

Simulation of Communication in Industrial Networks

CAN Network

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Structure of Computer Systems Project

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Introduction

1.1 Context

The **CAN** (Controller Area Network) communication protocol is widely used in industries such as automotive, aerospace, and industrial automation for robust and efficient communication between various electronic devices. It operates as a multi-master, broadcast communication system, allowing multiple Electronic Control Units (ECUs) to communicate over a shared bus. CAN is favored for its noise immunity, real-time data handling, and fault tolerance, making it an essential part of modern embedded systems. [1]

However, while the **CAN protocol** provides the framework for low-level communication, higher-level protocols like CANopen are necessary to manage more complex operations, such as real-time data exchange, device configuration, and network management. CANopen builds on top of CAN, providing the necessary structure for distributed control systems by organizing data, commands, and system states using standardized messages such as **PDOs**, **SDOs**, and **NMT** commands.

In the automotive industry, for example, ECUs responsible for tasks such as engine control, anti-lock braking, and power steering communicate through the CAN bus. CANopen further organizes this communication by providing a standardized framework to manage real-time data, configuration parameters, and device states.

1.2 Objective

The objective of this project is to develop a simulation of a CAN communication system using **Express** and **React** and **p5** (UI). The simulation will model the behavior of multiple **ECUs** communicating over a CAN bus, implement message arbitration, and integrate CANopen protocol features for real-time data exchange, network management, and device configuration. The simulated environment will be a basic car.

1.3 Project proposal

This section states what features will be implemented in the final simulation of the CAN protocol. The details of each feature will be presented in future sections.

List 1.3.1: Specific goals

1. Simulating the low-level CAN bus communication protocol, including bit-level arbitration.
2. Implementing the CANopen application layer protocol which defines real-time data exchange via PDOs (Process Data Objects), configuration and diagnostics via SDOs (Service Data Objects), and network management using NMT (Network Management) messages, by the help of the Object Dictionary.
3. Creating a GUI using React and p5 that will enable the user to:
 - visualize the message transmission
 - display the state of the bus
 - display the states of the ECU
 - enabling users to interact by sending commands
 - configuring devices and adding new devices

Bibliographic Research

2.1 What is CAN?

CAN (Controller Area Network) is a serial multi-master, message broadcast communication protocol that was developed by BOSCH [1].

Its domain of application ranges from high-speed networks to low-cost multiplex wiring. In automotive electronics, engine control units, sensors, anti-skid-systems, etc. are connected using CAN with bitrates up to 1 Mbit/s. At the same time, it is cost effective to build into vehicle body electronics, e.g. lamp clusters, electric windows etc. to replace the wiring harness otherwise required. [2]

CAN operates at the **Physical Layer** and **Data Link Layer** of the OSI model, managing the transmission of messages and ensuring the integrity of data through mechanisms such as arbitration and error detection.

Remark 2.1.1: CAN vs CANopen

CANopen, is a higher-layer protocol built on top of CAN, providing a framework for how data is organized, exchanged, and managed in a network. It operates at the **Application Layer** and defines how devices interact. So, it is not the same thing as the CAN bus protocol, which operates at a lower level. [4]

2.2 The CAN bus

The bus in the CAN protocol refers to the physical connection that links multiple devices (ECUs) together, allowing them to communicate and exchange data. It consists of two wires: **CANH** (CAN High) and **CANL** (CAN Low), which form a twisted-pair cable.

The CAN bus operates using differential signaling, where the data is transmitted by the difference in voltage between the CANH and CANL wires, rather than an absolute voltage level. [2] This differential method makes the system highly resistant to external noise because

any noise that affects both wires equally will be canceled out when the voltage difference is measured.

List 2.2.1: Bus states

- **Dominant State** (Logical 0): When the bus is in the dominant state, CANH is driven to a higher voltage (around 3.5V), while CANL is driven to a lower voltage (around 1.5V). This voltage difference (approximately 2V) represents a dominant bit, which is interpreted as a logical 0. [1]
- **Recessive State** (Logical 1): In the recessive state, both CANH and CANL are at the same voltage (around 2.5V), creating a 0V differential, which is interpreted as a logical 1. [1]

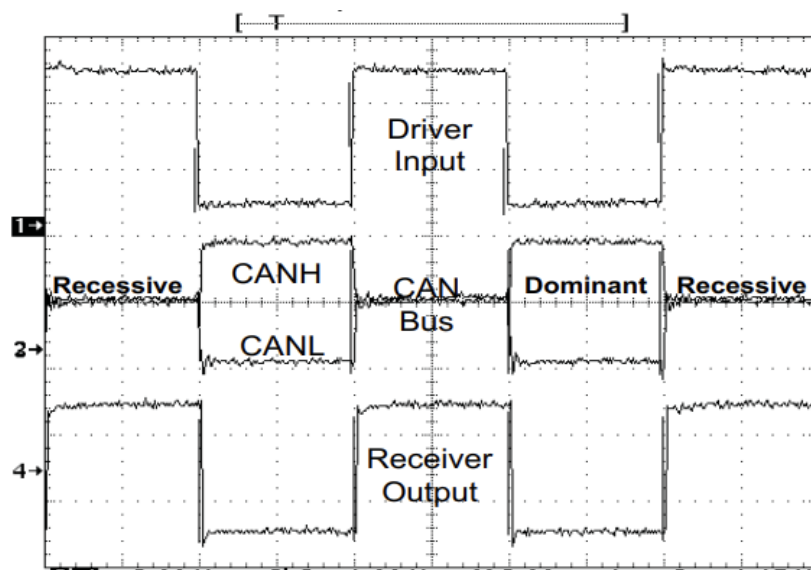


Figure 1. States of the bus under an oscilloscope [1]

The system defaults to the recessive state when no data is being transmitted. When an ECU sends data, it drives the bus into the dominant state for logical 0s, and the other ECUs can detect this change on the bus.

When two ECUs try to write a 1 and a 0 at the same time, the bus will be taken to the dominant state, the 0 winning the bus. This helps in arbitration.

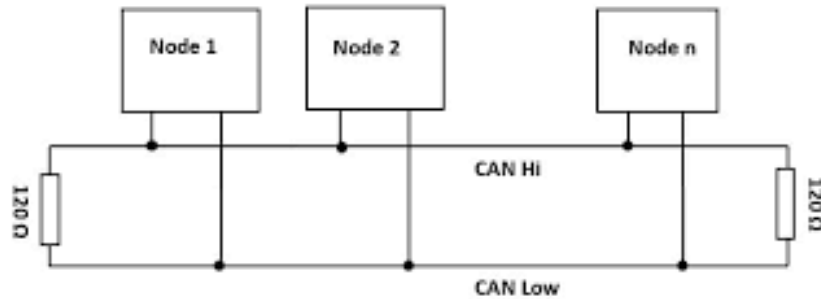


Figure 2. CAN bus [3]

2.3 Transceiver, CAN controller and DSP

A CAN device is made from multiple components, each with specific purposes.

The **CAN transceiver** is the component that interfaces between the **CAN controller** (operating at the Data Link Layer) and the physical bus, operating at the Physical Layer. Its main job is to convert the digital signals from the CAN controller into electrical signals that are transmitted over the CAN bus and to convert electrical signals from the bus back into digital data for the controller to process. Its key functionalities are signal conversion, bus monitoring, error handling and physical isolation. [1]

The **CAN controller** is the core component responsible for managing the **Data Link Layer** of the CAN protocol. It handles all communication-related tasks between the **DSP** (or microcontroller) and the **CAN transceiver**, ensuring that messages are correctly formatted, transmitted, and received according to the CAN protocol. Its key functionalities are message framing, message arbitration, error detection and message buffering. [1]

A **Digital Signal Processor (DSP)** is a specialized microprocessor optimized for performing high-speed mathematical operations, particularly useful in real-time applications. In the context of a CAN system, the DSP typically handles the higher-level processing tasks of an ECU, such as:

- Signal processing for sensors and actuators.
- Control algorithms for systems like engine control, motor drives, or industrial automation.

The **DSP** ensures that these real-time tasks are executed quickly and efficiently, without introducing delays into the system. It can process signals from sensors, apply complex control algorithms, and determine outputs that need to be sent to other devices on the CAN network. Although the DSP does not directly handle CAN message framing or transmission,

it works alongside the **CAN controller** and **transceiver** to ensure smooth and efficient communication with other nodes in the network.

In *Figure 3* we can observe such configuration.

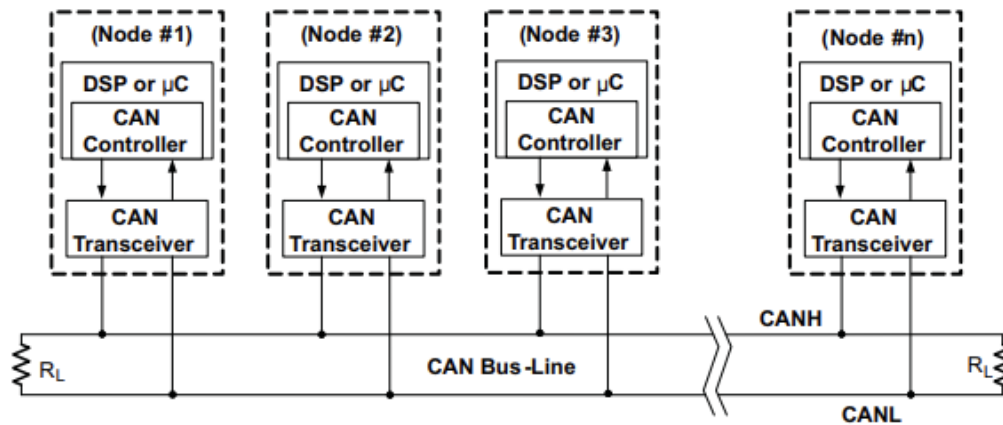


Figure 3. CAN system [1]

2.4 Arbitration

Arbitration in a CAN system is the process used to determine which Electronic Control Unit gets to send its message when multiple ECUs try to transmit simultaneously. CAN uses a non-destructive bitwise arbitration mechanism, meaning that the message with the highest priority (lowest **CAN-ID**) always wins without causing data loss.[2]

Remark 2.5.1: Low level explanation

During arbitration, each ECU monitors the bus while transmitting its message. If an ECU detects that another ECU is sending a dominant bit (0) while it is sending a recessive bit (1), it stops transmitting, as the bus has been taken by a higher-priority message. This process ensures that only one message is transmitted at a time and that the message with the highest priority is always sent first.[1]

2.5 CANopen

CANopen is a higher-layer communication protocol built on top of the CAN protocol, designed for embedded systems requiring structured data exchange, configuration, and network management. While CAN handles the low-level transmission of messages, CANopen adds organization and control at the Application Layer. [4]

At the core of CANopen is the **Object Dictionary**, a table that defines how each device's data and settings are structured. It enables standardization across the network, making it easier for devices to communicate and be configured.

CANopen defines two key message types:

- **PDOS** (Process Data Objects): Used for real-time data exchange, allowing devices to send and receive operational data like sensor readings and control commands quickly and efficiently.
- **SDOs** (Service Data Objects): Used for configuration and diagnostics, allowing one device to read or write to another device's Object Dictionary entries, enabling dynamic updates to device settings.

Additionally, NMT (Network Management) messages are used to control the operational states of devices, ensuring synchronized operation within the network.

CANopen is widely used in industries such as automotive, industrial automation, and medical devices, where real-time communication and device configuration are critical. It enhances CAN's capabilities by providing a flexible, structured approach to data management and device coordination. [4]

Analysis

3.1 Project Proposal

The final simulation for the CAN serial communication will provide a comprehensive visualization of multiple key aspects. It will demonstrate message arbitration, where several nodes attempt to send messages on the CAN bus at once. The simulation will reveal how conflicts are resolved based on priority, visually illustrating each bit as it is transmitted during the arbitration process, with a focus on dominant and recessive bits and their impact on the bus state.

Bitwise transmission will also be displayed, using a binary waveform to show changes in the bus state with each bit, making the influence of dominant bits clear. To deepen the realism, error detection and handling mechanisms, such as cyclic redundancy checks (CRC), acknowledgement errors, and bit-stuffing errors, will be included. Users will see how CAN manages errors, including the retransmission of faulty frames, adding a layer of robustness to the communication.

The simulation will cover various CAN frame types—data frames, remote frames, error frames, and overload frames—providing insights into each frame's role in the network. Fields within these frames, such as identifiers, data length, control, and CRC, will be highlighted to showcase their functions in message structuring. Users will also be able to adjust the bus load and observe the impact on message timing and delivery. Visual feedback will illustrate the influence of bus load on data flow, including latency effects on transmission.

Since the project includes CANopen protocol elements, the simulation will feature higher-level protocol functionalities like Process Data Objects (PDOs) and Service Data Objects (SDOs). This will enable the visualization of data transfers, command responses, and parameter configurations, key elements of CANopen communication. Additionally, the network management protocol (NMT) within CANopen will be represented, showing node states such as operational, pre-operational, and stopped, along with state transitions.

List 3.1.1: Simulation features

- See the top view of a wireframe car
- See a graphic representation of multiple ECUs, the CAN bus, the two resistors at each end of the bus, and each ECU connection to the bus
- See each ECU current state by hovering with the mouse over the drawing of a specific component
- Start the simulation
- Select configuration of the simulation. The configuration will be a set of commands that will specify the number of ECUs, what happens at each discrete time etc.
- Add a configuration
- Edit a configuration (e.g. add an ECU)
- See the log of the simulation
- See the resulting values of the simulation (e.g. total number of sent messages)
- Visualize the current state of the bus in the means of voltage levels of each wire. A graph with the x axis as time and y axis will be drawn
- Visualize the arbitration process by seeing what components are trying to write on the bus at the same time

3.2 Functional and non-functional requirements

The following are the functional and non-functional requirements for the CAN simulator project. The **functional requirements** cover the core features, such as ECU and CAN bus visualization, configuration management, and real-time monitoring of simulation states. The **non-functional requirements** focus on usability, performance, compatibility, and reliability to ensure a smooth and effective simulation experience.

List 3.2.1: Functional and non-functional requirements

Functional:

- Top view of wireframe car - Display a top-down wireframe image of a car as a background or reference element in the simulation interface.
- ECU and CAN Bus Visualization - Render multiple ECUs, the CAN bus, and terminating resistors on both ends. Each ECU should connect visually to the bus.
- Simulation Start Function - Provide a button to initiate the simulation, updating all visuals in real-time.
- Control simulation time – either automatic time or step time. Transition to the next step will be controlled by a “Next step” button
- Configuration Management - Enable users to add and edit configurations, including modifying ECU counts and timing actions.
- Simulation Log Display - Show a real-time log of simulation actions, including message transmissions and state changes.
- Result Summary Display - Provide a summary view of key metrics, such as total messages sent, at the end of each simulation.
- Provide a summary view of key metrics, such as total messages sent, at the end of each simulation. - Graph voltage levels on the CAN bus over time, with the x-axis as time and y-axis as voltage.
- Arbitration Visualization - Visually represent the arbitration process, showing which components attempt to write on the bus at the same time.

Non-functional:

- Performance - Ensure smooth updates in real-time, even with multiple ECUs and high bus activity.
- Usability - Design an intuitive interface with clear icons, tooltips, and controls for easy interaction.
- Scalability - Support configurations with varying numbers of ECUs without performance degradation.
- Documentation - Offer brief, user-friendly documentation explaining each control and feature.

3.3 Use cases

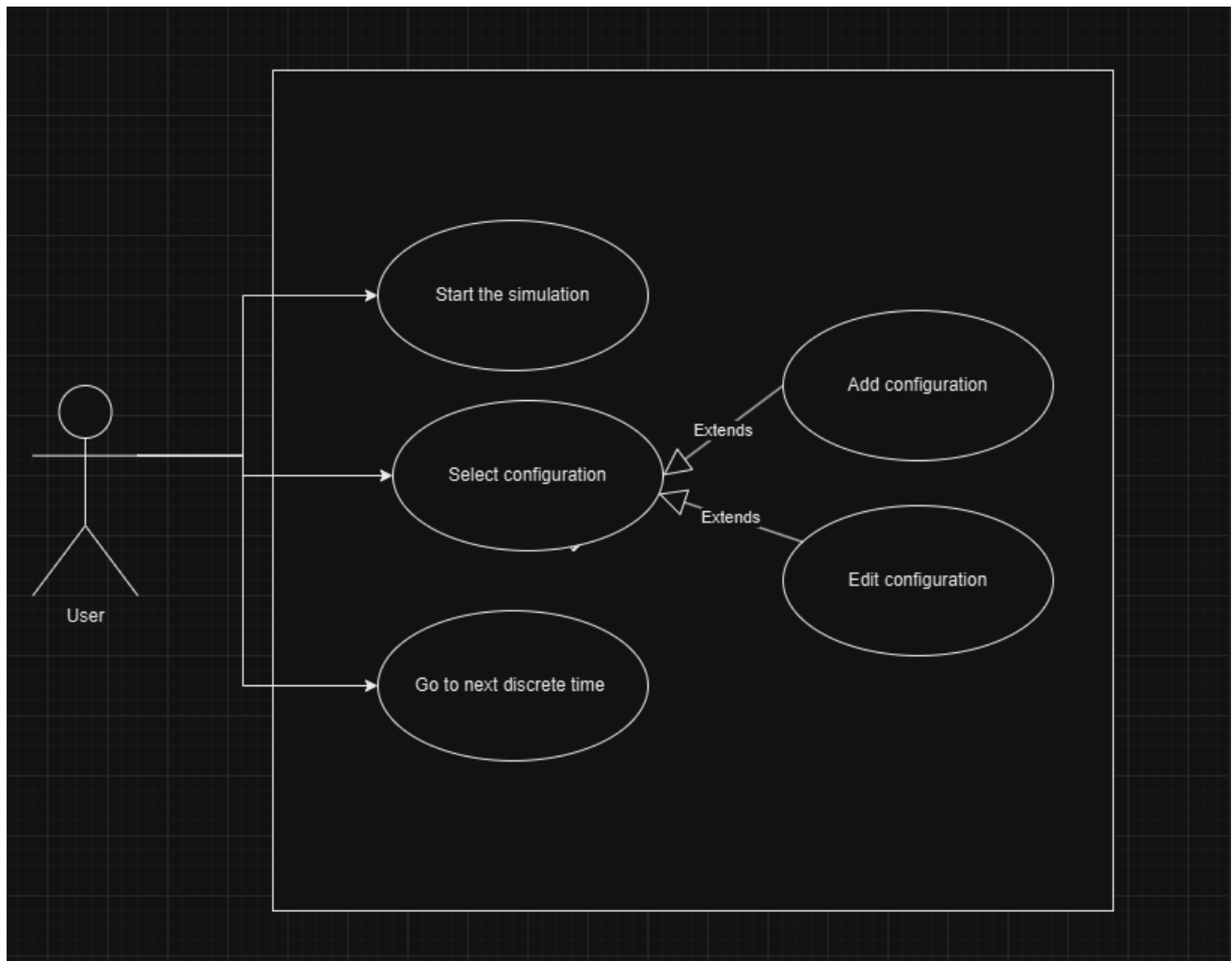


Figure 4. Use case diagram

Use case:

- **User:** The actor in the diagram is the user who interacts with the CAN simulator to control and monitor the simulation process.
- **Start the Simulation:** This use case allows the user to initiate the CAN simulation. Once started, the simulator will display the behavior of the configured network of ECUs, the CAN bus, and associated features.
- **Select Configuration:** The user can choose a predefined or previously saved configuration for the simulation. This selection will set up specific parameters, such as the number of ECUs, the timing of events, and the behavior of each component in the network. This is a primary step before starting the simulation.

- **Add Configuration** (extends): This option allows the user to create a new configuration for the simulation. By adding a configuration, the user can specify details such as ECU count, actions, and discrete events. It extends the "Select Configuration" use case because it provides a way to set up configurations to choose from.
- **Edit Configuration** (extends): This feature enables the user to modify an existing configuration. The user can adjust parameters, such as adding or removing ECUs and changing event timings. It also extends the "Select Configuration" use case by allowing adjustments to an existing configuration.
- **Go to Next Discrete Time:** This use case allows the user to advance the simulation to the next discrete time step manually. This feature is essential for observing the state of the network at specific intervals, providing detailed control over the simulation's progression.

Design

4.1 Solution and architecture

The simulation will be provided via a web interface. The software will be created based on the client-server architecture. The client-server architecture will use **Express** as the backend server, **React** as the frontend framework, and **p5.js** integrated with React for visualizing the simulation. Communication between the client and server will be facilitated by a **RESTful API**. The server will handle simulation computations and send JSON files to the client, which the React frontend will then render for visualization.

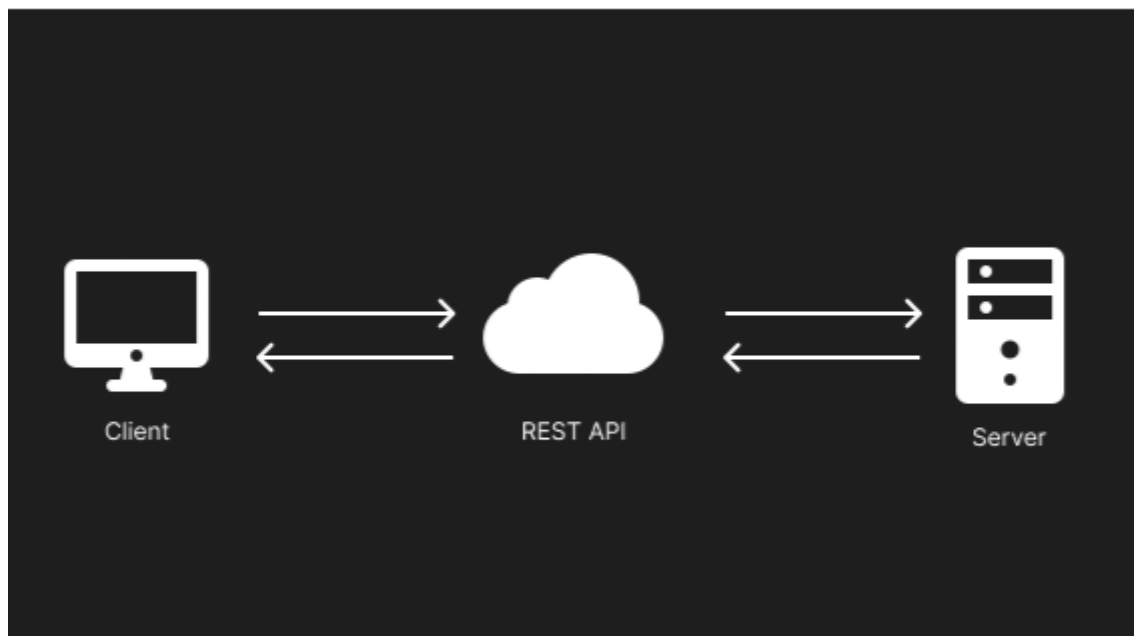


Figure 5. Client-server architecture [5]

4.2. Architecture Overview

1. Server (Backend):

- **Express** is used to set up a server to handle API requests from the client. This server will manage the configuration and execution of the CAN simulation, processing the results and storing them temporarily for retrieval by the client.
- The server will perform simulations in discrete time steps, computing values for each ECU and the CAN bus. These values are structured in JSON files, representing each time step's result, which the client can retrieve.

- **RESTful API:** The server exposes a RESTful API to allow the client to interact with the simulation, manage configurations, and fetch simulation results in JSON format.

2. Client (Frontend):

- **React** handles the user interface, providing options to start the simulation, select configurations, and view results.
- **p5.js** is integrated within React to create interactive visualizations. It visualizes each ECU's state, the bus's voltage levels, and the arbitration process based on the data fetched from the server.
- The client sends requests to the backend server to fetch simulation results and configuration data, displaying them dynamically using p5.js sketches embedded in the React components.

3. API endpoints and HTTP methods:

- **GET /api/configurations** - Returns an array of JSON objects representing available configurations. Each configuration contains details like the number of ECUs, timing actions, and other simulation parameters. It allows the client to display a list of configurations for the user to select.
- **POST /api/configurations** - Adds a new configuration for the simulation. It consists of a JSON object with configuration details (e.g., ECU count, actions at each time step). The response confirms creation with the ID of the new configuration. It enables the client to save new simulation setups, allowing for reusable configurations.
- **PUT /api/configurations/:id** - Updates an existing configuration by its unique ID. Accepts a JSON object with updated configuration details. Returns the modified configuration after confirmation. Allows the client to modify configurations by adding or removing ECUs and adjusting timing settings.
- **DELETE /api/configurations/:id** - Deletes a specific configuration by ID. Returns a confirmation message. Enables the client to remove unused or obsolete configurations.
- **POST /api/simulation/start** - Initiates a new simulation based on the selected configuration. Accepts a JSON object containing the configuration ID to be used. Returns a session ID for tracking the specific simulation instance. Starts the simulation on the server with the specified configuration.
- **GET /api/simulation/step/** - Retrieves simulation results for a specific discrete time step in an ongoing or completed simulation. Returns a JSON object with computed values for the specified time step, including ECU states, bus voltage levels, and arbitration details. Allows the client to display data for a particular time step.
- **GET /api/simulation/log** - Retrieves the full log of the simulation for a particular session.

- **GET /api/simulation/results** - Retrieves the final results of a completed simulation. Returns a JSON object containing summarized data such as total messages sent and other key metrics. Allows the client to display an overview of the simulation after completion

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