

EN2160 - Electronic Design Realization

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University of Moratuwa — May 07, 2024



Department of Electronic and Telecommunication Engineering
Semester 4 (Intake 2021)

Project Report - Application of the Cambridge EDC Inclusive Design Methodology

RFID Based Warehouse Management System – UHF RFID Reader

Abstract

This project involves the design and development of an Ultra-High Frequency (UHF) RFID reader intended for warehouse management systems. The RFID reader aims to streamline inventory tracking by providing reliable, real-time updates and reducing manual errors. The project includes the creation of detailed circuit schematics, a 6-layer PCB layout, and the selection of key components such as the ST25RU3993 IC and STM32 microcontroller.

A critical aspect of the design is the Planar Inverted-F Antenna (PIFA), which has been meticulously designed and optimized using advanced simulation tools to ensure optimal performance in reading RFID tags over a range of at least 2 meters. Through the application of these simulation tools and rapid prototyping, the design achieves high gain and efficiency while maintaining compactness. Despite facing challenges such as component delays and complex impedance control, the team has successfully progressed to the prototyping and testing phase. This project demonstrates a comprehensive approach to designing a cost-effective, high-performance RFID reader tailored to the needs of modern warehouse environments.

To address the multifaceted nature of the project, a cross-functional team structure has been adopted. Each team, consisting of two members, is assigned to a specific module—UHF Portal, HF Handheld Scanner AND HF forklift scanner Module. This strategic team alignment focuses on achieving learning outcomes of the EDR module. Each team have to design their own PCB and enclosure to ensure the proper understanding of the concepts.

This report delves into the key components of the UHF RFID Reader including RFID tags/stickers, readers, antennas, and software integration. Furthermore, it outlines the benefits of implementing such a system including improved inventory accuracy, enhanced operational efficiency, reduced labor costs, and increased customer satisfaction. Practical considerations such as system design, implementation challenges, and cost analysis are also discussed. Overall, this report serves as a valuable resource for organizations seeking to optimize their warehouse operations through the adoption of RFID technology.

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1 Review progress.

The starting point for inclusive concept generation is to review our status and plan the next steps. For that we must consider available resources and associated risks. We considered previous works related to our project for better understanding of risks and to define what to do next. Here are some related previous works.

Existing products and related research.

Research Papers in the scope of RFID and Warehouse Management,

- <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/4178418>
- <https://www.computer.org/csdl/proceedings-article/icebe/2011/4518a178/12OmNC4wtIB>
- https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321835292_Flexible_circuits_and_material_for_largearea_UHF_RFID_reader_antenna_systems

Companies,

- Zebra Technologies
https://www.zebra.com/gb/en/products/rfid.html?tactic_type=WBP&tactic_detail=Desc_AV_GL_None_Youtube
- Impinj
<https://www.impinj.com/partners/products/partner-fixed-readers>
- Intrasys
<https://www.intrasys.com.sg/RFIDSolution/Retail/RFID-Warehouse-Inventory-Management-System>

Some of the YouTube video links,

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAI-ggjYFIU>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8IpYYkLebJ8>
- [https://www.mecalux.com/warehouse-manual/the-warehouse/tasks-and-functions\(what is a warehouse\)](https://www.mecalux.com/warehouse-manual/the-warehouse/tasks-and-functions(what%20is%20a%20warehouse))

Review Progress - June 2024

- Current Status:

The UHF RFID reader project is currently in the prototyping and testing phase. The design and layout of the PCB have been completed, and it has been fabricated and shipped and is now in the initial testing of the assembled prototype is underway.

- **Completed Tasks:**
 - Schematic Design: Finalized the circuit schematics based on the ST25RU3993 manual.
 - PCB Layout: Completed the design of a 6-layer PCB, incorporating impedance control, via stitching, shielding, and teardrops.
 - Component Sourcing: Procured all necessary components and received the fabricated PCBs from JLCPCB.

- Antenna Design: Designed and simulated a Planar Inverted-F Antenna (PIFA) using advanced simulation tools to ensure optimal performance.
- **Challenges and Issues:**
 - Design Complexity: Ensured proper impedance control and shielding for high-frequency signals, which required several iterations.
 - Component Delays: Faced delays in receiving some components, impacting the assembly schedule. Alternative suppliers were identified to mitigate further delays.
 - Antenna Tuning: Fine-tuning the PIFA design to achieve the desired performance parameters posed a challenge.
- **Solutions Implemented:**
 - Impedance Control: Utilized simulation tools to optimize impedance matching and minimize signal loss.
 - Alternate Suppliers: Sourced alternative suppliers to expedite component delivery.
 - Antenna Optimization: Conducted iterative simulations and adjustments to optimize the PIFA design for improved performance.
- **Next Steps and Upcoming Tasks:**
 - Complete Prototype Assembly: Finish assembling the remaining components on the PCB.
 - Comprehensive Testing: Conduct thorough testing of the assembled prototype, focusing on RFID reading.
 - Documentation Updates: Update the project documentation to reflect changes and progress made.
 - Final Antenna Testing: Validate the performance of the PIFA in real-world conditions and make necessary adjustments.
- **Timeline and Schedule:**
 - Current Timeline: The project is slightly behind schedule due to component delays but is on track with the adjusted timeline.
 - Revised Schedule: Outline any adjustments made to the project schedule and how these will impact the overall timeline.
- **Quality and Compliance:**
 - Quality Checks: Document results from initial quality checks and any issues identified during testing.
 - Compliance: Ensure the design adheres to relevant industry standards and regulatory requirements.

2 Stakeholder Mapping

2.1 Introduction

This document outlines the development of an Ultra-High Frequency (UHF) RFID reader designed for warehouse management systems. The reader is engineered for seamless integration onto warehouse portals, facilitating the efficient tracking and management of inventory as it moves through the supply chain. This project aims to leverage advanced RFID technology to enhance operational efficiency, reduce manual scanning errors, and provide real-time inventory updates.

2.2 Market Analysis

The logistics and warehousing sectors are increasingly seeking automated solutions to streamline inventory management, reduce losses, and improve overall efficiency. Our RFID reader addresses these needs by offering a robust, reliable, and scalable solution that can significantly reduce manual intervention and errors in inventory tracking.

2.3 Existing Product Analysis

A thorough examination of existing RFID readers reveals a market characterized by a mix of high-cost, high-performance readers and more affordable but less capable options. Many existing solutions lack the range, durability, or ease of integration required for optimal warehouse management. Our design seeks to bridge this gap by offering a high-performance reader at a competitive price point.

In evaluating the competitive landscape, we've analyzed several leading RFID readers in the market, such as the Zebra FX9600 and the Impinj Speedway Revolution R420. These devices represent the upper echelon of current RFID technology in warehouse management but also come with certain limitations that our design seeks to address.

- **Zebra FX9600:** The Zebra FX9600 is known for its high read performance and durability, making it a popular choice in industrial settings. However, its high cost and complexity in integration with existing systems pose challenges for smaller operations or those with budget constraints. Our RFID reader aims to offer comparable or superior performance at a more accessible price point, with streamlined integration features.
- **Impinj Speedway Revolution R420:** The Impinj R420 is celebrated for its advanced features, such as support for multiple antenna configurations and low power consumption. Despite these advantages, users report difficulties in customization and a steep learning curve for optimal deployment. In contrast, our RFID reader is designed with user-friendly configuration tools and flexible deployment options to accommodate a wide range of warehouse environments without extensive setup time.
- **Alien ALR-F800:** The Alien ALR-F800 is another competitor, offering a versatile solution with a self-optimizing enterprise feature set. While it boasts impressive read rates and ease of deployment, its adaptability in complex RF environments and high-density tag scenarios is sometimes questioned. Our

design incorporates advanced signal processing and environmental tuning capabilities to ensure reliable performance even in the most challenging conditions.

By addressing these gaps and leveraging the latest advancements in RFID technology, our UHF RFID reader is positioned to offer a compelling alternative in the warehouse management market. It combines high performance, ease of use, and cost-effectiveness, making it an attractive solution for a broad range of inventory tracking applications.

2.4 User Profile

The primary users of our RFID reader will be warehouse personnel, including forklift operators and inventory managers. They require a user-friendly, durable device that can withstand the rigors of a warehouse environment while seamlessly integrating with existing Warehouse Management Systems (WMS).

2.5 Specifications

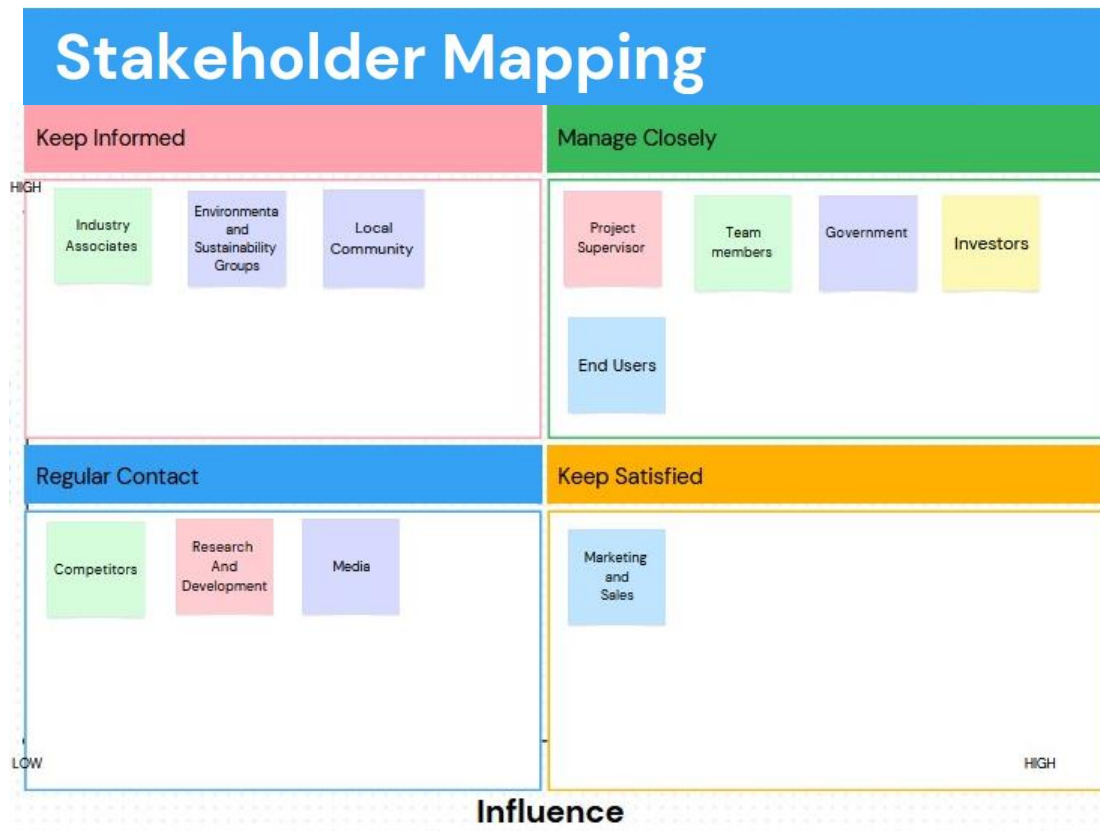
The RFID reader is designed to operate within the UHF spectrum, offering a read range of at least 2 meters. The device also features seamless data transfer and indicators for clear identification of tag reading.

2.6 Stakeholders

While researching on the topic of RFID Readers for Warehouse Management Systems (WMS) we identified a wide variety of stakeholders.

1. Project Team Members
2. Project Supervisor
3. End-Users/ Customers
4. Regulatory Bodies (Government)
5. Industry Associations (Large Warehouse owners/owning companies)
6. Financial Stakeholders
7. Marketing and Sales
9. Community
10. Competitors (Competing companies in the same industry)
11. Research and Development
12. Media

As their level of influence and interest may fluctuate during the project, it is imperative to continuously communicate with stakeholders to maintain the correctness of their categorization. User observation data plays a crucial role in this scenario.



3 User observation

Below is the process we went through to observe our users.

1) **Before Implementation:**

a) **Observe current process:**

- (i) How do staff currently bring in and out goods? Manually scan barcodes and use paperwork?
- (ii) What challenges do they face in the current process (e.g., scanning errors, slowness, data accuracy)?
- (iii) How long does it typically take to process incoming/outgoing goods?

2) **During Observation:**

a) **Ease of use:**

- i) Can staff easily carry items through the gate without triggering false reads?
- ii) Do they understand how to position items for optimal tag reading?
- iii) How quickly do they adapt to using the new system?
- iv) Are there any physical limitations (e.g., gate size, tag placement) that hinder workflow?

b) **System responsiveness:**

- i) How quickly does the system register and update after reading tags?
- ii) Are there any delays or error messages that impede the process?
- iii) Does the system handle multiple items passing through simultaneously effectively?

c) **User feedback:**

- i) Ask staff directly for their opinions on the system's ease of use, efficiency, and impact on their workload.
- ii) Do they have any suggestions for improvement or concerns about the system?

After our observation here is what we identified that the users expect and are concerned about.

1. Government Entities

- Concerned with regulatory compliance and security in cargo transportation and interested in technologies that enhance border control and monitoring.

2. Logistics Companies

- Prioritize efficient and timely cargo movement.

3. Warehousing Companies

- Focus on optimizing warehouse space and improving inventory accuracy and interested in technologies that enhance inventory visibility and management.

4. RFID Technology module manufacturers

- Invested in the adoption and success of RFID solutions.
- Interested in market feedback to improve and innovate their products.

5. Manufacturers

- Emphasize supply chain efficiency and timely delivery.

6. Financial Institutions

- Primarily concerned with financial viability and returns on investment.
- Less interest in the technical aspects of the RFID system.

7. IT and Software Developers

- Concentrate on creating and improving software solutions and interested in technical specifications, compatibility, and integration possibilities.

8. Customers and End-Users

- Primarily concerned with the efficiency of cargo services and timely deliveries and less involved in the technical aspects of the inventory management system.

9. Supply Chain Partners

- Interested in smooth collaboration within the supply chain.
- Focus more on their specific role in the supply chain than the overall technical details of the RFID system.

4 User Needs

Users' needs can be categorized based on what type of a need it is.

4.1 Functional Needs

- **RFID Tag Reading**

Must reliably read RFID tags within a range of at least 2 meters. Should accurately identify and log the tags even in environments with potential RF interference.

- **Antenna Designing for transmission and reception**

The antenna must operate within the Ultra-High Frequency (UHF) band, specifically at the center frequency of 915 MHz, to ensure compatibility with standard RFID tags.

4.2 Performance Needs

1) **RFID Tag Reading**

i) **Read Accuracy:**

- (a) High accuracy in reading multiple tags simultaneously.
- (b) Minimization of read errors and false positives.

ii) **Speed:**

- (a) Fast processing of RFID data to ensure real-time updates without

4.3 User Specific Needs

1) **User Interface:**

- a) Easy-to-use interface for warehouse personnel, including visual indicators for successful scans.
- b) Touchscreen interface for advanced models to allow manual control and monitoring.

2) **Durability:**

- a) Robust design capable of withstanding harsh warehouse environments, like dust and moisture.
- b) Durable housing to protect the internal components from physical damage.

4.4 Operational Needs

1) **Power Management:**

- a) Efficient power usage to ensure long operational periods without frequent recharging or battery replacements.

2) **Maintenance:**

- a) Ease of maintenance, with easily accessible components for repair or replacement.
- b) Availability of troubleshooting guides and support for quick issue resolution.

4.5 Scalability Needs

- 1) **Expandability:**
 - a) Capability to scale the system to accommodate additional readers or integration points as the warehouse operations expand.
- 2) **Futureproofing:**
 - a) Design considerations for future technological advancements and compatibility with upcoming RFID standards.

5 Idea Stimulation

Our initial plan was to develop a RFID Portal reader/ Gate Systems (in which the reader and the antenna will be developed). After capturing data from RFID tags using readers in a warehouse management system, the captured information undergoes a series of processes to ensure effective inventory management. Firstly, the system processes the received data. This processed data is then integrated into the warehouse management database, where it is stored alongside existing inventory records. The database facilitates real-time tracking of inventory levels and movements, enabling accurate and up-to-date visibility into warehouse operations. Utilizing this data, the system can automate various tasks such as inventory replenishment, order picking, and shipping, optimizing warehouse workflows and minimizing human error. Furthermore, the stored RFID data serves as a valuable resource for generating reports, analyzing trends, and making data-driven decisions to improve overall warehouse efficiency and productivity.

To generate innovative concepts for our UHF RFID reader, we employed several creative strategies. We held regular brainstorming sessions where team members freely discussed ideas and solutions. We analyzed existing RFID readers and kept up with technological trends to identify opportunities for innovation. We had to do extensive research on the different ICs used for RFID Readers and other RFID applications. Additionally, we compared different antenna types to choose which is most suitable for our application. We looked into instances in which these antennas are used. These strategies helped us develop a range of innovative ideas to enhance the functionality and usability of our RFID reader for the project.

6 Concept development

6.1 Conceptual designs and block diagrams

6.1.1 Conceptual Design 1 – Basic RFID Reader

The Basic RFID Gate Reader is engineered for simplicity and efficiency, focusing on the core function of scanning RFID tags on crates as they pass through gates. It integrates a high-gain antenna for broad coverage and effective tag detection, coupled with a streamlined signal processing system for fast and accurate data interpretation. The design emphasizes durability and ease of installation on various gate types, making it ideal for environments that require robust and straightforward solutions for inventory tracking. Real-time updates to the inventory system and clear scan indicators further enhance its utility, ensuring seamless operational integration.

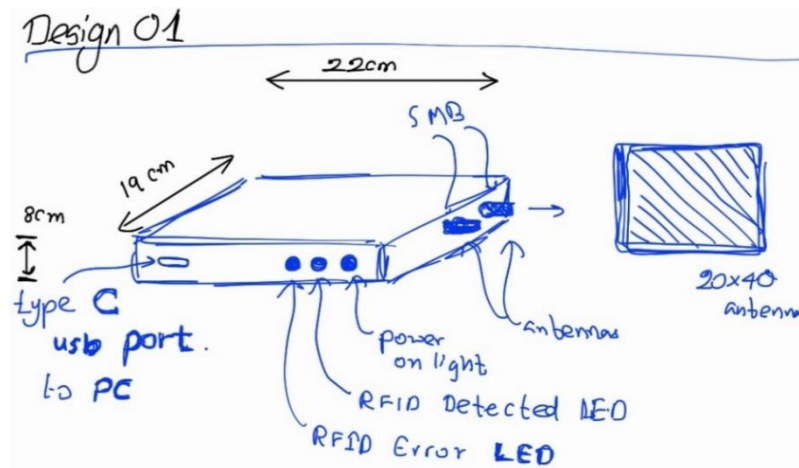


Figure 1: Conceptual Design 1 1

6.1.2 Functional Block Diagram 1

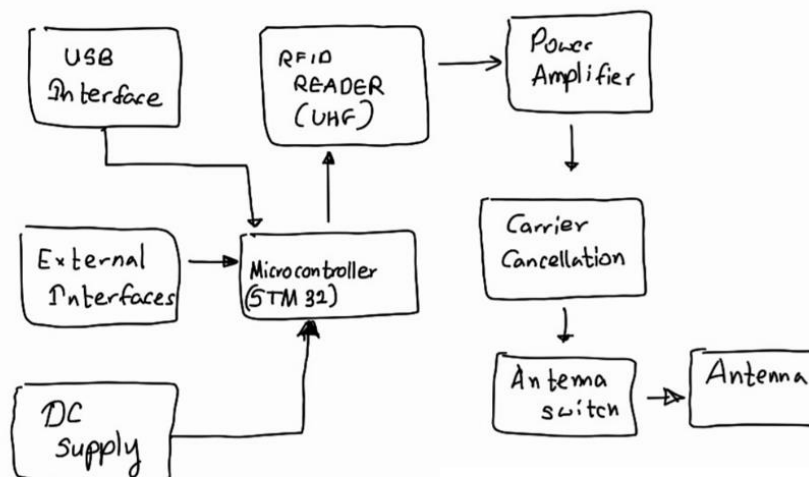


Figure 2: Block Diagram of Design 1

6.1.3 Conceptual Design 2 – Smart RFID Reader with Data Logging

This design advances RFID technology by incorporating automated data collection with each scan, including detailed logging of timestamps, gate IDs, and forklift IDs. It's designed with connectivity at its core, offering Wi-Fi or Ethernet options for seamless data integration. The Smart RFID Reader is compact and sleek, making it suitable for environments where space is at premium and data analytics are crucial for operational efficiency. Its focus on data logging and connectivity makes it a powerful tool for detailed inventory management and analysis.

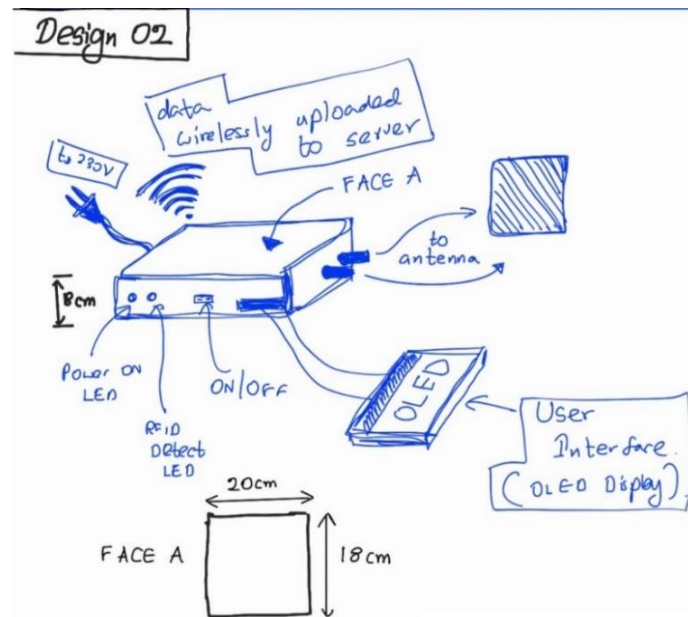


Figure 3: Conceptual Design 2

6.1.4 Functional Block Diagram 2

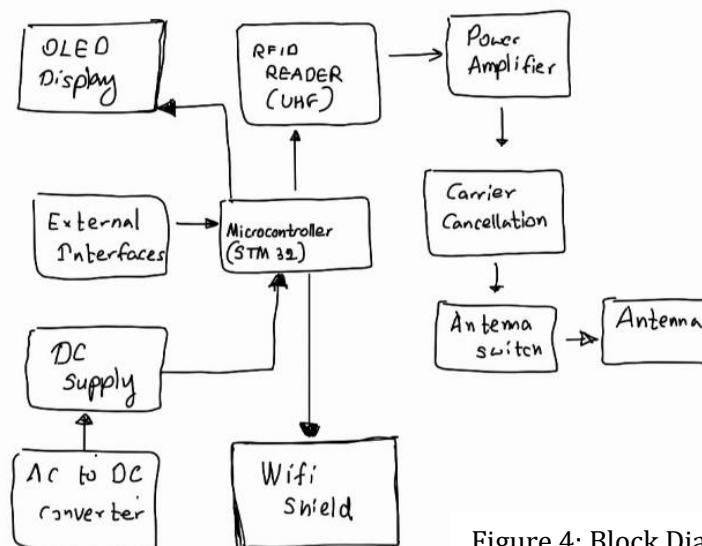


Figure 4: Block Diagram of Design 2

6.1.5 Conceptual Design 3 - RFID Reader with Enhanced User Interface

The third conceptual design prioritizes user interaction through an intuitive touchscreen interface, allowing for manual control and real-time monitoring of RFID scans. It features user authentication for secure access, ensuring that system adjustments and data monitoring are restricted to authorized personnel. This design is characterized by its user-friendly and ergonomic approach, catering to environments where user interaction and system control flexibility are key requirements.

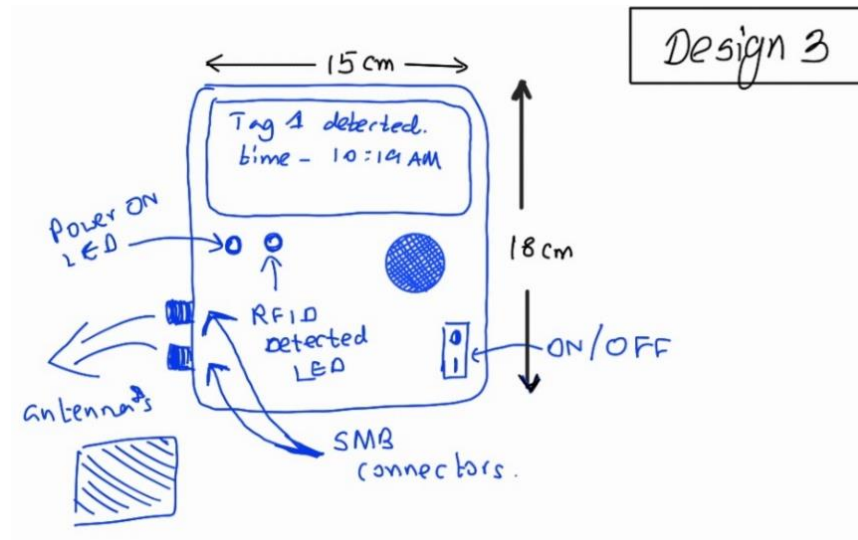


Figure 5: Conceptual Design 3

6.1.6 Functional Block Diagram 3

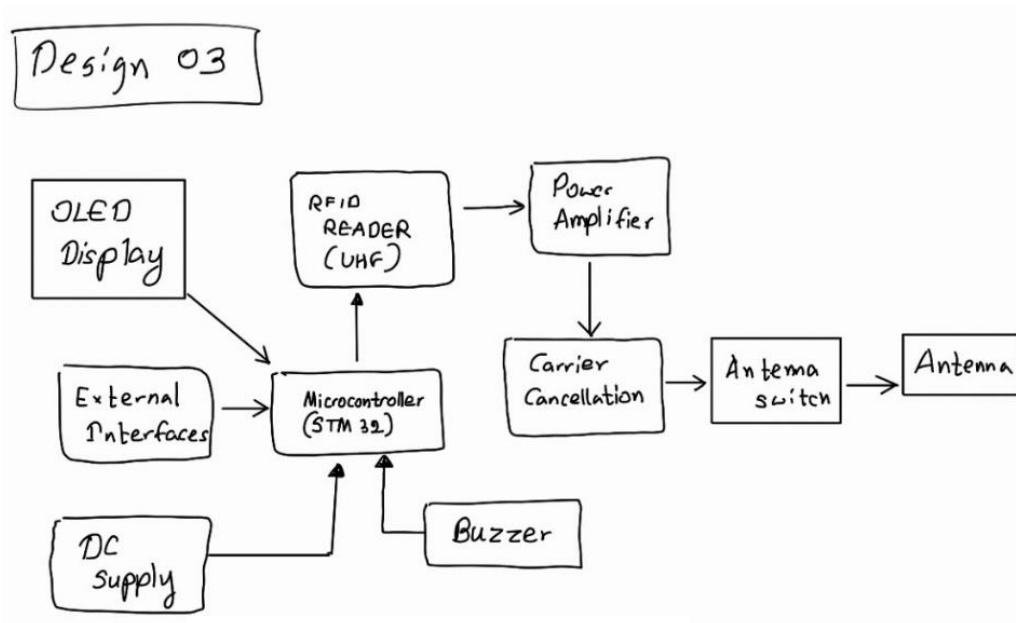


Figure 6: Block Diagram of Design 3

6.2 Evaluation of Conceptual Design

Comparison of designs

		Conceptual design 1: Basic RFID Gate Reader	Conceptual design 2: Smart RFID Reader with Data Logging	Conceptual design 3: RFID Reader with Enhanced User Interface
Newly added features		Real-time inventory updates. Visual scan indicators.	Data logging for scans with timestamps, gate ID, forklift ID. Wi-Fi or Ethernet connectivity.	Touchscreen interface for monitoring and manual gate control, User authentication for secure access.
Removed features		High-end data processing External display and extensive controls.	External display and extensive controls.	Audio and Visual Indicators. Wi-Fi or Ethernet connectivity.
Enclosure design criteria comparison	Functionality	6	8	9
	Aesthetics	8	8	8
	Heat dissipation	6	9	8
	Assembly and serviceability	9	6	7
	Ergonomics	8	8	8
	Simplicity	9	7	8
	Durability	9	8	6
Functional block design criteria comparison	Functionality	9	7	8
	User experience	6	8	9
	Manufacturing feasibility	10	8	8

	Cost	6	9	7
	Performance	7	8	7
	Future proofing	5	9	7
	Power	9	6	6
Total		108	107	98

Decision Rationale

Among the three conceptual designs, the first was chosen for its simplicity and ease of construction. The Basic RFID Gate Reader stands out for its straightforward approach to RFID technology, focusing on essential functionalities without the complexities of advanced data logging or user interfaces. This simplicity not only makes it more cost-effective and quicker to develop but also ensures reliability and ease of maintenance. Its design aligns well with operational needs that prioritize efficient tag scanning and real-time inventory updates, without the overhead of additional features that might complicate the system or its deployment. This choice underscores a preference for practicality and effectiveness, particularly in settings where the primary goal is the seamless tracking of goods through RFID technology.

7 Schematic Design

7.1 System Overview – The A4 size Schematics and PCB is at the end of the document

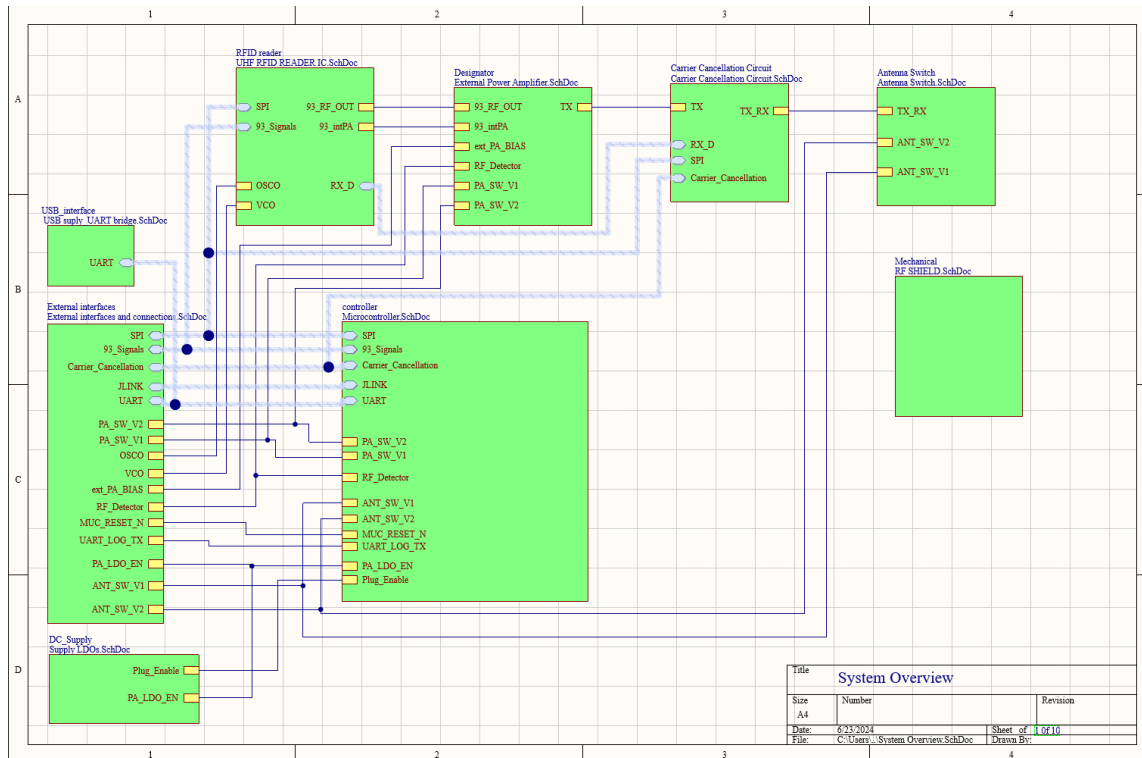


Figure 7: System Overview

7.2 UHF RFID Reader IC

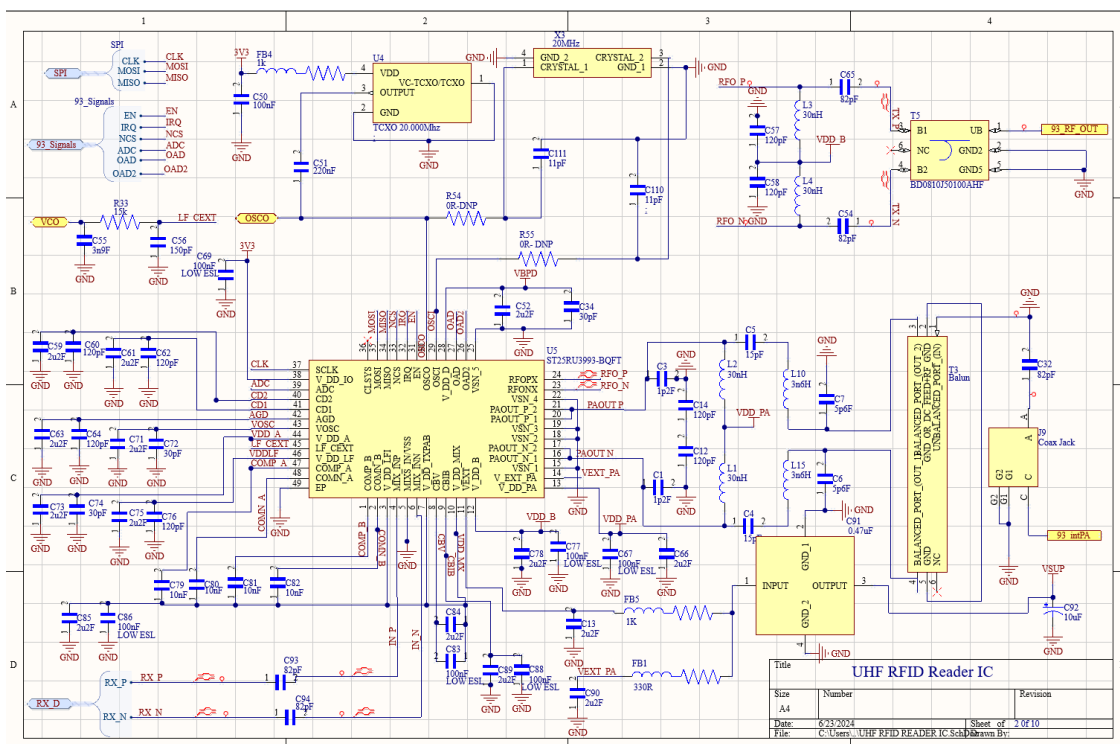


Figure 8: Schematic of UHF RFID Reader IC Circuit

7.9 Supply LDOs

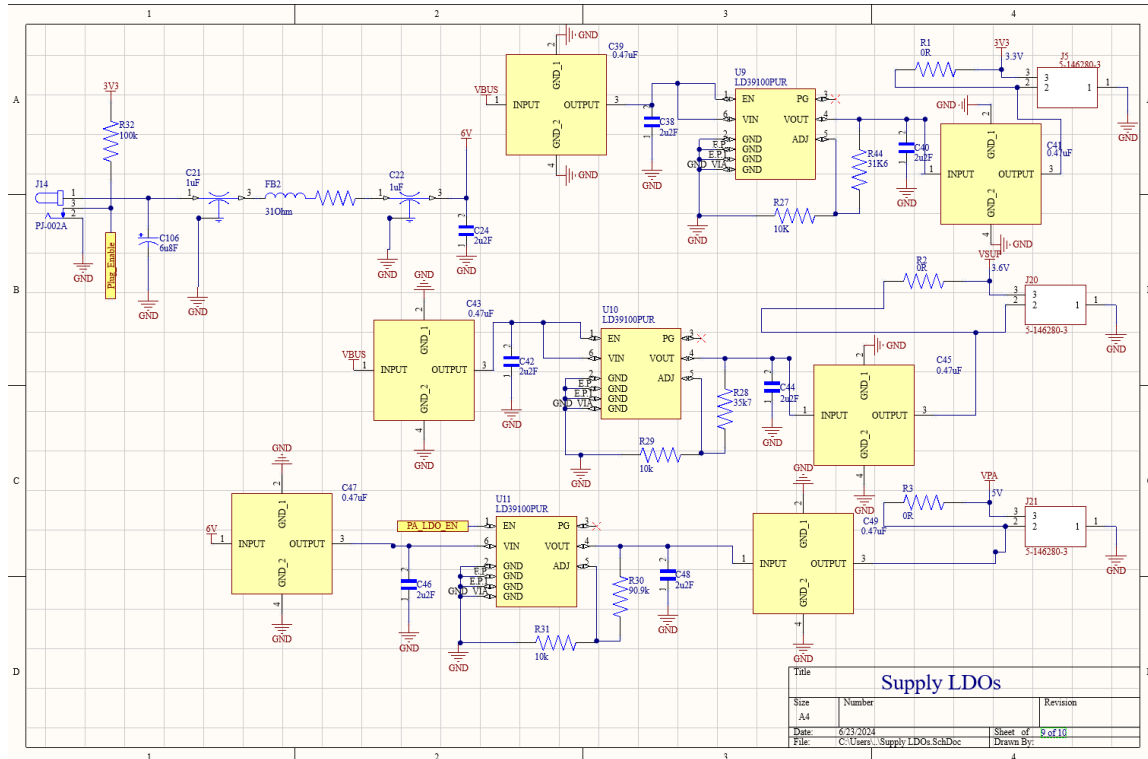


Figure 15: Schematic of Supply LDOs

7.10 External Interfaces

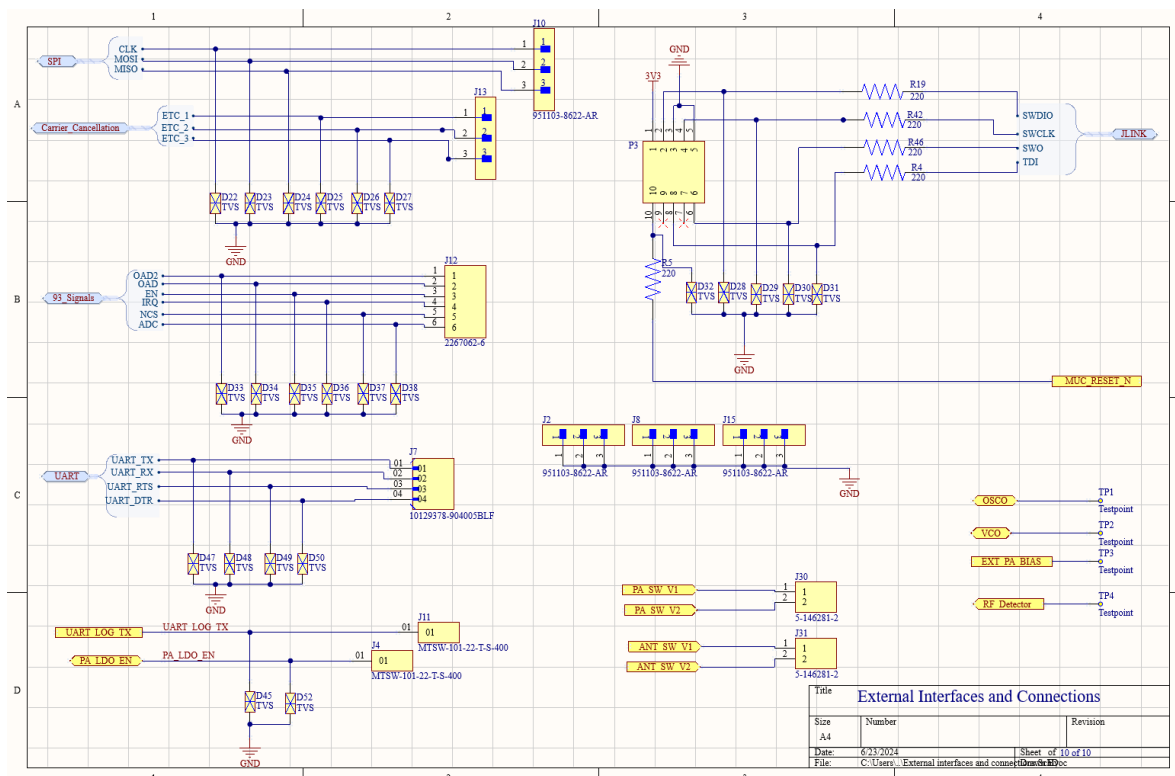


Figure 16: Schematic of External Interfaces

8 PCB Design

8.1 Main circuit

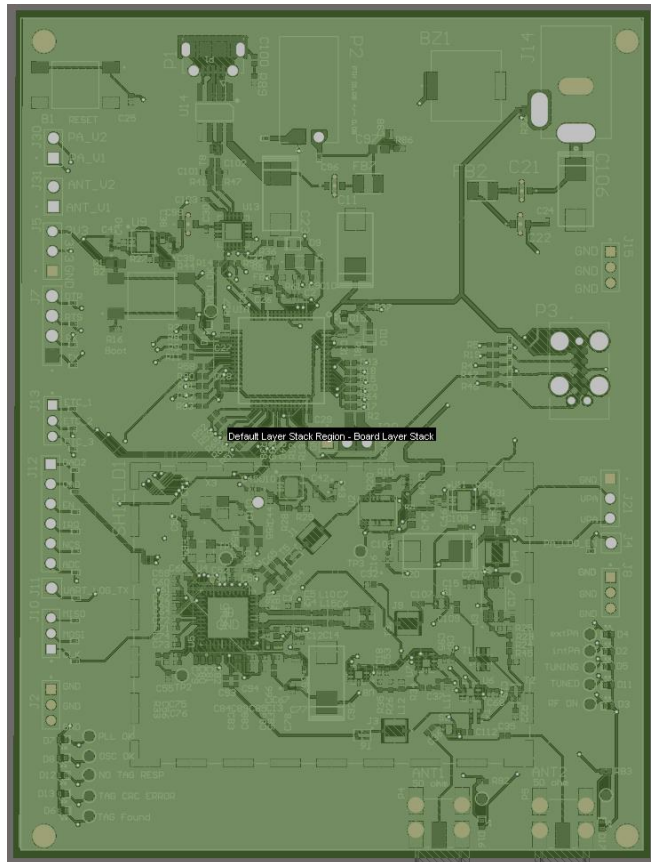


Figure 17: Board Planning View

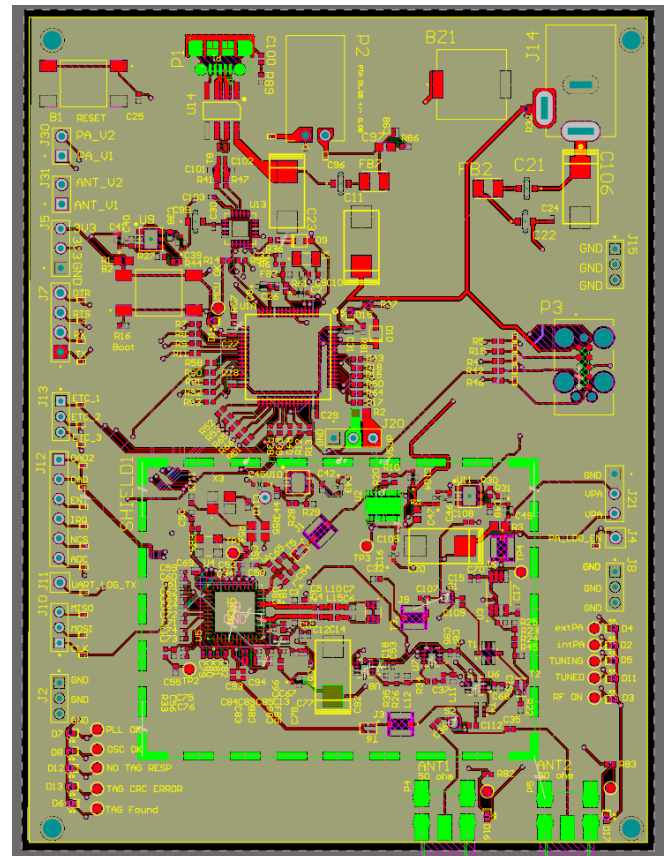


Figure 18: 2D View

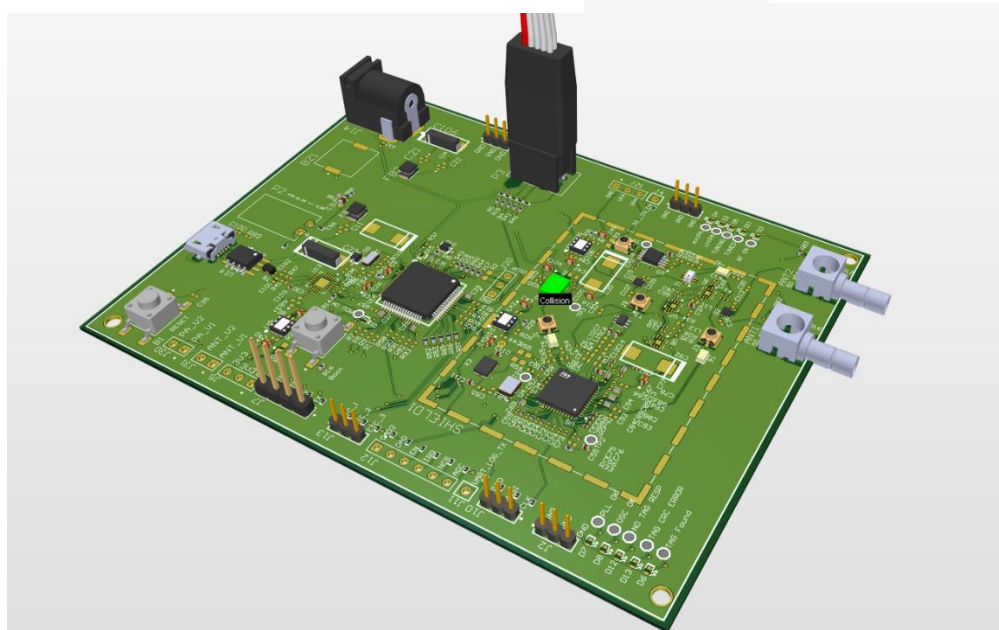


Figure 20: 3D Isometric View

- **Top Layer:**
 - All components and almost all interconnections are located on the top layer (Figure 22).
 - Impedance-controlled RF traces (single-ended 50 Ω CBCPW and differential 100 Ω traces) are situated here.
 - Direct connection of all component ground terminals to the surrounding GND plane without thermal relief connections ensures optimal grounding.
- **RF Ground Layer:**
 - Positioned directly below the top layer to support the 50 Ω and 100 Ω waveguide traces.
 - The solid and uninterrupted nature of this layer is critical for providing a direct path for RF return currents, ensuring efficient signal transmission.

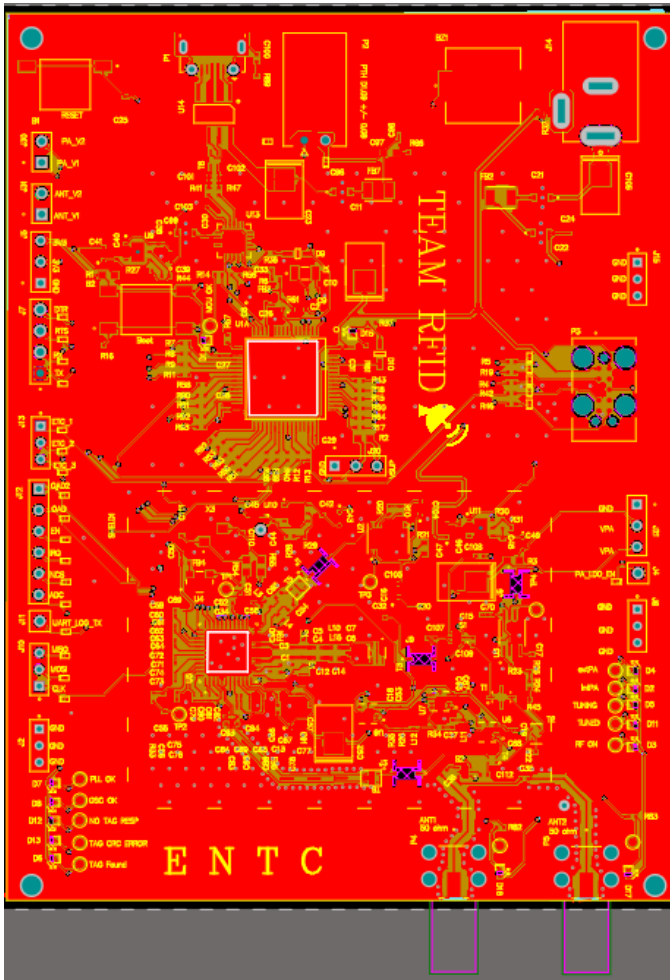


Fig: Top Layer

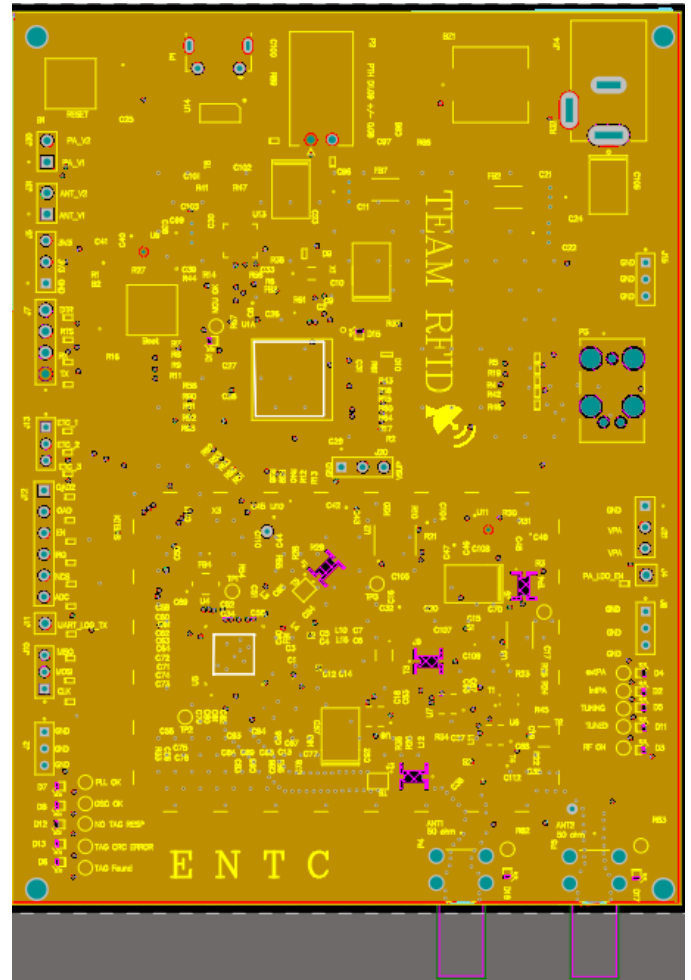


Fig: RF Ground Layer

- **Power Layer:**

- Utilized primarily for distributing supply voltages through power planes, with minimal traces to avoid interference.

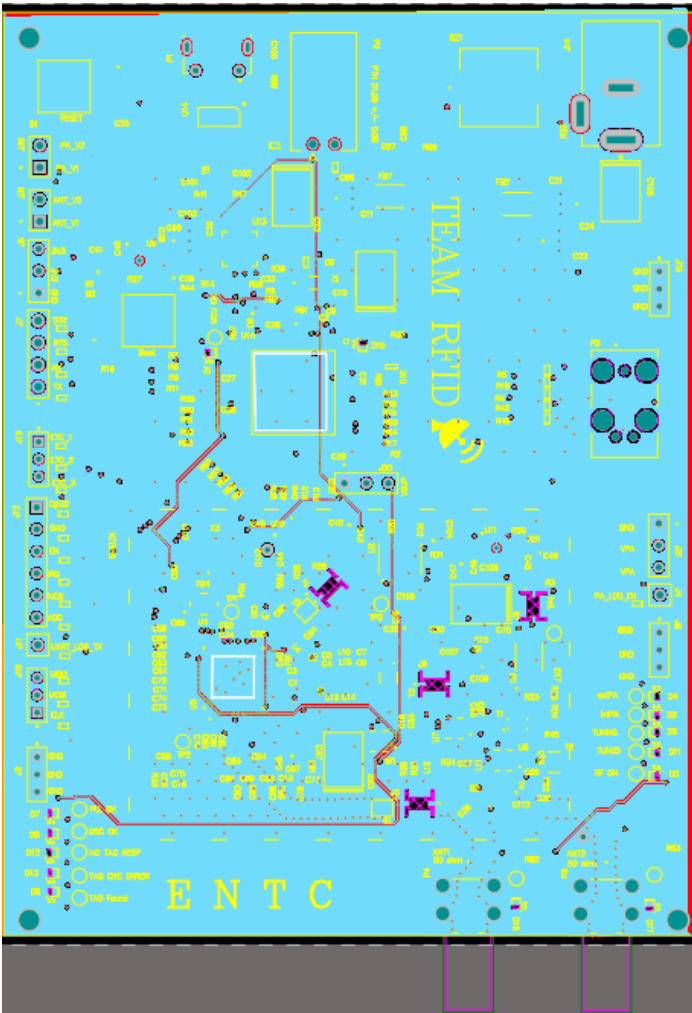


Fig: Power Layer

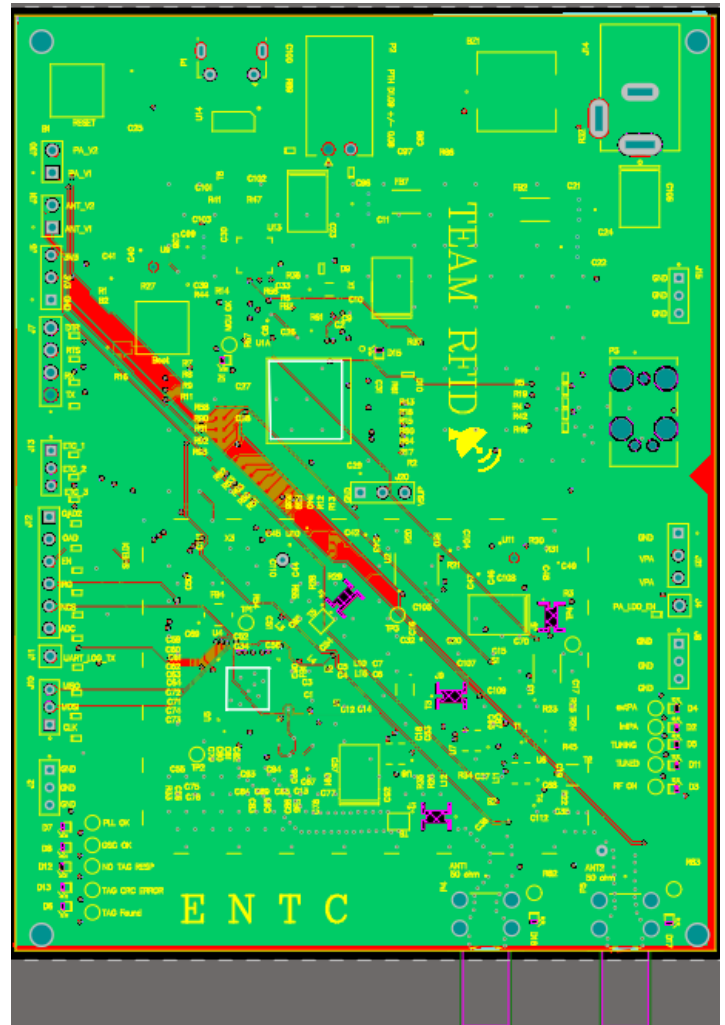


Fig: Power Ground Layer

- **Routing Layer:**
 - Dedicated to interconnecting components while minimizing cross-talk effects on RF traces.

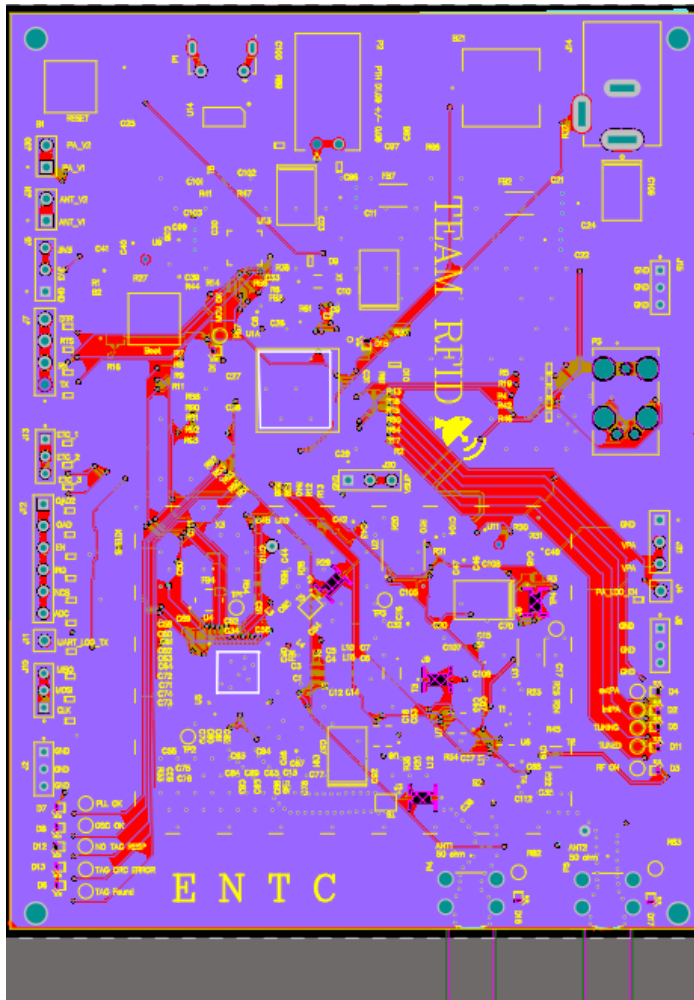


Fig: Routing Layer

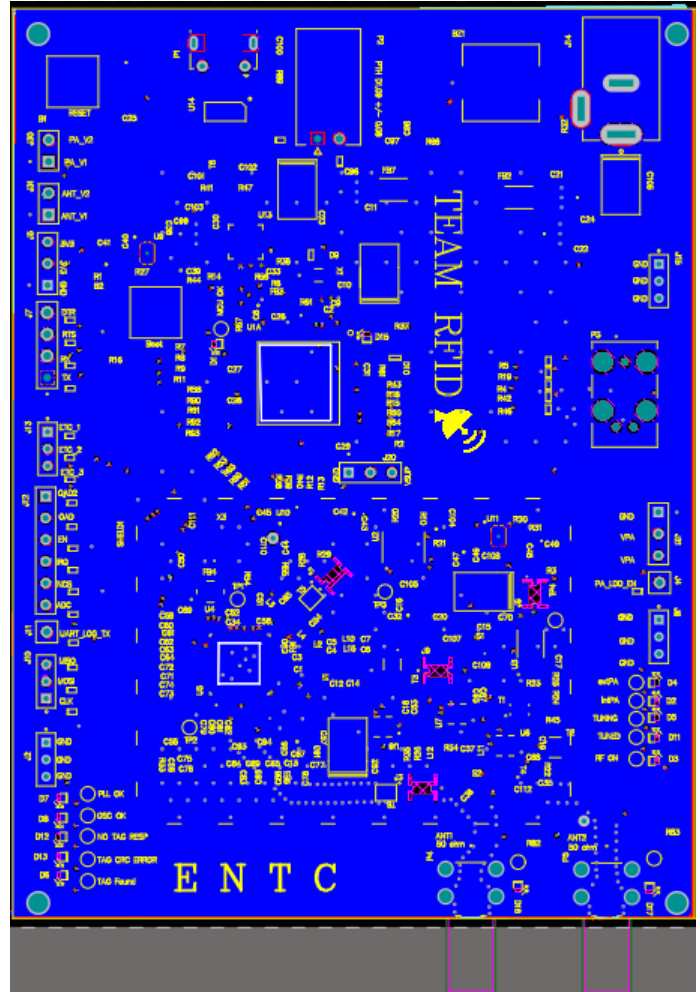
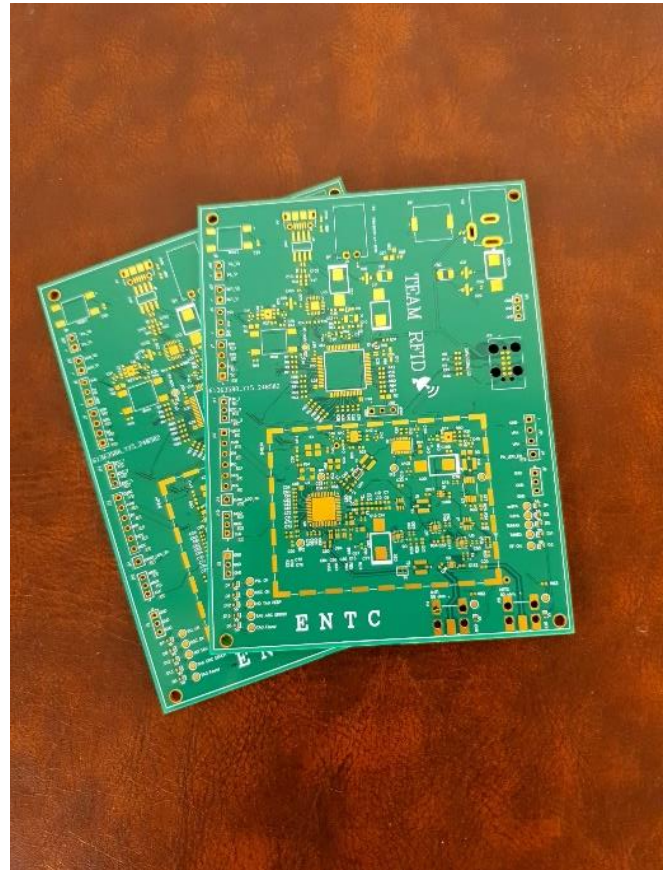
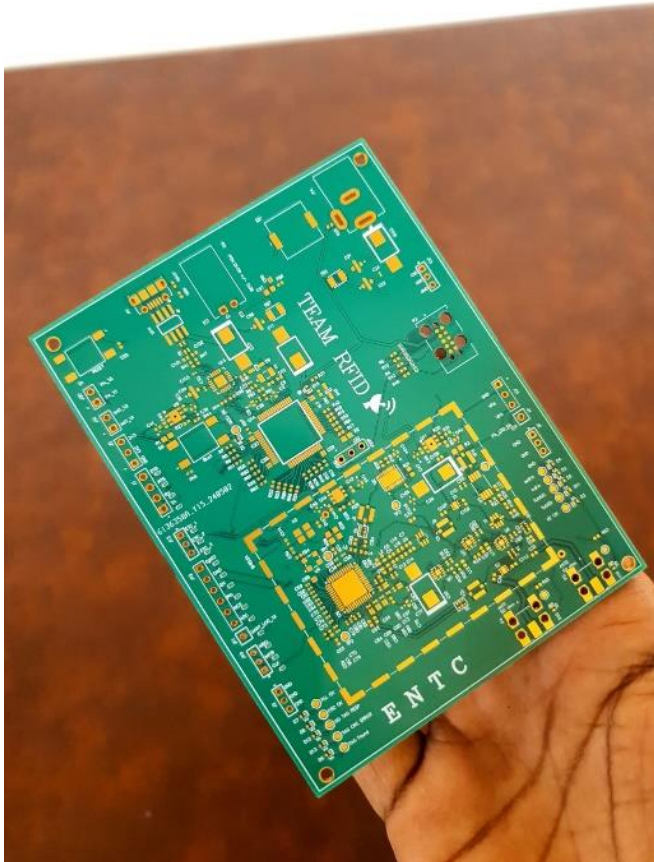


Fig: Bottom Ground Layer

- **Material:** FR4
- **Thickness:** 1.6mm
- **Surface Finish:** ENIG (Electroless Nickel Immersion Gold)
- **Copper Weight:** 1 oz for outer layers, 0.5 oz for inner layers

Bare PCB



9 SolidWorks Design Antenna Design

9.1 Enclosure Design

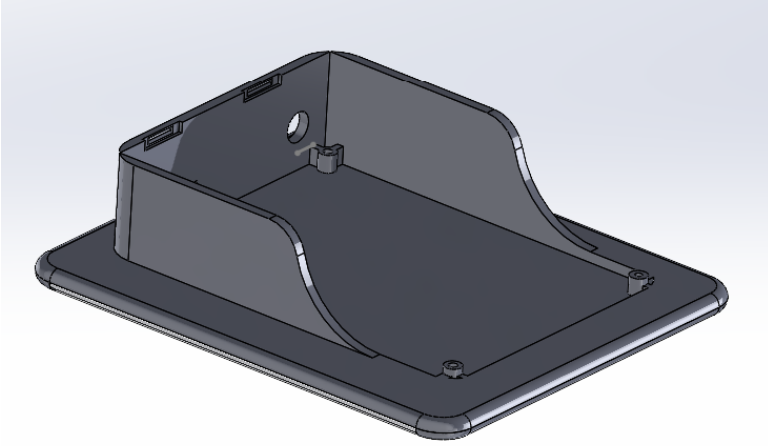


Figure 21: Enclosure

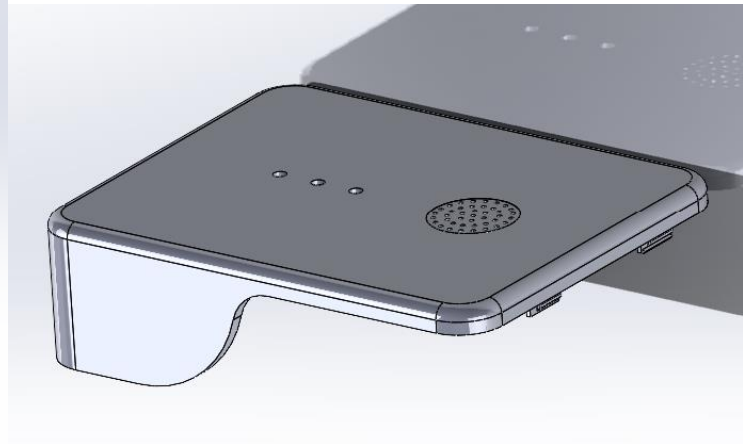


Figure 22: Lid

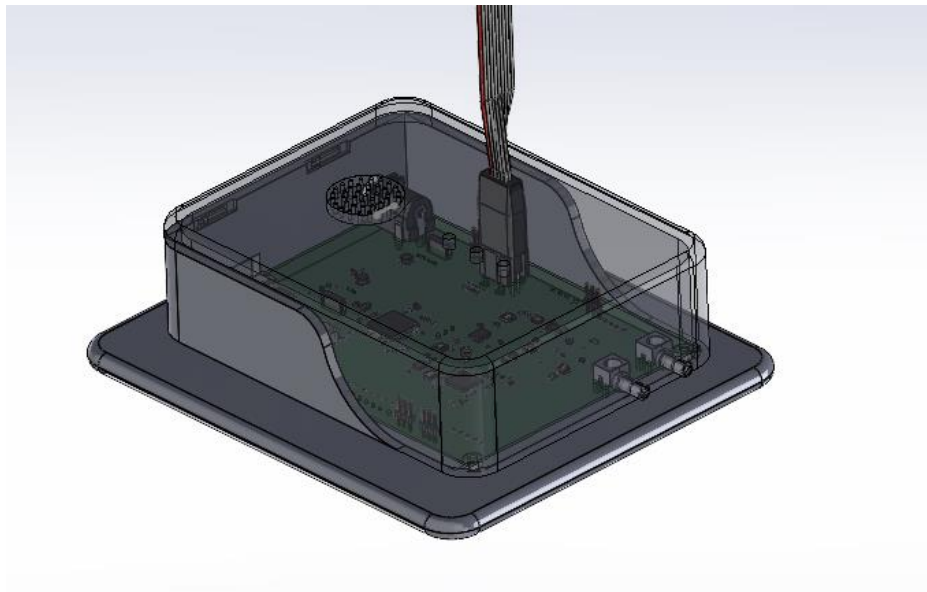


Figure 23: Assembly

9.2 PIFA Antenna Design

Schematic Diagram

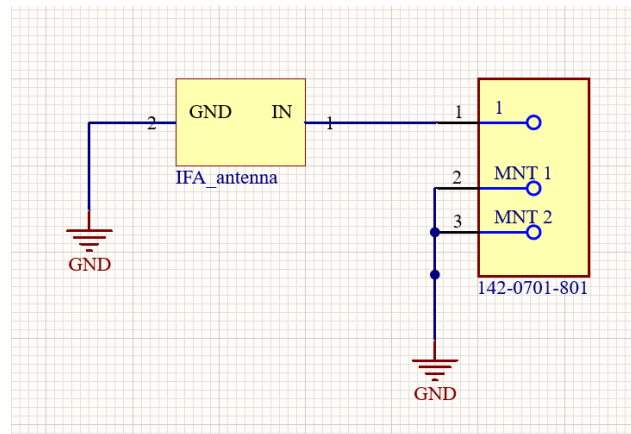


Fig: Schematic Diagram of the Antenna PCB

PCB Diagram

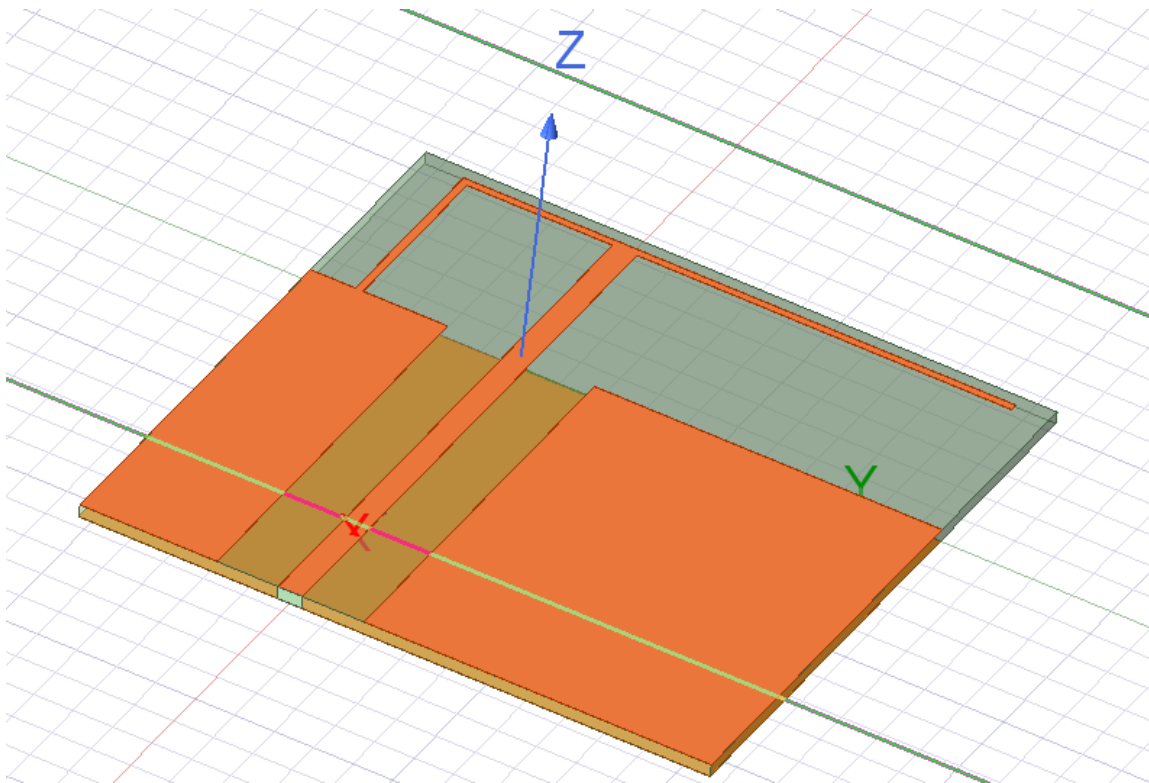


Figure 24: PIFA Antenna Design

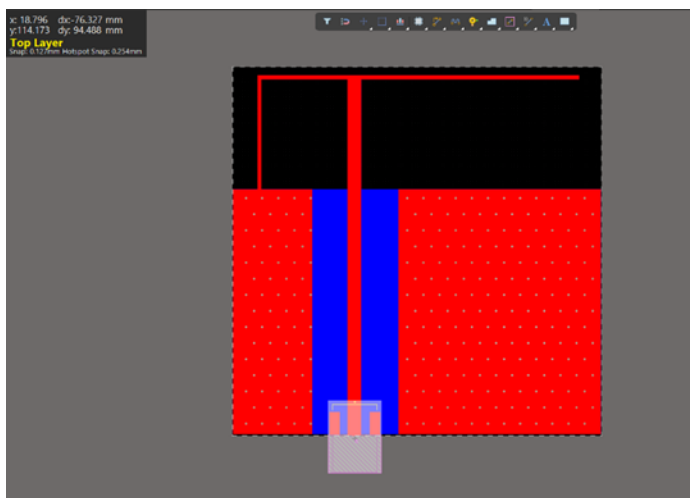


Fig: Top Layer of Antenna PCB



Fig: Multi-Layer View

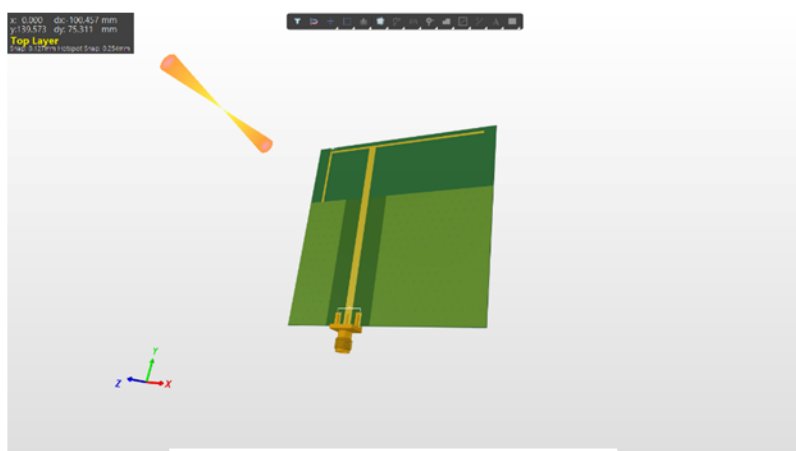


Fig: 3D View

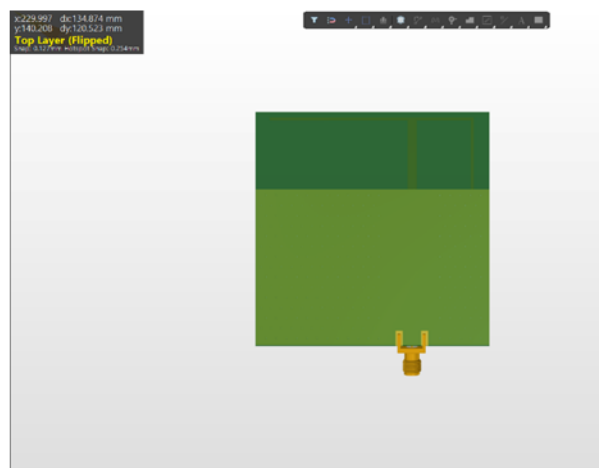


Fig: Bottom View

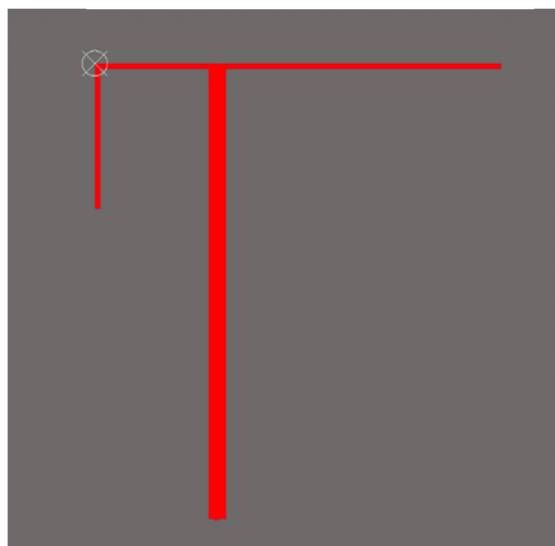


Fig: Antenna

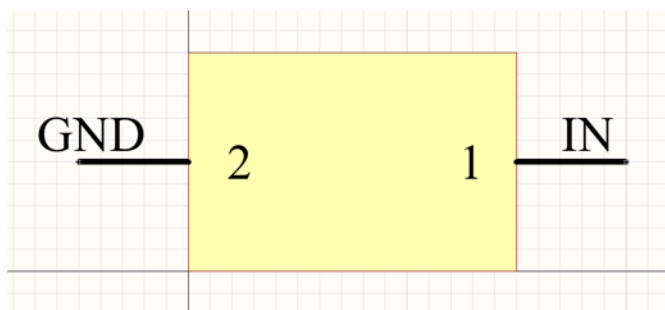
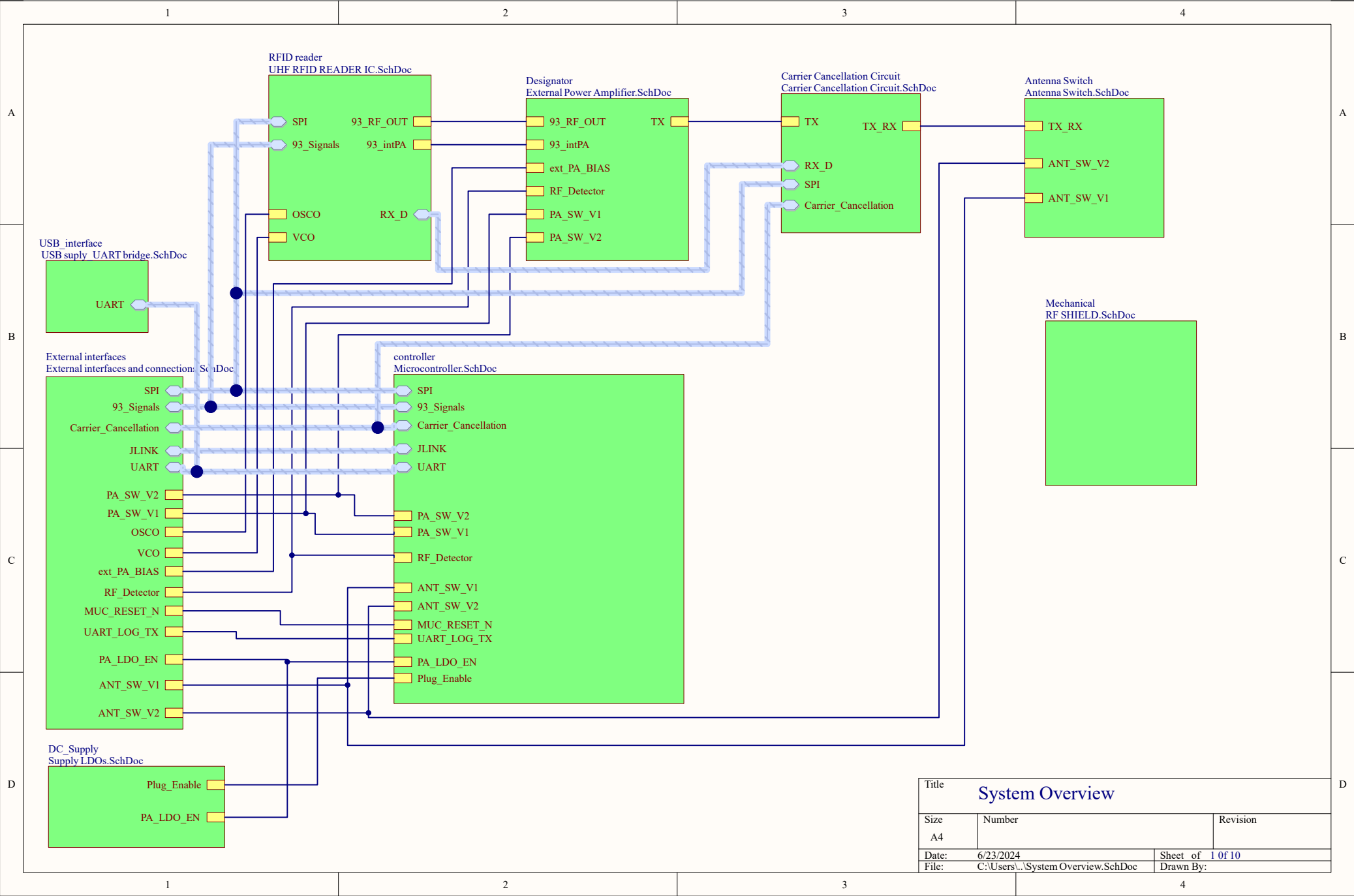
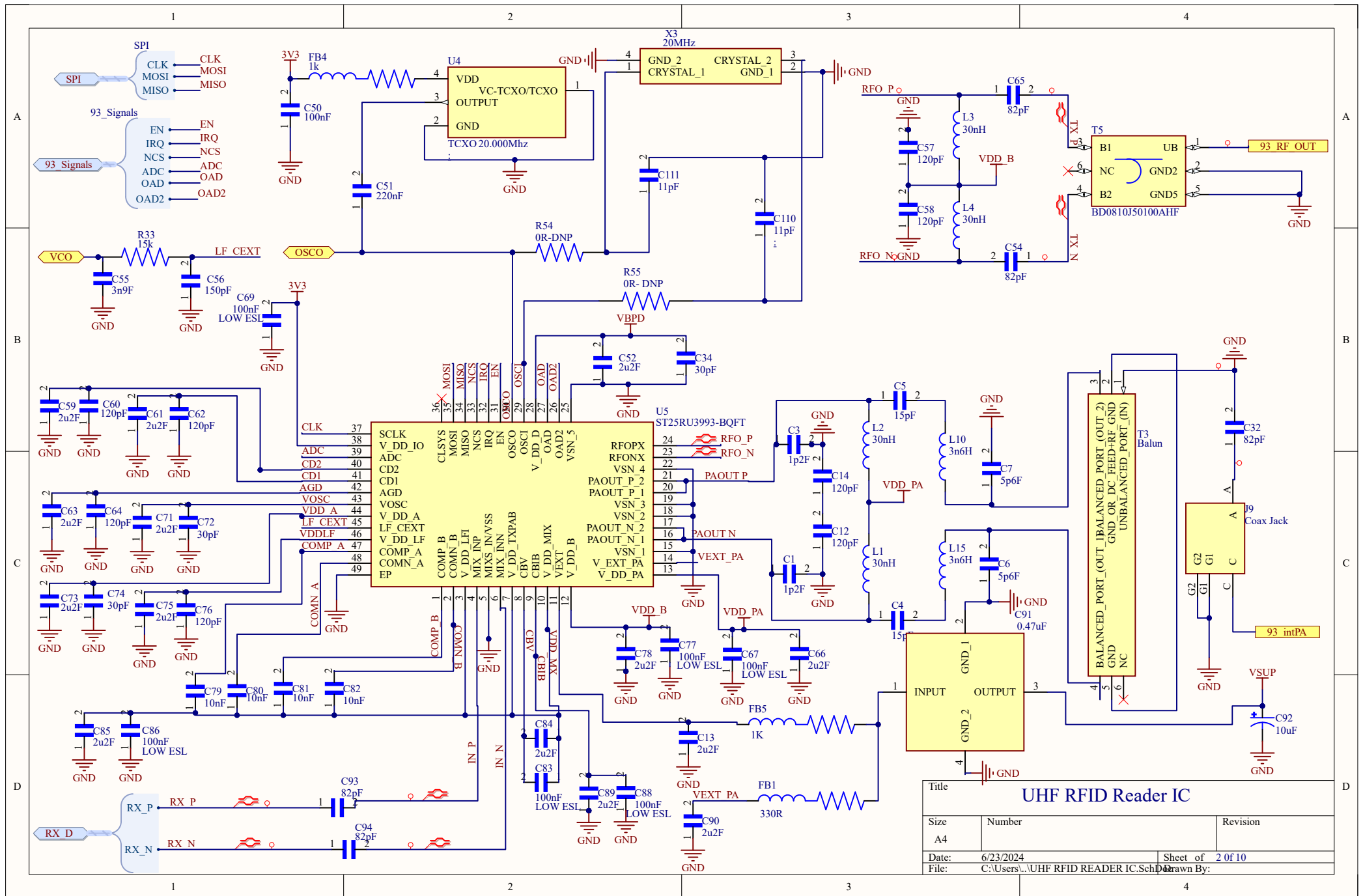


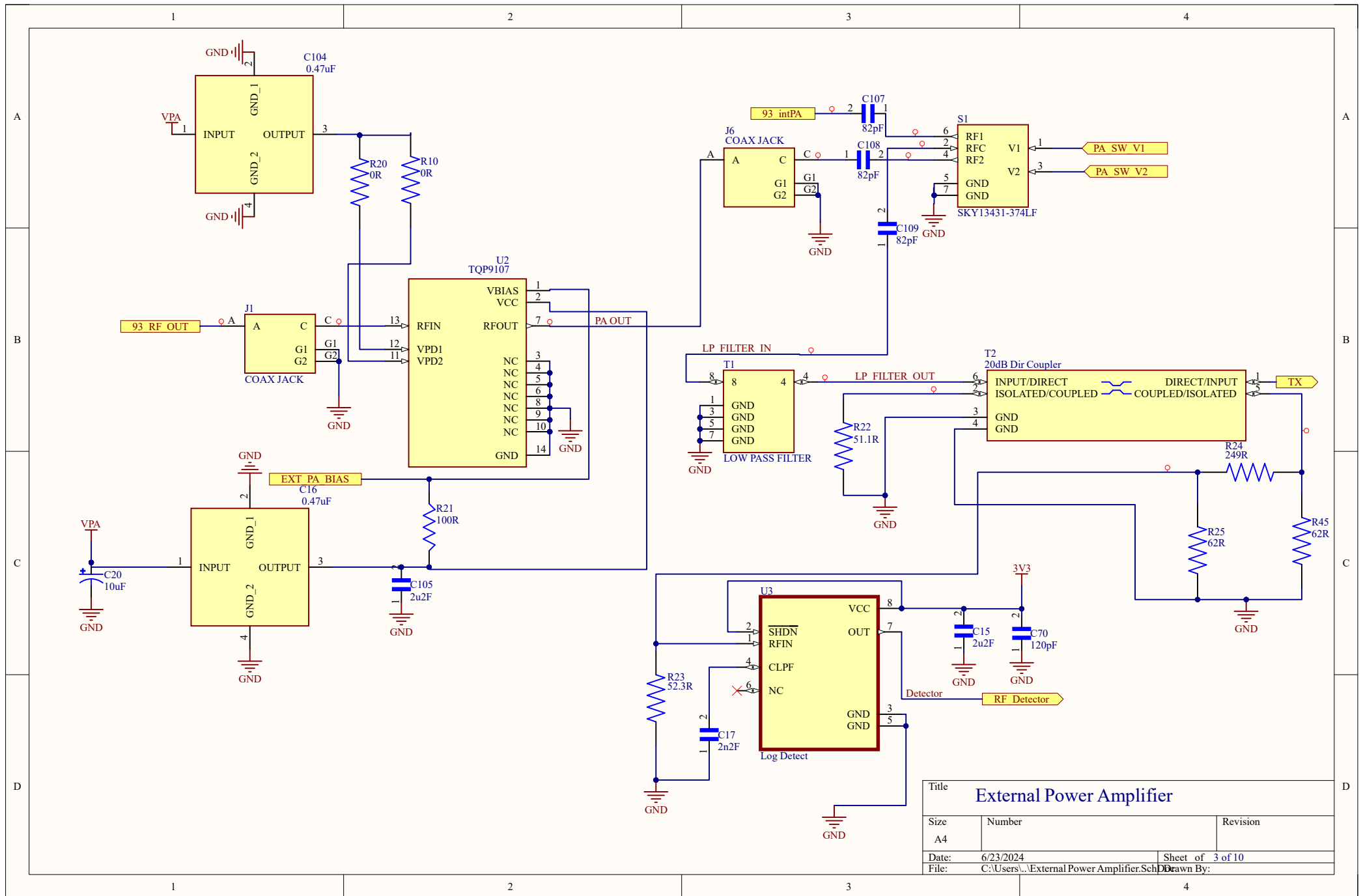
Fig: Schematic Library

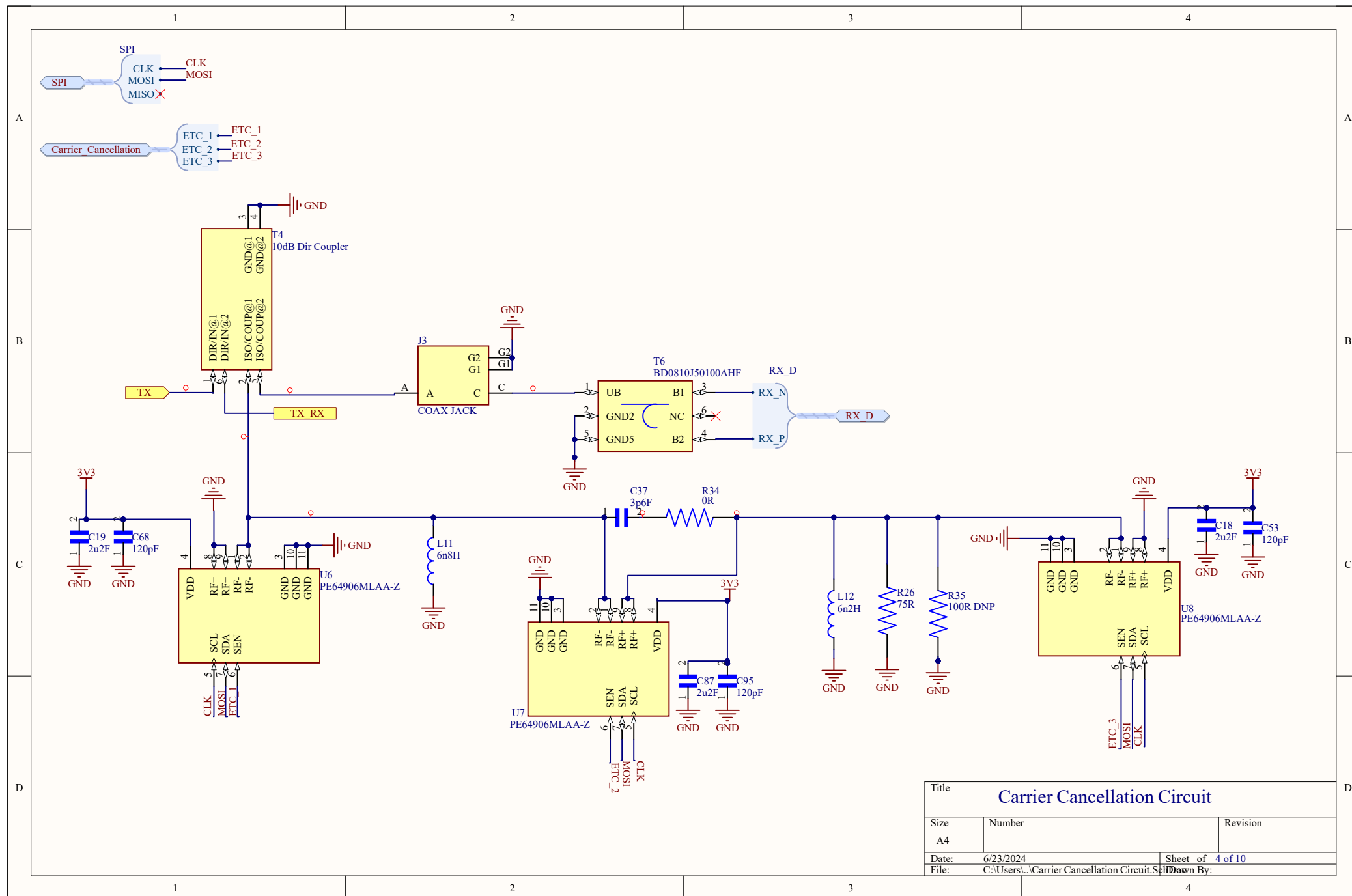


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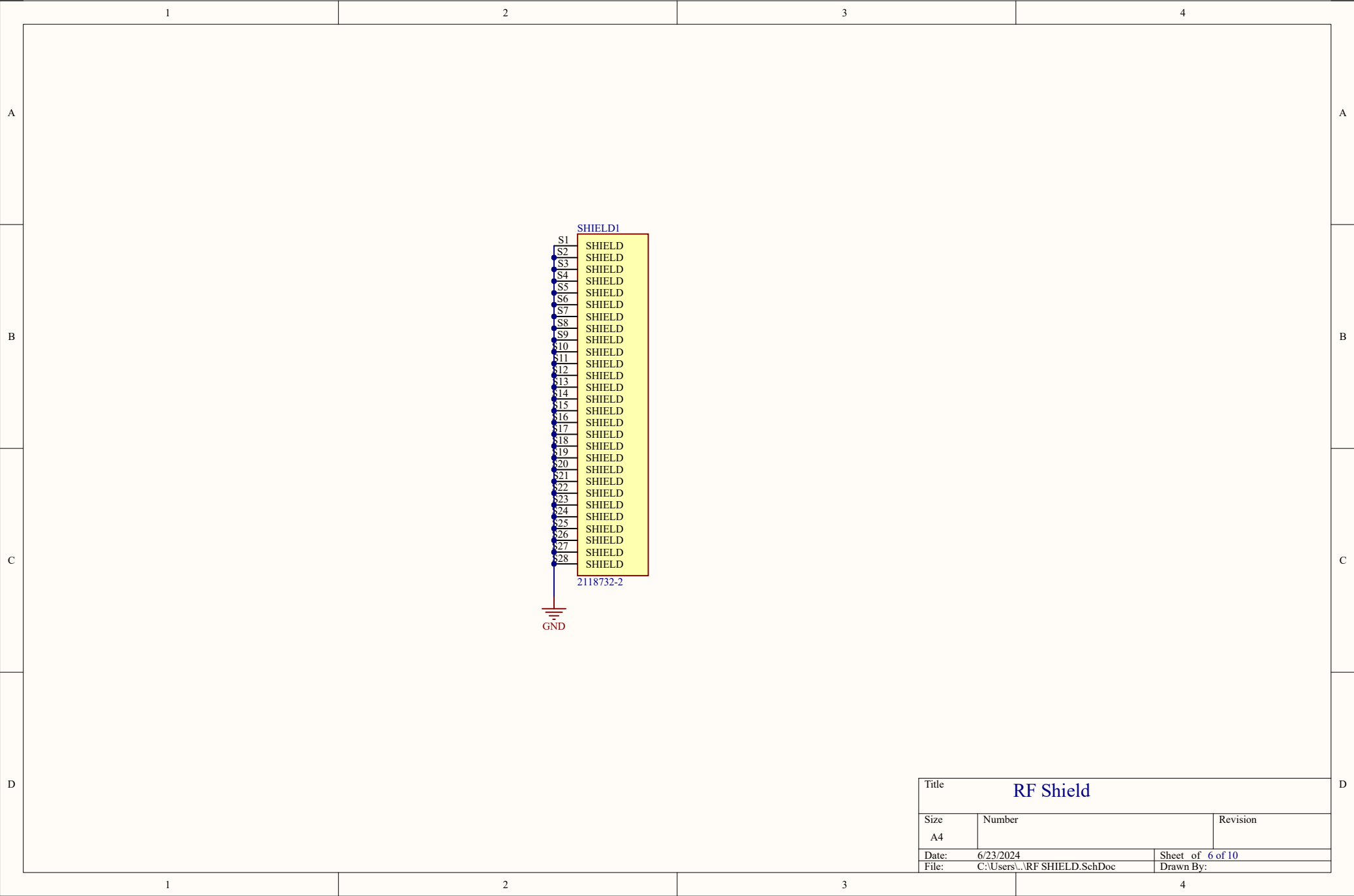


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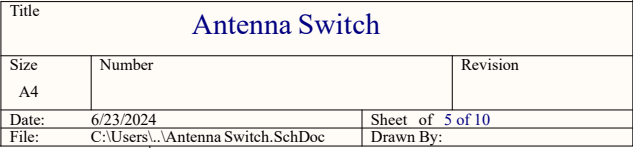


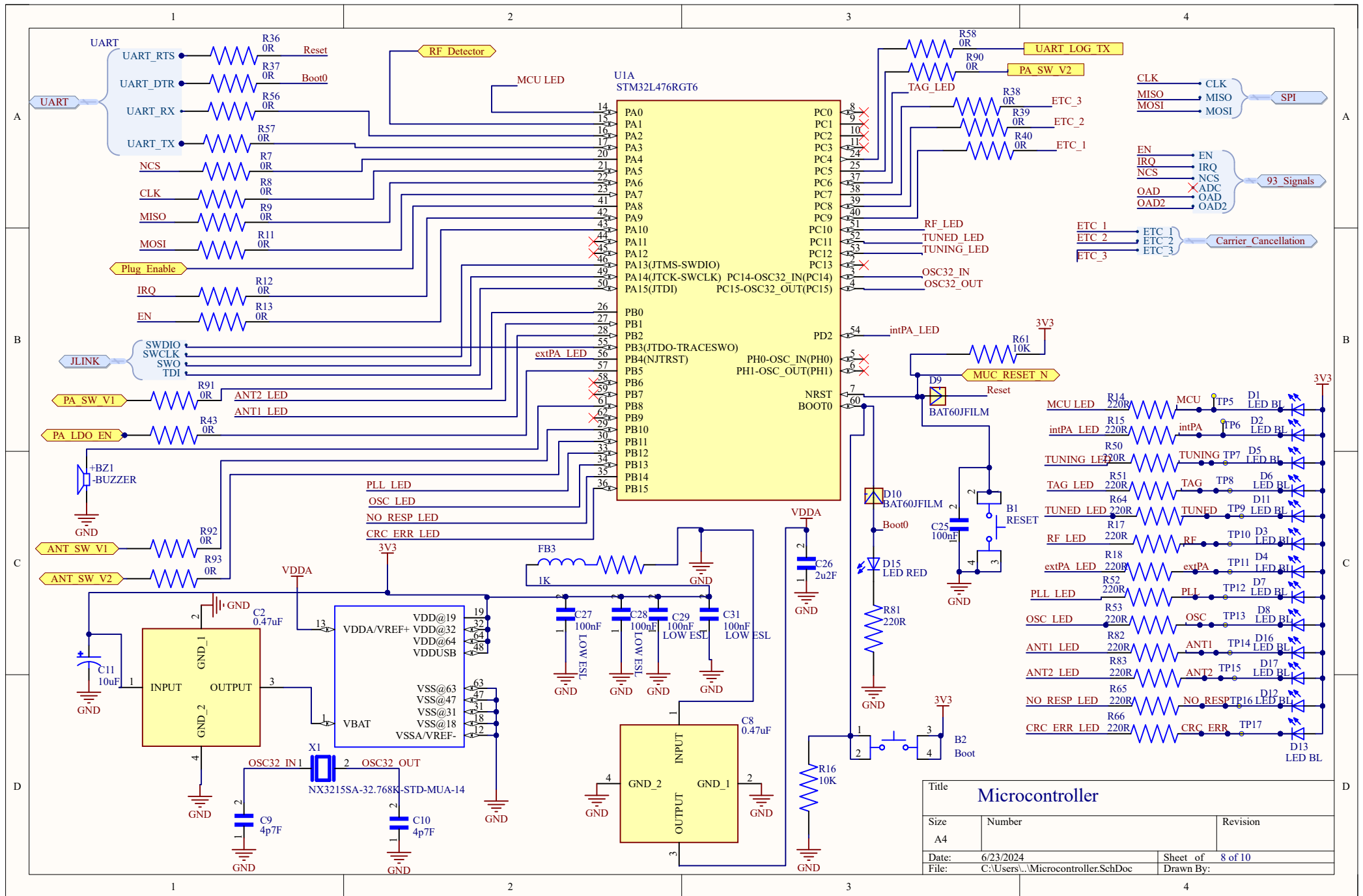


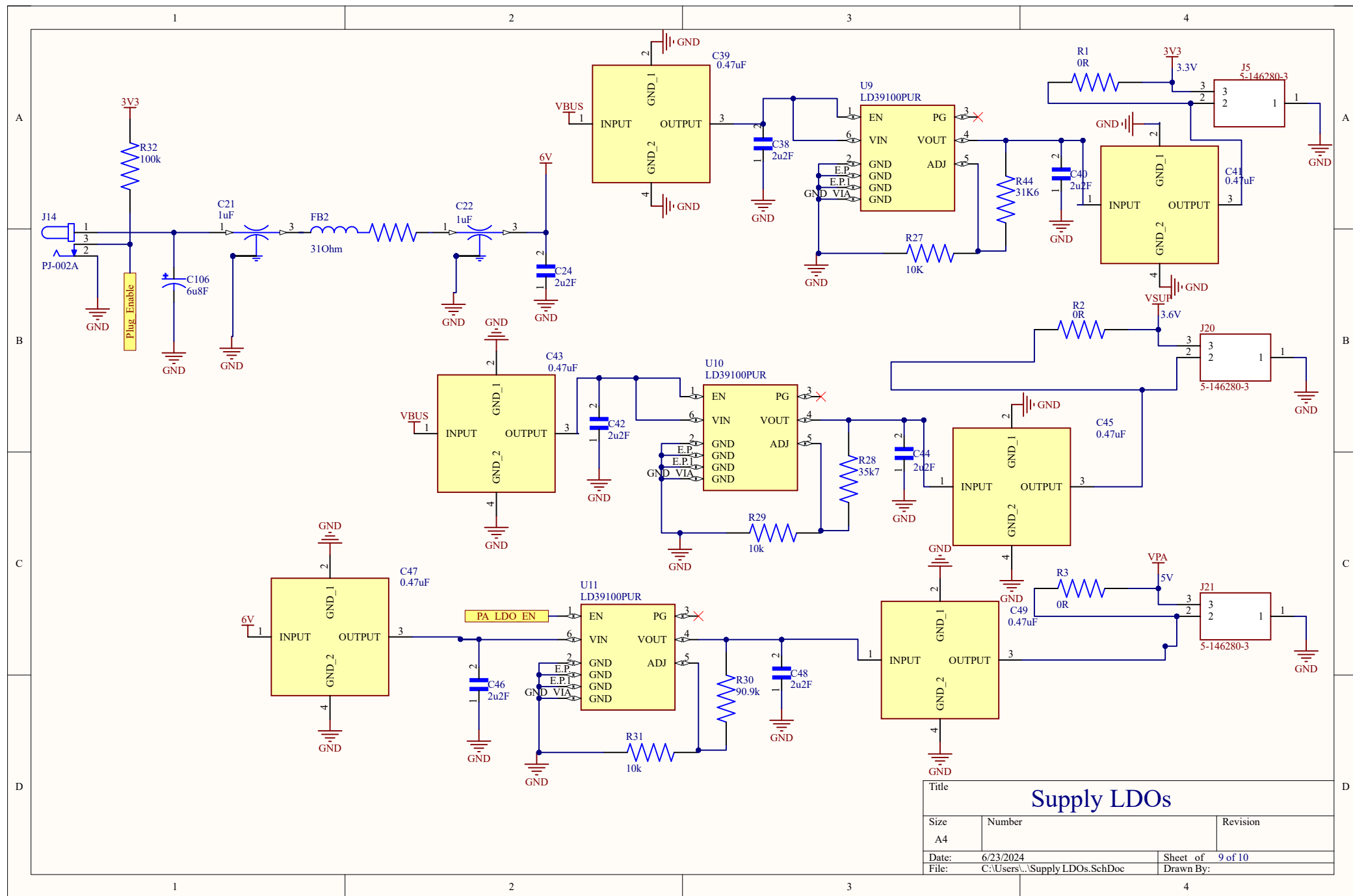
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Title		
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