

Technical Report: CubeSAT

QUT Aerospace Society

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Contents

- 1 CubeSAT Overview 2**
 - 1.1 Technical Breakdown 2
 - 1.1.1 Communication and Data Handling 3
 - Microcontroller Selection 3
 - GPS Selection 3
 - IMU Selection 4
 - Magnetometer Selection 4
 - Barometer Selection 5
 - 1.1.2 Radio Modem 5
 - 1.1.3 Antenna 5
- 2 Design Implementation 6**
 - 2.1 Power PCB Design 6
 - 2.2 Communications PCB Design 7
 - 2.3 Command and Data Handling Design 7
 - 2.3.1 PCB Design 7
 - 2.3.2 Data Handling 10
- 3 Design Verification and Validation 11**
 - 3.1 Payload Subsystem 11
 - 3.1.1 Microcontroller 11
- 4 System Requirements Compliance 12**

CubeSAT Overview

1.1 Technical Breakdown

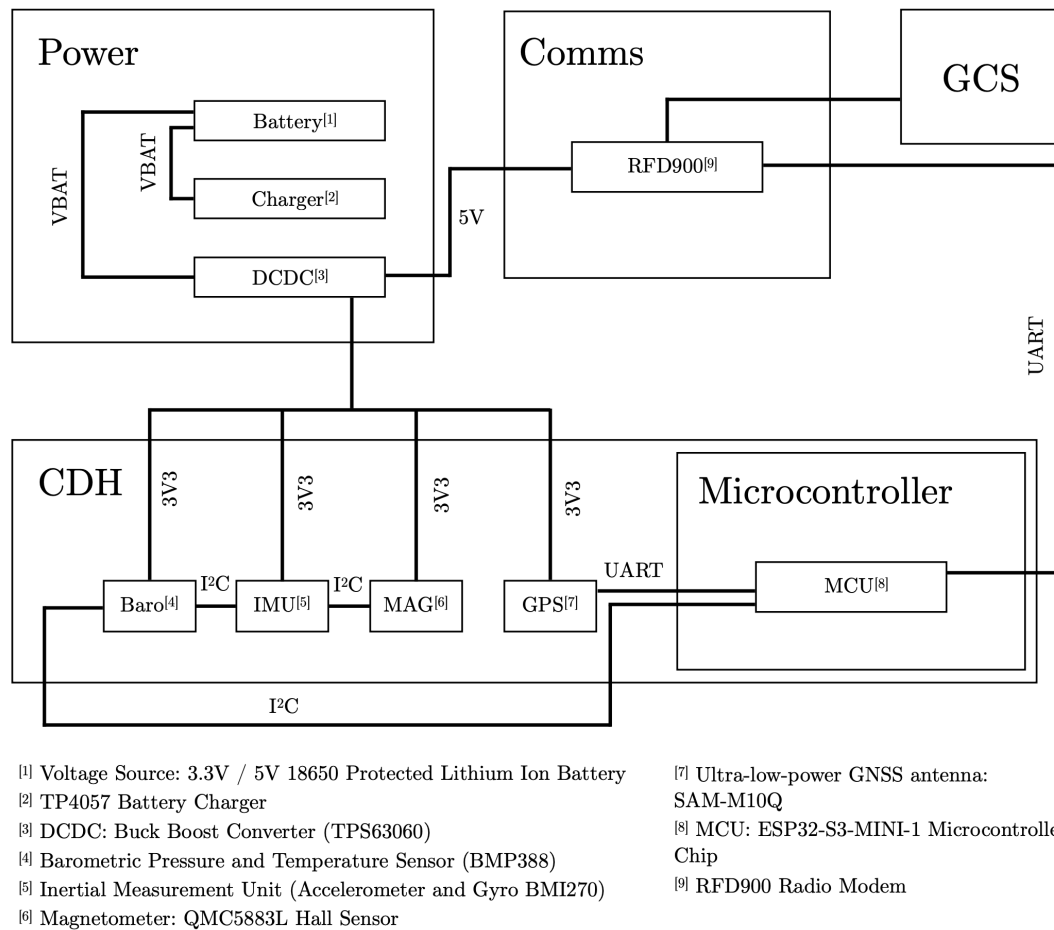


Figure 1.1: Block Diagram of the Payload Subsystem

The payload subsystem of the CubeSAT project is essential for the success of the project and for the collection of data. The system is powered via a 18650 LiPo battery which is regulated to 3.3V to power the barometer, IMU, Magnetometer, GPS, and microcontroller (ESP32-S3-Mini-1). The CubeSAT project consists of 5 PCBs with a 3D printed structure to house the components.

- Batteries
- Power Regulation
- Communication and Data Handling
 - Microcontroller PCB
 - Sensor PCB
 - * QMC5883L Magnetometer
 - * BMI270 IMU
 - * BMP388 Barometer
 - * SAM-M10Q GPS
 - * ESP32-S3-Mini-1
- Communications
 - RFD900
 - Antennas
- Communication Transmission (Antennae)

1.1.1 Communication and Data Handling

Microcontroller Selection

The microcontroller serves as the central processing unit for the CDH system, interfacing with sensors and managing data flow. The selection process shall consider the following requirements

- Support for I2C, and SPI communication protocols
- Dual-core architecture for efficient multitasking
- UART/Serial support for programming and communication
- USB bootloader availability for easy firmware updates
- Integrated flash memory for code storage (optional)
- Arduino IDE compatibility for ease of development

By factoring the above requirements, the following options were considered

- ESP32-S3-Mini-1
- RP2040
- STM32-F103

Given the similarity in functionality, and development support between all three options, the ESP32-S3-Mini-1 has been chosen for its reliability, prior experience with the team, and lack of impedance issues present in options such as the RP2040 [2]. Furthermore, its superior performance and efficiency compared to other options make it a viable candidate for future improvements, and enhancements to the project.

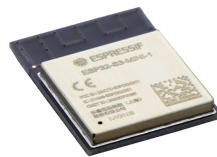


Figure 1.2: Image of the ESP32-S3-Mini-1 Microcontroller

GPS Selection

The GPS module serves as the primary source of location data for the CubeSAT, providing accurate positioning information for the payload. The selection process shall consider the following requirements

- Accuracy
 - Support for multi-band GNSS (L1/E1), with a ± 1.5 m horizontal accuracy
 - Position updates at a minimum rate of 10Hz for real-time tracking and navigation
- Communication
 - UART communication upto 115200 baud for interfacing with the microcontroller
 - Power efficient serial communication operation
- Operating power
 - 3.3 or 5V operating voltage for optimal compatibility with existing power systems
 - Consumption of < 25 mA during continuous tracking to remain within limited power budgets

Taking into account the above requirements, the SAM-M10Q GPS module was chosen for its high accuracy, low power consumption, and compatibility with the ESP32-S3-Mini. The module provides a high update rate of 10Hz, and supports multi-band GNSS for improved accuracy and reliability. Furthermore, its low power consumption of 21mA at 3.3V makes it an ideal candidate for the CubeSAT project [6]



Figure 1.3: Image of the SAM-M10Q GPS Module

IMU Selection

A low power, high accuracy IMU is essential for the CubeSAT project, providing accurate orientation and motion data for the payload. The selection process shall consider the following requirements

- Low cost (less than \$10 per unit)
- Low power and high precision (up to $\pm 16g$ accelerometer, ± 2000 degree/s gyroscope)
- Flexibility in communication (I2C, SPI)

By factoring the above requirements, the BMI270 IMU was chosen for its high accuracy, low power consumption, and compatibility with the ESP32-S3-Mini. The module provides a wide range of motion sensing capabilities, with a $\pm 16g$ accelerometer, and ± 2000 °/s gyroscope. Furthermore, its low power consumption of $700\mu A$ during operation, i2C (up to 3.4MHz) and SPI (up to 10MHz) communication interfaces, dual core architecture with a 16KB FIFO buffer for configuration and buffering, Arduino libraries for easy integration [3], and low cost of \$7 to \$10 per unit make it an ideal candidate for the CubeSAT project [3]

Magnetometer Selection

A space, cost, and energy efficient magnetometer is essential for the CubeSAT project, providing accurate magnetic field data for the payload. The selection process shall consider the following requirements

- Low cost (less than \$5 per unit)
- Low power and high precision (up to ± 8 gauss)
- Flexibility in communication (I2C, SPI)
- Small form factor for easy integration
- Wide operating temperature range (-40 to 85 °C)
- Low power consumption (less than $100\mu A$)

By factoring the above requirements, the QMC5883L magnetometer was chosen for its high accuracy, low power consumption, and compatibility with the ESP32-S3-Mini. The module provides a wide range of magnetic field sensing capabilities, with a ± 8 gauss range, and 0.2 gauss resolution. Furthermore, its low power consumption of $100\mu A$ during operation, I2C (up to 400kHz) communication interface, while it lacks SPI support, its small form factor, wide operating temperature range [1], and low cost of \$2 to \$5 per unit make it an ideal candidate for the CubeSAT project [1]

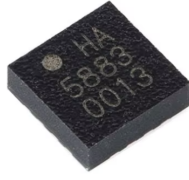


Figure 1.4: Image of the QMC5883L Magnetometer Module

Barometer Selection

A space, cost, and energy efficient barometer is essential for the CubeSAT project, providing accurate pressure data for the payload. The selection process shall consider the following requirements

- Low cost (less than \$5 per unit)
- Wide operating temperature range (-40 to 85 °C)
- Wide operating pressure range (30 to 125 kPa)
- High absolute accuracy (± 50 Pa)

Three barometers were considered for the CubeSAT project, the ICP10101, S-THP-01A, and the BMP388. However, the BMP388's superior accuracy (50Pa vs 100Pa for the ICP10101), support for a wider range of communication protocols (i2C and SPI vs i2C only for the ICP10101, and RS485 for the S-THP-01A), and lower cost (\$1.65 for the BMP388 vs \$6.08 for the ICP10101, and \$55.09 for the S-THP-01A) make it an ideal candidate for the CubeSAT project [3]



Figure 1.5: Image of the BMP388 Barometer Module

1.1.2 Radio Modem

The RFD900ux STM radio modem is used for communication between the CubeSAT and the ground station. The modem operates on the 915MHz frequency band, with a maximum output power of 1W, and a range of up to 40km. The modem supports serial communication at up to 115200 baud, with a power consumption of 1.5W during transmission, and 0.5W during reception. Simple integration using the MAVLink Protocol, and support for AES-128 encryption allows for easy integration and secure communication between the CubeSAT and the ground station.

1.1.3 Antenna

The antenna system consists of a pair of dipole antennas, one for the CubeSAT, and one for the ground station. The antennas are tuned to the 915MHz frequency band, with a gain of 2.15dB, and a VSWR of 1.5:1. The antennas are connected to the RFD900 radio modem via SMA connectors, providing a reliable and efficient communication link between the CubeSAT and the ground station.

Design Implementation

2.1 Power PCB Design

The power PCB is designed to regulate power from the batteries to the system of PCBs in the CubeSAT. The PCB consists of two TPS63060DSCR buck-boost converters, an STC3100IQT battery monitor, and a pair of 18650 LiPo batteries. The TPS63060DSCR buck-boost converters regulate voltage to 5V and 3.3V for the payload system, with the STC3100IQT battery monitor monitoring battery voltage and current. The buck-boost converter design follows the recommended configuration in the datasheets for a 3.3V and 5V output, where the voltage divider resistors were selected as follows

$$R_1 = R_2 \left(\frac{V_{OUT}}{V_{FB}} - 1 \right) \quad (\text{From datasheet})$$

Figure 2.1: Voltage Divider Calculation

Letting $R_2 = 200\text{k}\Omega$, the voltage divider resistors were calculated as follows

For 3.3V output

$$\begin{aligned} R_1 &= 200\text{k}\Omega \left(\frac{3.3\text{V}}{0.5\text{V}} - 1 \right) \\ R_1 &= 200\text{k}\Omega (6.6 - 1) \\ &= 1120\text{k}\Omega \approx 1.1\text{M}\Omega \end{aligned}$$

For 5V output

$$\begin{aligned} R_1 &= 200\text{k}\Omega \left(\frac{5\text{V}}{0.5\text{V}} - 1 \right) \\ R_1 &= 200\text{k}\Omega (10 - 1) \\ &= 1800\text{k}\Omega = 1.8\text{M}\Omega \end{aligned}$$

The batteries are connected in parallel to provide redundancy and increase capacity. The PCBs were designed using Altium Designer, and each component was integrated using the recommended configuration in the datasheets. The resultant schematic and PCB layout is provided below.

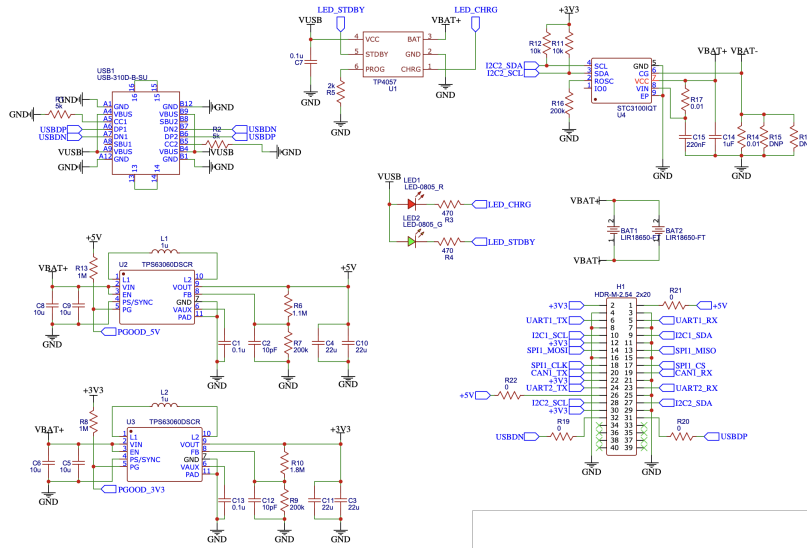


Figure 2.2: Power Regulation Schematic

The battery monitor provides a voltage and current reading for the batteries, allowing for real-time monitoring of battery health and performance. The configuration follows the recommended configuration in the datasheet [4] (Figure 2.3).

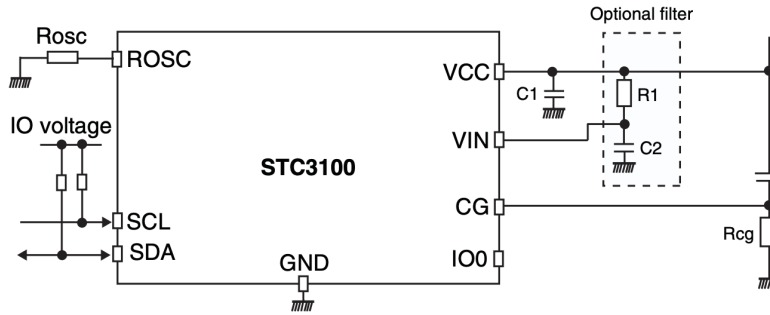


Figure 2.3: Battery Monitor Configuration

2.2 Communications PCB Design

The communications PCB is designed to interface with the RFD900ux STM radio modem to provide communication between the CubeSAT and the ground station. The PCB consists of an RFD900ux STM radio modem, and an RFDesign Flex1-UX antenna. The combination of the RFD900ux STM radio modem and the RFDesign Flex1-UX antenna provides a reliable and efficient communication link between the CubeSAT and the ground station while avoiding bottlenecks in data transmission due to their similar frequency bands and the low return loss of the antenna.

2.3 Command and Data Handling Design

2.3.1 PCB Design

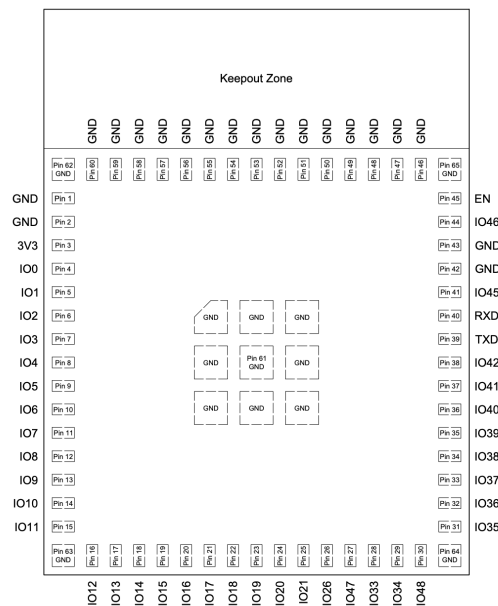


Figure 2.4: ESP32S3 Microcontroller Pin Configuration

Using the sample configuration specified in the datasheet 2.5 [5], the ESP32-S3-Mini-1 was integrated into the CDH PCB in order to interact with the sensors and radio through the I2C and SPI communication protocols. It must be noted that the ESP32-S3-MINI-1 was utilized for cost efficiency and had the keepout zone cut off to accomodate the specification. However, redesigns were not necessary as the pin configuration is identical to the ESP32-S3-MINI-1U.

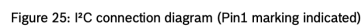


Figure 2.6: Barometer Datasheet Configuration

words

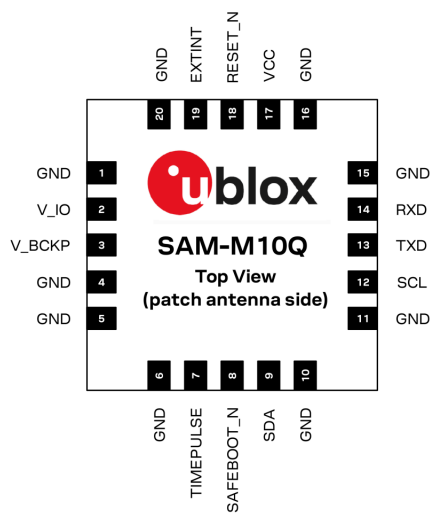


Figure 2.7: GPS Datasheet Configuration

words

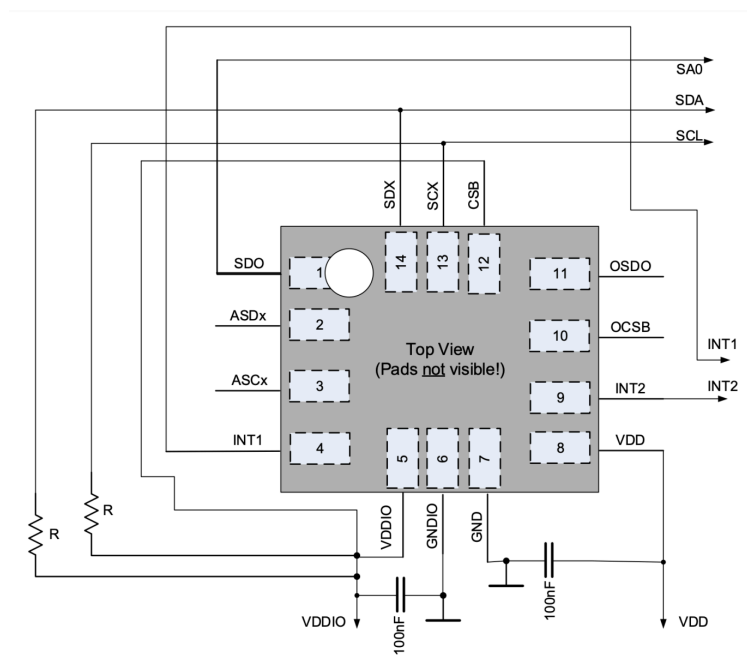


Figure 2.8: IMU Datasheet Configuration

words

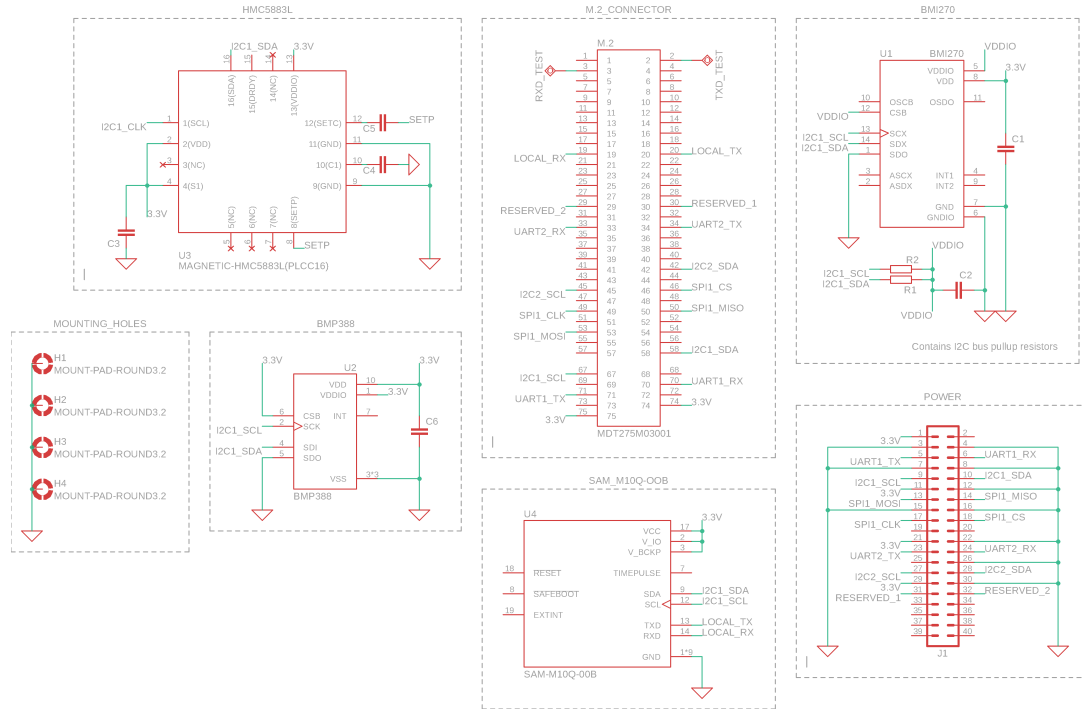


Figure 2.9: Final CDH Schematic

2.3.2 Data Handling

CDH Pseudocode

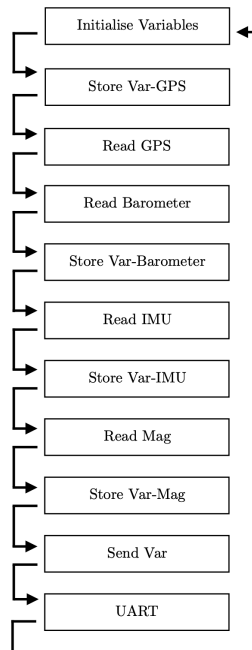


Figure 2.10: Data Handling Program Flowchart

Design Verification and Validation

3.1 Payload Subsystem

3.1.1 Microcontroller

The data handling code was first tested for functionality on a development board before being ported to the ESP32-S3-Mini-1. The code was tested for functionality and performance, with the microcontroller interfacing with the sensors.

System Requirements Compliance

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