

Capless LDO Regulator Achieving –76 dB PSR and 96.3 fs FOM

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Abstract—The performance of switching devices such as display driver ICs is degraded by large power supply noise at switching frequencies from a few hundreds of kilohertz to a few megahertz. In order to minimize the power supply noise, a low-dropout (LDO) regulator with higher power supply rejection (PSR) is essential. In this brief, a capless LDO regulator with a negative capacitance circuit and voltage damper is proposed for enhancing PSR and figure of merit (FOM), respectively, in switching devices. The proposed LDO regulator is fabricated in a 0.18 μm CMOS. Measurement results show that the proposed LDO regulator achieves –76 dB PSR at 1 MHz and 96.3 fs FOM with a total on-chip capacitance of as small as 12.7 pF.

Index Terms—Low-dropout (LDO) regulator, negative capacitance, power supply rejection (PSR).

I. INTRODUCTION

THE INCREASING demands for larger display and higher resolution have meant that display driver ICs (DDIs) have been developed with more driving channels. This has led to larger switching current and larger supply noise at the switching frequency range from a few hundreds of kilohertz to a few megahertz [1]. As a result, the perturbed bias voltage of each pixel due to the supply noise degrades the display quality. In order to overcome this problem, a low-dropout (LDO) regulator with higher power supply rejection (PSR) for the aforementioned frequency range is generally required. Several LDO regulators with high PSR have been proposed over the last few years [2]–[6]. However, these conventional LDO regulators require a large external output capacitor, which prevents their use in fully integrated system-on-chip designs; capless LDO regulators are thus preferred in these applications [7]–[13].

Several techniques can be used to achieve high PSR performance in designing capless LDO regulators. The supply noise shielding technique in [7] uses an nMOS cascode transistor with its gate biased separately as a source follower,

in order to prevent the entire regulator from fluctuating caused by the power supply noise. However, this technique is not suitable for most applications due to the high dropout voltage and the poor transient response. To overcome these drawbacks, the feed-forward supply-noise cancellation technique was proposed in [8], but it exhibits poor PSR performance due to the sensitivity in the variations of the input voltage and the load current. Another method with the power supply ripple injection filter was proposed in [1], although its PSR performance is limited because the ripple rejection accuracy purely depends on the passive elements of the filter. In contrast to both of these methods (with the maximum load capacitance of less than 100 pF), a capless LDO regulator with the load capacitance larger than 100 pF was presented in [9]. However, the PSR of the aforementioned capless LDO regulators is limited to –41 dB PSR at 1 MHz [1], [7]–[9]. To achieve –70 dB PSR at 1 MHz, the feed-forward current injection technique was introduced in [10] at the expense of large on-chip capacitance of 28 pF and a poor figure of merit (FOM) of 290 fs.

This brief presents a capless LDO regulator that achieves high PSR performance and superior FOM while using the smallest on chip capacitance compared to other capless LDO regulators. This brief is organized as follows. The proposed PSR enhancing scheme is presented in Section II. Design considerations for the fundamental circuit blocks are discussed in Section III. Simulation and experimental results of the proposed LDO regulator are presented in Sections IV and V, respectively, followed by the conclusion in Section VI.

II. PROPOSED LDO REGULATOR

A. Basic Structure

The proposed negative capacitance circuit (NCC) allows for higher PSR performance with a simpler and smaller circuit.

Fig. 1 shows the fundamental blocks of the proposed LDO regulator composed of an error amplifier (EA), a pass transistor M_P , a frequency compensator (FC), the voltage damper (VD), and the NCC. C_L and R_L refer to the load capacitor and load resistor, respectively, which are externally connected for the test. The proposed LDO regulator adopts the conventional FC for a phase margin higher than 60° [10]. The NCC is modeled as a variable capacitor with a negative value. The main path of the supply noise in the conventional LDO regulator is the supply voltage coupled through the gate-source and the gate-ground parasitic capacitances of M_P . The coupled gate-source

Manuscript received September 6, 2016; revised November 7, 2016; accepted November 13, 2016. Date of publication November 15, 2016; date of current version September 25, 2017. This work was supported in part by the Basic Science Research Program through the National Research Foundation of Korea within the Ministry of Science, ICT and Future Planning under Grant NRF-2014R1A1A1003771 and in part by Samsung Electronics. This brief was recommended by Associate Editor H.-J. Chiu.

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Digital Object Identifier 10.1109/TCSII.2016.2628965

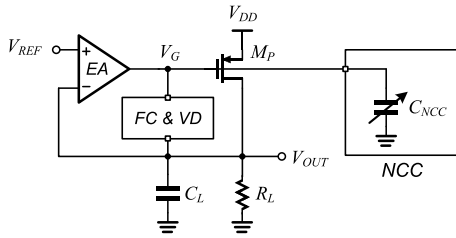


Fig. 1. Fundamental blocks of the proposed LDO regulator.

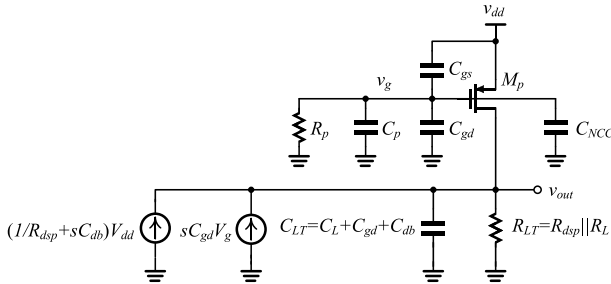


Fig. 2. Small-signal equivalent circuit of the proposed LDO regulator.

voltage from the supply is converted into a current through M_P , resulting in PSR performance degradation by affecting the output voltage of the LDO regulator. The NCC cancels the supply noise coupling effect by adding the negative capacitance, C_{NCC} , to the gate node of M_P , which enhances the PSR performance significantly at a certain frequency range.

B. Small-Signal Analysis of the Proposed LDO Regulator

Fig. 2 shows the small-signal equivalent circuit of the proposed LDO regulator. R_p and C_p are the parasitic resistance and capacitance, respectively, which include EA, FC, and VD. C_{gs} and C_{gd} represent the parasitic capacitances of the gate-source and the gate-drain of M_P , respectively. The two voltage controlled current sources, $(1/R_{dsp} + sC_{db})v_{dd}$ and $sC_{gd}v_g$, are the feed-forward paths due to the drain-bulk parasitic capacitance of M_P , C_{db} , and C_{gd} , respectively. The total load resistance R_{LT} meets $R_{LT} = R_{dsp} || R_L$, where R_{dsp} is the drain-source parasitic resistance of M_P . Since the effect of these current sources in the PSR performance is trivial, they can be neglected in the small signal analysis [10]. In the conventional LDO regulator without C_{NCC} , the small signal gate voltage of M_P , v_g , can be approximated as

$$v_g = \frac{sC_{gs}}{\frac{1}{R_p} + s(C_{gs} + C_p + C_{gd})} v_{dd} \cong \frac{C_{gs}}{C_{gs} + C_p + C_{gd}} v_{dd}. \quad (1)$$

Note that R_p is large enough for $1/R_p$ to be ignored [10]. Therefore, v_g can be approximated as a linear function of the small signal supply voltage v_{dd} . In the proposed LDO regulator, the correlation between v_g and v_{dd} in (1) can be eliminated at the expense of an additional capacitance C_{NCC} at the gate of M_P , which can be rewritten as

$$v_g \cong \frac{C_{gs}}{C_{gs} + C_p + C_{gd} + C_{NCC}} v_{dd}. \quad (2)$$

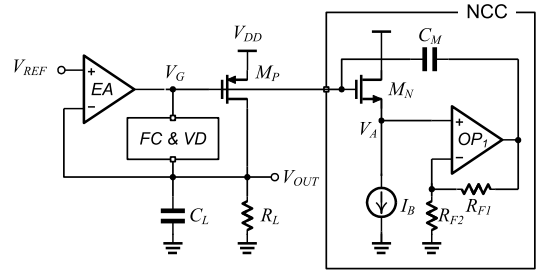


Fig. 3. Implementation of NCC with fundamental blocks.

If C_{NCC} cancels out the parasitic capacitances C_p and C_{gd} as

$$C_{\text{NCC}} = -(C_p + C_{\text{gd}}) \quad (3)$$

then v_g can be simply approximated as

$$v_g \cong \frac{C_{gs}}{C_{gs} + C_p + C_{gd} - (C_p + C_{gd})} v_{dd} = v_{dd}. \quad (4)$$

The small signal gate-source voltage of M_P is approximated to zero as $v_{gs} = v_g - v_s = v_{dd} - v_{dd} = 0$, which means the small signal output voltage v_{out} is zero and thus enhances PSR by eliminating the supply voltage induced noise through M_P .

III. CIRCUIT IMPLEMENTATION

A. Negative Capacitance Circuit

The circuit diagram of NCC shown in Fig. 3 is the implementation of the negative capacitance discussed in (3). NCC includes the noninverting amplifier with OP_1 , R_{F1} , R_{F2} , and the miller capacitor C_M . The equivalent capacitance C_{NCC} can be modulated by the Miller effect as

$$C_{\text{NCC}} = C_M(1 - A_{CL}) = C_M \left\{ 1 - \left(1 + \frac{R_{F1}}{R_{F2}} \right) \right\} = -\frac{R_{F1}}{R_{F2}} C_M \quad (5)$$

where A_{CL} is the closed loop gain of the non-inverting amplifier. To control the negative capacitance C_{NCC} , a feedback resistor R_{F1} or R_{F2} can be digitally controlled. Consequently, this scheme has two advantages as follows.

- 1) The value of negative capacitance can be optimized according to the operating conditions,
- 2) On-chip capacitance C_M , of which the maximum value is equal to $C_p + C_{gd}$, can be minimized by depending on the ratio of the feedback resistors R_{F1} and R_{F2} .

While the source follower M_N is not necessary for implementing the NCC, it reduces the voltage level of V_A for the required headroom range of O_{P1} .

B. Voltage Damper

Since a capless LDO regulator cannot take advantage of a large decoupling capacitor for absorbing the voltage spike at the output when the load current is abruptly changed, fast load-transient performance is one of the most important features of a capless LDO regulator. The conventional capless LDO regulators generally adopt additional transient enhancing schemes at the expense of larger power dissipation [14]–[18].

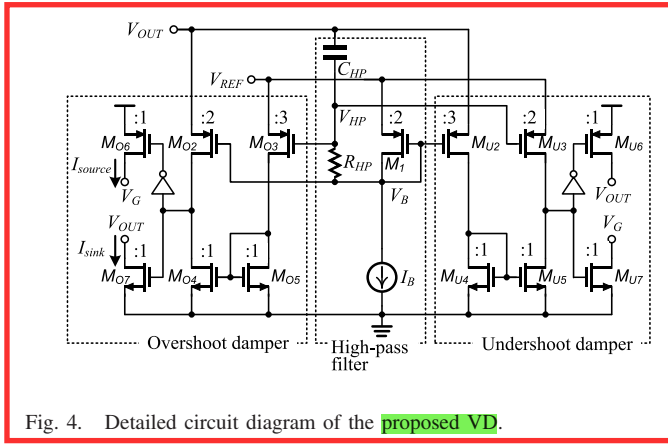


Fig. 4. Detailed circuit diagram of the proposed VD.

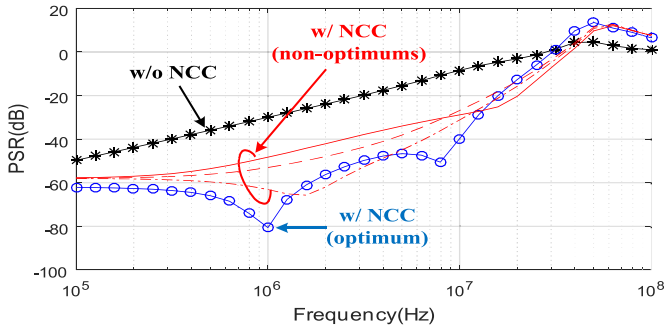


Fig. 5. Simulated PSR performance of the proposed LDO regulator with and without NCC at 50 mA load condition.

In the proposed LDO regulator, a VD is proposed as a simple transient enhancing scheme with its stand-by current of less than 1% of the overall quiescent current.

The circuit diagram of the proposed VD shown in Fig. 4 is composed of a high-pass filter, an overshoot damper, and an undershoot damper. In the high-pass filter, any abrupt change in V_{OUT} is transferred to V_{HP} , while the dc bias is supplied by V_B . The overshoot damper consists of an asymmetrical input stage (the common-gate amplifier of M_{O2} and the common-source amplifier of M_{O3}), active loads (M_{O4} and M_{O5}), and p/nMOS switches (M_{O6} and M_{O7}). When the overshoot voltage is applied to the asymmetrical input stage, the gate-source voltage of M_{O2} increases and vice versa for M_{O3} . This mitigates the overshoot by increasing both the current I_{source} to the V_G node and I_{sink} from the V_{OUT} node.

The undershoot damper also consists of an asymmetrical input stage (M_{U2} and M_{U3}), active loads (M_{U4} and M_{U5}) and p/nMOS switches (M_{U6} and M_{U7}). Similarly, the undershoot damper can mitigate undershoots at V_{OUT} by increasing both the source current to the V_{OUT} node and the sink current from the V_G node. The quiescent current of VD including the bias current I_B is 0.7 μA .

IV. SIMULATION RESULTS

Fig. 5 shows the simulated PSR performance of the proposed LDO regulator with and without NCC at a load current of 50 mA. The optimum PSR performance at a certain frequency range can be found by controlling the ratio of R_{F1}/R_{F2} shown in Fig. 3. The maximum PSR enhancement of

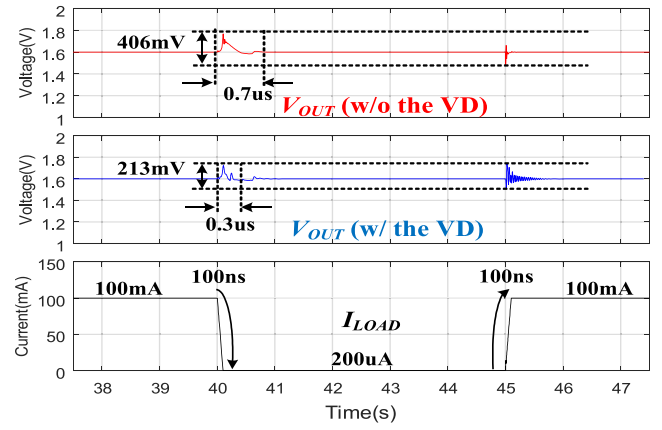
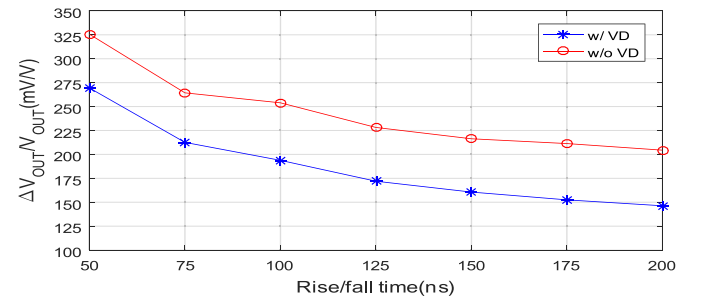


Fig. 6. Simulated load transient response of the proposed LDO regulator with and without the VD.

Fig. 7. Simulated $\Delta V_{OUT}/V_{OUT}$ of the proposed LDO regulator with and without VD under various rise/fall time.

the proposed LDO regulator over the LDO without NCC is obtained as 50 dB at 1 MHz.

The simulated load transient responses of the proposed LDO regulator with and without VD are shown in Fig. 6. For both cases, the step load current from 200 μA to 100 mA is applied to V_{OUT} with its rise/fall time of 100 ns. The peak-to-peak output voltage of the proposed LDO regulator with VD is 310 mV, resulting in 23.6% reduction compared with that without VD. The simulated $\Delta V_{OUT}/V_{OUT}$ of the proposed LDO regulator with and without VD under various rise/fall times is shown in Fig. 7, which shows a decrease in $\Delta V_{OUT}/V_{OUT}$ as the rise/fall time increases.

V. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

The proposed LDO regulator is fabricated in a 0.18 μm CMOS. Fig. 8 shows a microphotograph of the proposed LDO regulator. The active area of the proposed LDO regulator is 0.033 mm², excluding options for digitally controlling R_{F2} and regulator. The active area of the proposed LDO regulator is 0.033 mm², excluding options for digitally controlling R_{F2} and the serial-to-parallel interface. The regulated output voltage of the LDO regulator is 1.6 V for the input voltage ranging from 1.8 to 2.2 V. The total on-chip capacitance is as small as 12.7 pF. The output capacitance of 100 pF is externally added to model the power line capacitance of V_{OUT} node. The quiescent current varies from 71 to 101 μA under the possible load current range from 0.2 to 100 mA. The measurement setups for PSR and the load transient are shown in Fig. 9. To inject

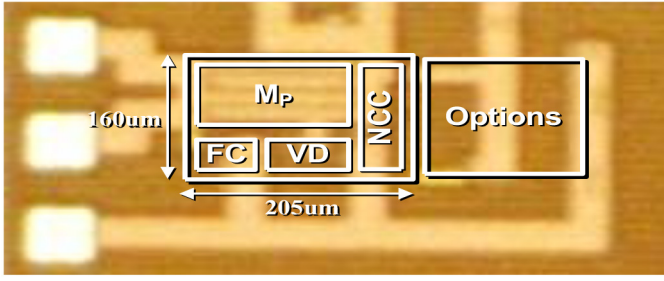


Fig. 8. Microphotograph of the proposed LDO regulator.

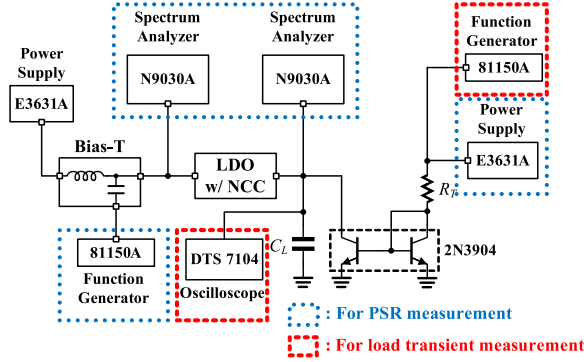


Fig. 9. Measurement setup.

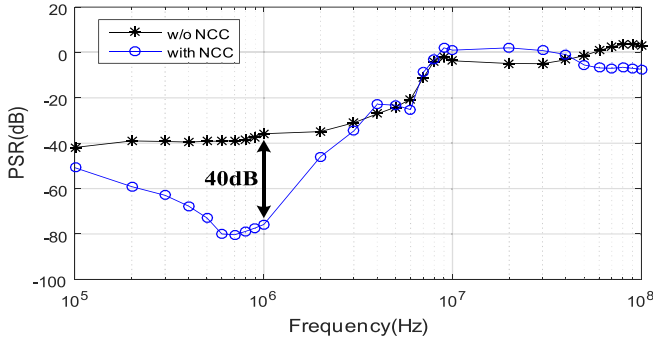
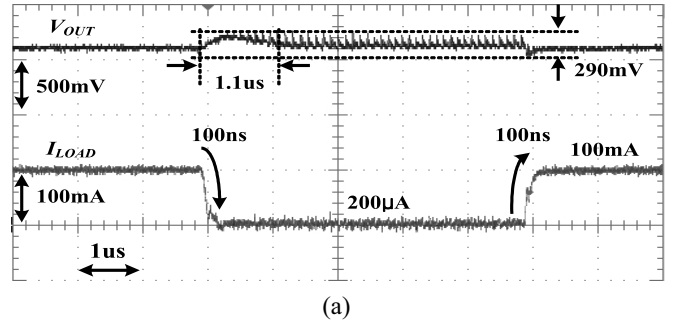


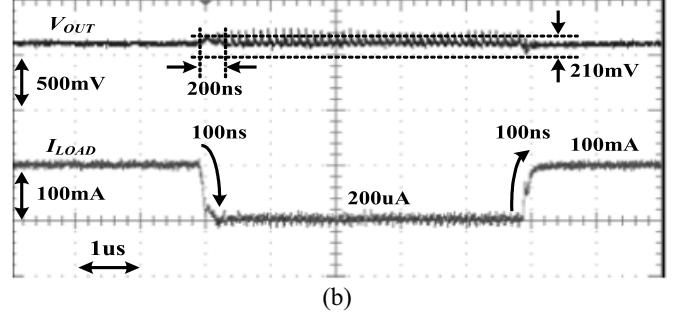
Fig. 10. Measured PSR performance of the proposed LDO regulator with and without NCC at 50 mA load condition.

supply noise, a dc bias voltage and a sine wave are combined by using a bias tee. An input sine wave was swept from 0.1 to 100 MHz to evaluate the PSR of the proposed LDO regulator. The pulse output of the function generator is applied to the bipolar junction transistor current mirror for load transient measurement.

Fig. 10 depicts the measured PSR performance of the proposed LDO regulator with and without the NCC at a load current of 50 mA. The proposed LDO regulator with the NCC achieves 40 dB superior PSR over that without NCC in the 0.6–1 MHz range. Especially, at 1 MHz, −76 dB PSR is obtained by the proposed LDO. The PSR enhancement is rapidly decreased at frequencies over 2 MHz due to the bandwidth limitation of OP_1 . If it is possible to increase the bandwidth of OP_1 using an advanced process, the PSR performance at the high frequency range can be further enhanced. Fig. 11 compares the measured load transient response of the proposed LDO regulator without VD



(a)



(b)

Fig. 11. Measured load transient response of the proposed LDO regulator (a) without the VD and (b) with the VD.

TABLE I
PERFORMANCE COMPARISON

Parameter	[1]	[8]	[9]	[10]	[12]	This work
Year	2012	2011	2015	2014	2015	2016
Technology (μm)	0.13	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.065	0.18
$I_{LOAD,max}$ (mA)	50	25	10	50	10	100
V_{OUT} (V)	1	1.5	1.2	1.6	1	1.6
V_{DROP} (mV)	200	300	600	200	150	200
I_Q (μA)	37.32	300	265	80	50–90	71–101
C_{LOAD} (pF)	20	25	600	100	130	100
$C_{ON-CHIP}$ (pF)	41	100	40	28	N/A	12.7
PSR@1MHz (dB)	-40	-40	-41	-70	-21	-76
ΔI_{LOAD} (mA)	49.95	25	9.99	50	10	99.8
$\Delta V_{OUT}/V_{OUT}$ (mV/V)	94	N/A	36.7	125	82	131
Edge times Δt (μs)	0.2	N/A	0.05	0.1	0.0002	0.1
Area (mm ²)	0.018	0.041	0.079	0.14	0.023	0.033
Current efficiency (%)	99.92	98.8	97.35	99.84	99.5	99.93
FOM* (fs)	28.1	N/A	42400	290	26600	96.3

*FOM = $C_{LOAD} \Delta V_{OUT} I_Q / (a \Delta I_{LOAD}^2)$, where a is a process scaling factor.

and with VD. Similar to the simulation setups, the step load current is applied to V_{OUT} from 0.2 to 100 mA with its rise/fall time of 100 ns. The proposed LDO regulator without VD shows the undershoot and the overshoot output voltages of 200 and 90 mV, respectively, and a settling time of 1.1 μs. The undershoot and the overshoot output voltages of the proposed LDO regulator with VD are reduced to 110 and 100 mV, respectively, with its settling time of 200 ns.

The proposed LDO regulator is compared with other capless LDO regulators in [1], [8]–[10], and [12] as shown in Table I, where the PSR performance and current efficiency

of the proposed LDO regulator is shown to be superior to other LDO regulators with the least amount of on-chip capacitance. The performance of the FOM of the proposed LDO regulator follows. Even though the LDO regulator in [1] exhibits the best FOM, its ΔV_{OUT} is measured at the rise/fall time of 200 ns unlike those of 100 ns in [7] and [10], and this brief.

VI. CONCLUSION

A capless LDO regulator for enhancing PSR is proposed. The proposed LDO regulator achieves -76 dB PSR and 96.3 fs FOM with a total on-chip capacitance of as small as 12.7 pF. The proposed LDO regulator can be widely used for any fully integrated switching device where high PSR and better FOM are required while occupying a small area.

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