**, Fsw increases as I.sub.load increases, resulting in Fsw eventually being detected within a predetermined stopband **804** at times **t1** and **t2**. Responsive to the stopband detection at times **t1** and **t2**, I.sub.peak is decreased, which results in Fsw being increased. At times **t3** and **t4**, Fsw is detected as being within a predetermined stopband **802**. Responsive to the stopband detection at times **t3** and **t4**, I.sub.peak is increased, which results in Fsw being decreased. At times **t5** and **t6**, Fsw is detected as being within the predetermined stopband **804**. Responsive to the stopband detection at times **t5** and **t6**, I.sub.peak is decreased again, which results in Fsw being increased. At times **t7** and **t8**, Fsw is detected as being within the predetermined stopband **802**. Responsive to the stopband detection at times **t7** and **t8**, I.sub.peak is decreased again, which results in Fsw being increased and settling above the predetermined stopband **802**.

[0043] In some example embodiments, stopband detection operations are paused or delayed for a time after a change in I.sub.peak due to stopband detection (e.g., at times **t2**, **t4**, **t6**, and **t8** in FIG. **8**). Also, in different example embodiments, the number of stopband detection samples needed before a change in I.sub.peak is initiated may vary. As another option, the number of predetermined stopbands may vary. With graph **800**, I.sub.peak is adjusted up or down as needed responsive to stopband detections to move Fsw out of the predetermined stopbands **802** and **804** during scenarios in which I.sub.load increases and settles.

[0044] FIG. **9** is a flowchart showing a switching converter controller method **900** in accordance with an example embodiment. The method **900** is performed, for example, by the switching converter controller **104** in FIG. **1**, or the switching converter controller **104A** in FIG. **2**. As shown, the method **900** includes monitoring Fsw of a switching converter controller or power stage switch at block **902**. If Fsw is not detected to be within a predetermined stopband (determination block **904**), the method **900** returns to block **902**. If Fsw is detected to be within a predetermined

stopband (determination block **904**), I.sub.peak in the control loop (e.g., the control loop **106** in FIG. **1**) is adjusted to change Fsw at block **906**. For example, an increase to I.sub.peak will decrease Fsw while a decrease to I.sub.peak will increase Fsw. In some example embodiments, I.sub.peak_max is accounted for by the switching converter controller, where I.sub.peak_max is based on a target efficiency and/or target VOUT ripple for the switching converter controller. Other options include enabling/disabling stopband detection, selectively combining stopband avoidance with other control loop options (e.g., PWM control, peak/valley current control, voltage mode control, hysteresis control, constant ON/OFF time control, multi-phase control, zero crossing detection, and/or other control options), use of multiple programmable stopbands, use of programmable stopband sizes, changing the amount of change to I.sub.peak based on stopband size or stopband pattern detection, determining an appropriate frequency step size to avoid stopbands or move away from stopbands, and/or changing Fsw by the frequency step size as needed to avoid repeated stopband violations. In another example embodiment, the inductor peak current is adjusted up or down without clamping the maximum or minimum inductor peak currents and also no clamping for the maximum switching frequency.

[0045] FIGS. **10A** and **10B** are flowcharts showing switching converter controller methods **1000A** and **1000B** in accordance with example embodiments. The methods **1000A** and **1000B** are performed, for example, by a state machine or digital logic of a stopband controller (e.g., the stopband controller **126** in FIG. **1**, or the stopband controller **126A** in FIG. **2**). When enabled, the method **1000A** of FIG. **10A** includes measuring the frequency of CLK at block **1002**. If a threshold number (fixed or programmable) of CLK frequency measurements is not reached (determination block **1004**), the method **1000A** returns to block **1002**. If the threshold number of CLK frequency measurements is reached (determination block **1004**), a determination is made regarding whether a stopband is violated in all of the CLK frequency samples (determination block **1006**). If not, the method **1000A** returns to block **1002**. If a stopband is violated in all of the CLK frequency samples (determination block **1006**), a determination is made regarding whether any stopband bit or flag was previously set (determination block **1008**). If not, a stopband bit or flag is set at block **1010**, and the method **1000A** waits at block **1012** for a time interval (e.g., fixed or programmable) before returning to block **1002**. If a stopband bit or flag was previously set (determination block **1008**), an active stopband bit or flag is reset at block **1014**. The method **1000A** then waits at block **1012** for a time interval before returning to block **1002**.

[0046] When enabled, the method **1000B** of FIG. **10B** includes the various blocks of the method **1000A** of FIG. **10A** as well as blocks **1018** and **1020** to avoid oscillating between adjacent stopbands. In method **1000B**, if any stopband bit or flag was previously set (determination block **1008**), a determination is made regarding whether a stopband violation is repeated (determination block **1018**). If not, the method **1000B** proceeds to blocks **1014** and **1012**. If a stopband violation is repeated (determination block **1018**), a next stopband bit or flag is set at block **1020**. The method **1000B** then waits at block **1012** for a time interval before returning to block **1002**.

[0047] In some example embodiments, a switching converter controller is configured to selectively adjust its switching frequency to avoid one or more predetermined stopbands. In different example embodiments, the size and number of stopbands accounted for by the switching converter controller varies. In some example embodiments, the switching converter controller includes a control loop configured to selectively adjust a clock signal responsive to stopband information and feedback error, where the clock signal determines the switching frequency of the switching converter controller. For example, the clock signal may be provided to a driver circuit configured to generate drive signals for one or more power stage switches based on the clock signal. By controlling the switching frequency of the switching converter controller to avoid the one or more predetermined stopbands, switching noise at these predetermined stopbands is avoided or reduced. As desired, the described options for selectively adjusting the switching frequency of the switching converter controller to account for one or more predetermined stopbands can be combined with

other switching converter controller options (e.g., pulse-width modulation (PWM) control, peak current control, multi-phase control, zero crossing detection, and/or other control options).

[0048] In this description, the term “couple” may cover connections, communications, or signal paths that enable a functional relationship consistent with this description. For example, if device A generates a signal to control device B to perform an action: (a) in a first example, device A is coupled to device B by direct connection; or (b) in a second example, device A is coupled to device B through intervening component C if intervening component C does not alter the functional relationship between device A and device B, such that device B is controlled by device A via the control signal generated by device A.

[0049] As used herein, the terms “electrode”, “node”, “interconnection”, “pin”, “contact”, and “connection” are used interchangeably. Unless specifically stated to the contrary, these terms are generally used to mean an interconnection between or a terminus of a device element, a circuit element, an integrated circuit, a device or other electronics or semiconductor component.

[0050] The example embodiments above may utilize switches in the form of n-type metal-oxide semiconductor field-effect transistors (nMOSFET or just “nMOS”) or pMOS transistors. Other example embodiments may utilize NPN bipolar junction transistors (BJTs), PNP BJTs, or any other type of transistor. Hence, when referring to a current electrode, such electrode may be an emitter, collector, source or drain. Also, the control electrode may be a base or a gate.

[0051] A device that is “configured to” perform a task or function may be configured (e.g., programmed and/or hardwired) at a time of manufacturing by a manufacturer to perform the function and/or may be configurable (or re-configurable) by a user after manufacturing to perform the function and/or other additional or alternative functions. The configuring may be through firmware and/or software programming of the device, through a construction and/or layout of hardware components and interconnections of the device, or a combination thereof.

[0052] A circuit or device that is described herein as including certain components may instead be adapted to be coupled to those components to form the described circuitry or device. For example, a structure described as including one or more semiconductor elements (such as transistors), one or more passive elements (such as resistors, capacitors, and/or inductors), and/or one or more sources (such as voltage and/or current sources) may instead include only the semiconductor elements within a single physical device (e.g., a semiconductor die and/or integrated circuit (IC) package) and may be adapted to be coupled to at least some of the passive elements and/or the sources to form the described structure either at a time of manufacture or after a time of manufacture, for example, by an end-user and/or a third-party.

[0053] Circuits described herein are reconfigurable to include the replaced components to provide functionality at least partially similar to functionality available prior to the component replacement. Components shown as resistors, unless otherwise stated, are generally representative of any one or more elements coupled in series and/or parallel to provide an amount of impedance represented by the shown resistor. For example, a resistor or capacitor shown and described herein as a single component may instead be multiple resistors or capacitors, respectively, coupled in parallel between the same nodes. For example, a resistor or capacitor shown and described herein as a single component may instead be multiple resistors or capacitors, respectively, coupled in series between the same two nodes as the single resistor or capacitor.

[0054] Uses of the phrase “ground” in this description include a chassis ground, an Earth ground, a floating ground, a virtual ground, a digital ground, a common ground, and/or any other form of ground connection applicable to, or suitable for, the teachings of this description. Unless otherwise stated, “about,” “approximately,” or “substantially” preceding a value means ± 10 percent of the stated value.

[0055] Modifications are possible in the described embodiments, and other embodiments are possible, within the scope of the claims.

Claims

1. A method comprising: receiving, by a stopband controller, a clock signal; determining, by the stopband controller, a clock frequency from the clock signal; determining, by the stopband controller, a stopband violation by the clock frequency; determining, by the stopband controller, a status of a stopband flag; and setting, by the stopband controller, the status of the stopband flag in response to the stopband violation.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein: the determining of the clock frequency is based on measuring the clock signal N times; and the N times is at least a threshold number of times.
3. The method of claim 2, further comprising: the determining of the stopband violation is based on a determining, by the stopband controller, that the clock signal measured in each of the N times violated a stopband.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein: the status of the stopband flag is set to a reset status in response to determining the status of the stopband flag is a set condition; and the status of the stopband flag is set to a set status in response to determining the status of the stopband flag is not a set condition.
5. The method of claim 4, wherein: the status of a next stopband flag is set to a set status in response to determining the status of the stopband flag is a set condition.
6. The method of claim 1, further comprising: determining, by the stopband controller, a stopband violation by a first switching frequency of a switching converter controller; and adjusting, by the stopband controller, the first switching frequency to a second switching frequency outside a first stopband in response to the determination.
7. The method of claim 1, further comprising: selectively adjusting, by a control loop, a clock signal responsive to stopband information and a feedback error, wherein the clock signal determines a first switching frequency of a switching converter controller.
8. The method of claim 1, further comprising: adjusting, by a pulse-frequency modulation (PFM) controller within the stopband controller, a clock signal at an output of the PFM controller based on a stopband information.
9. The method of claim 8, wherein: the adjusting of the clock signal is based on the stopband information and an error signal received by the PFM controller.
10. The method of claim 8, wherein: the PFM is capable of adjusting the clock signal to avoid a stopband.
11. The method of claim 8, wherein: the PFM is capable of adjusting the clock signal above a stopband.
12. The method of claim 8, wherein: the PFM is capable of adjusting the clock signal below a stopband.
13. The method of claim 8, wherein: the PFM controller includes a clamp controller; and the clamp controller is capable of outputting a clamp control signal responsive to the stopband information.
14. A method comprising: monitoring, by a switching converter controller, a switching frequency; determining, by the switching converter controller, a stopband violation of a predetermined stopband by the switching frequency; and adjusting, by the switching converter controller, a peak current in a control loop in response to the stopband violation.
15. The method of claim 14, wherein: the switching frequency is monitored from the switching converter controller.
16. The method of claim 14, wherein: the switching frequency is monitored from a power stage switch.
17. The method of claim 14 wherein: the switching converter controller is capable of determining a peak current maximum based on a target efficiency for the switching converter controller.
18. The method of claim 14 wherein: the switching converter controller is capable of determining a peak current maximum based on an output voltage ripple for the switching converter controller.

19. The method of claim 14 wherein: there are multiple programmable stopbands.

20. The method of claim 14 further comprising: changing, by the switching converter controller, the switching frequency by a frequency step size in response to multiple stopband violations.
