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# 5 GHz Wi-Fi Transmit Network Tuning



**MMB**Networks™

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## Overview

This coop term I worked on optimizing Wi-Fi 5GHz network for maximum transmit performance. Wi-Fi transmit performance measurements include Transmit (TX) power, Error Vector Magnitude (EVM), and spectral mask compliance. The performance is measured for 5 example channels in the 5 GHz band across the lowest and highest data rates for 802.11a and n.

EVM is a measure of how accurately a radio is transmitting symbols within its constellation. EVM is a measure of signal quality, which is a function of noise, interfering signals, nonlinear distortion and the load of the radio [1]. EVM is part of the 802.11 IEEE standard which has become industry standard for phones, television and Wi-Fi. It essentially shows linearity transmitter accuracy, and how well it can represent the symbol of amplitude phase point in the constellation. This indirectly translates to supporting higher data rates and higher EVM number can support new generation of Wi-Fi.

Table 1 shows the Wi-Fi Transmit Specification Table that needs to be met by Thunderchild product. Table 1 includes the power level and EVM for various Wi-Fi versions with different data rates and modulation. These specs should be met by products for optimal Wi-Fi performance.

Technology	Data rate	MCS	Modulation	Coding	Power (dBm)	EVM max (dB)
802.11g	6Mbps		BPSK	1/2	13	-5
802.11g	54Mbps		64-QAM	3/4	11	-25
802.11n	7.2Mbps	HT20 MCS0	BPSK	1/2	13	-5
802.11n	72.2Mbps	HT20 MCS7	64-QAM	5/6	9	-27
802.11n	7.2Mbps	HT40 MCS0	BPSK	1/2	12	-5
802.11n	72.2Mbps	HT40 MCS7	64-QAM	5/6	9	-27

*Table 1: Wi-Fi 5 GHz TX Spec Table*

## Objective

The overall objective for this project was to match Thunderchild boards' Wi-Fi TX performance with Wi-Fi TX specifications as shown in Table 1, which are consist with the Qualcomm development board QCA402x.

## Wi-Fi RF Schematic and Layout

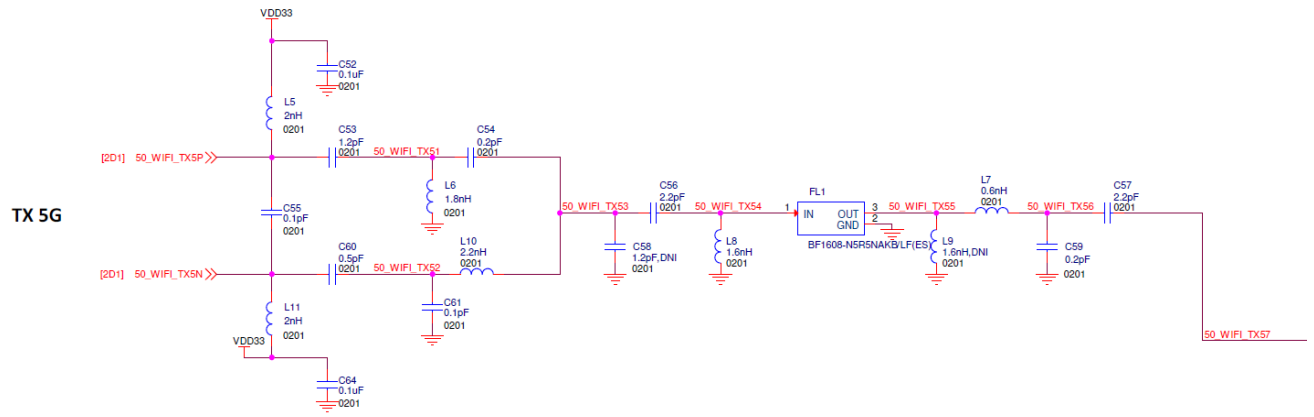


Figure 1: Wi-Fi 5GHz TX Schematic Connected to RF Switch

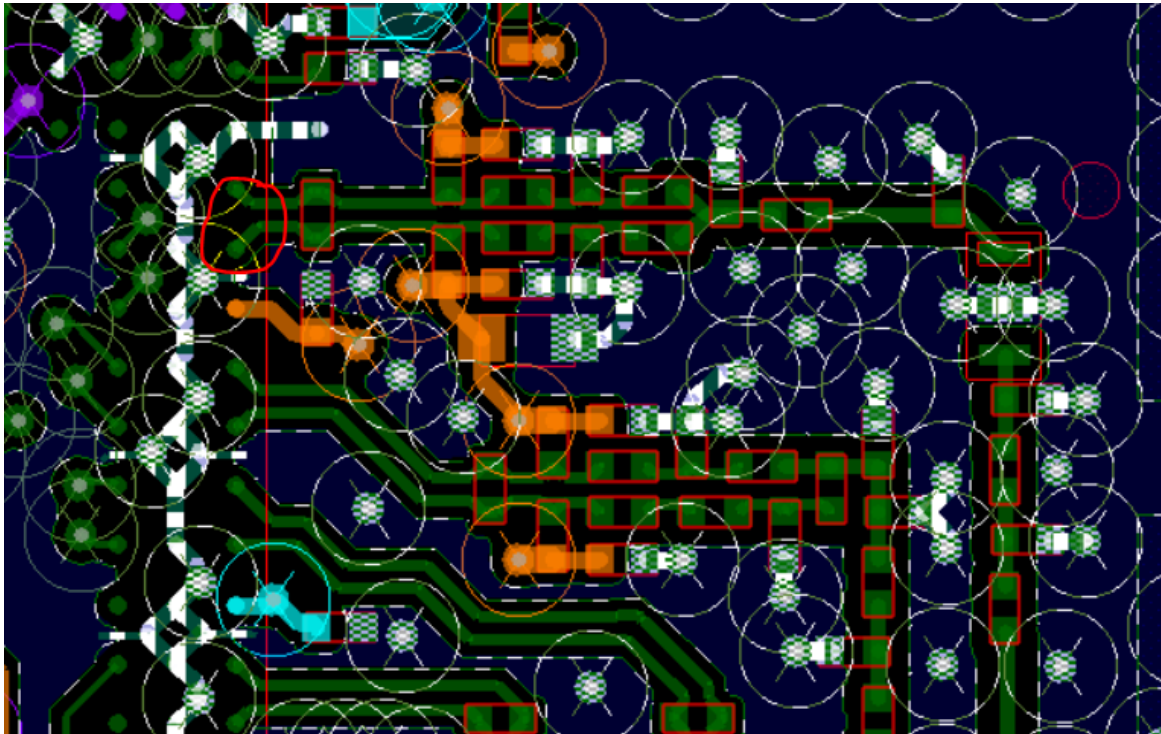


Figure 2: PCB Layout of 5GHz Wi-Fi TX Path from Chip circled in Red

The original design as shown in the above schematic Figure 1 was drawn from the reference design from Qualcomm. This design was used in current board but did not provide good results with failing EVM and low power level.

The optimal way to increase the 5GHz Tx performance is by analyzing the topology, components and corresponding values. Since topology was mainly fixed on this version of the board shown in PCB layout Figure 2, the components and associated values needed to be changed.

The general topology of RF matching network consists of the following blocks coming from the chip:

- Balun- provides single-ended to differential conversion.
- Lowpass filter section- suppresses harmonics and spurious emissions.
- Impedance transformation section- matches correct impedance to antenna feed.

The tuning exercise was limited by the information presented in layout guidelines from Qualcomm. This included the original topology selection, trace width selection, use of microstrip/co-planar, layer thickness, geometry, and track length matching of the nets. Results from advanced simulation software (ADS, HFSS, etc.) or internal chip design details from Qualcomm were not shared with us for this project as well.

# Tuning using QUACS Simulation and Trial-Error

## Simulation 1: Balun

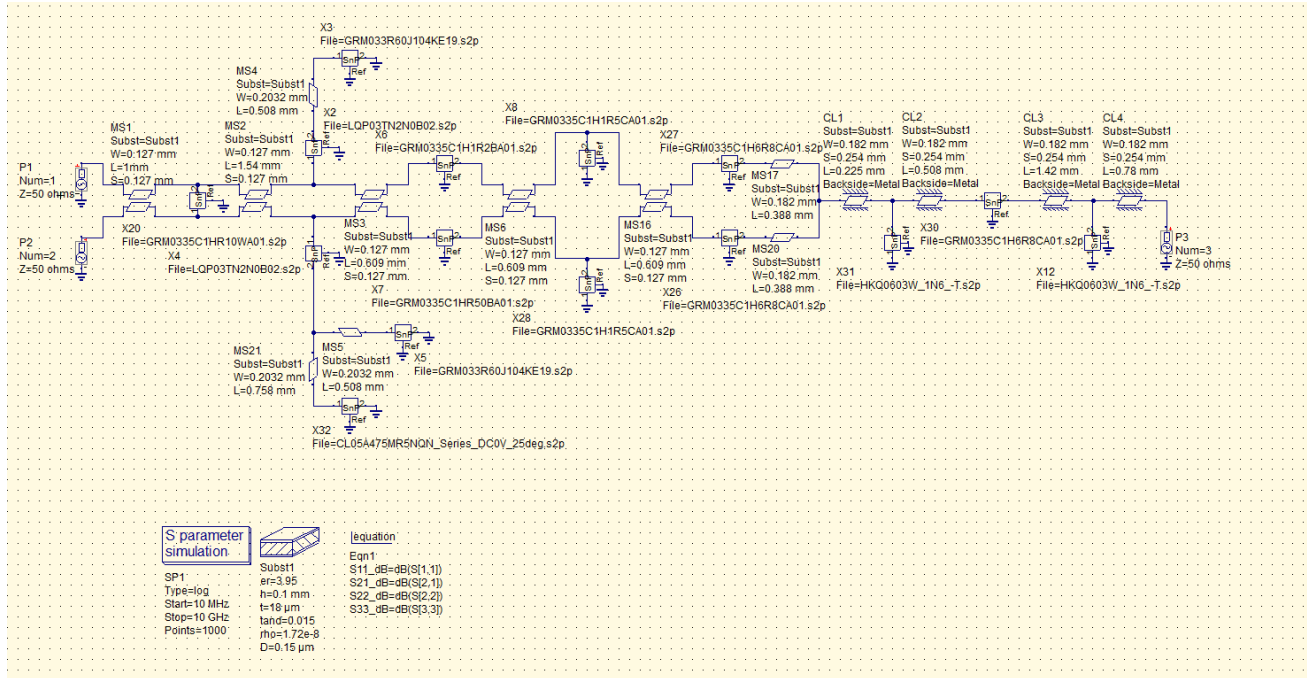


Figure 3: Balun Simulation Topology in QUACS

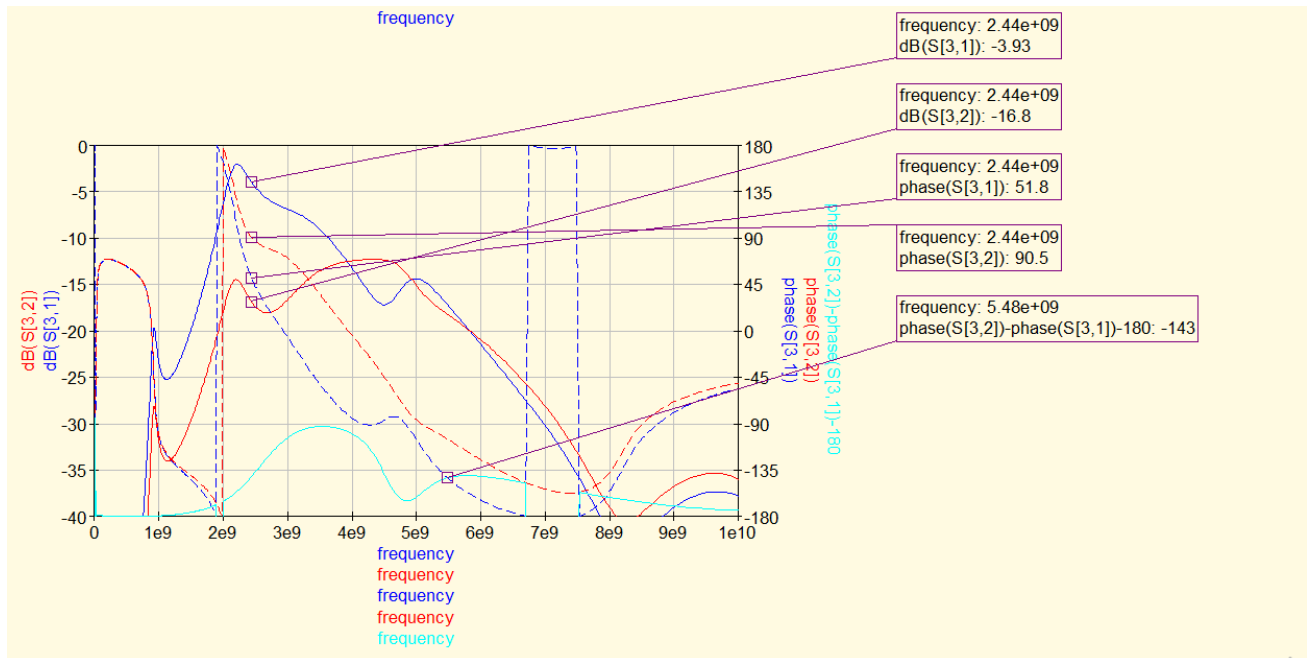


Figure 4: Balun Frequency Response



The simulation that was done in Figure 3 is for the balun, which consist of high and low pass filters which is initial guide where changes should be applied. This is good starting point since its closest to the input pins of the chip, thus having the greatest impact. The balun is selected to provide a single-ended to differential conversion function with minimal insertion loss over the frequency band of interest. The simulation is for the PCB layout of the balun consists of input and output ports with impedance values, component S-parameter values, co-planar track width/space/length values, and substrate value. Using open-source free QUACS software, an accurate layout of the balun was created and simulated. As seen in the frequency (GHz) vs power(dB) plot in Figure 4, there is not much to learn from simulation since the correct port impedance values are unknown, making it very difficult to match to. The optimum impedance at the various points along the track is also not known as that information is not provided by the Qualcomm documentation. The reason for doing the entire balun simulation was to compare the frequency response match for the high pass and low pass arms. Theoretically, the upper arm is supposed to have +90 degree phase shift and the lower arm with -90 degree phase shift. The difference between phase shifts of the arms is expected to be 180 degree. As shown in Figure 4, at frequency 5.48 GHz, the phase is -143 degrees, which is not consistent with the balun topology. The only important line in the plot is the s31 and s32, which is the loss from the positive pin to the 50 ohm port and the negative pin to the 50 ohm port. The plots just show very high loss, which cannot be used to determine changes to any component values. The plot results turned out to be very random and so the result cannot be actionable changes. The problem is that the real port impedance is not 50 ohms which is why the simulation does not work. One of the caveats with doing simulation is that the impedance at the ports are not known. Port 3 (RF Switch which connects to the antenna) should be 50 ohms but there is no information available on the impedance values of port 1 and port 2 inside the chip to match to. Port 1 and 2 are the input TX and RX pins connected to Wi-Fi portion of the Qualcomm chip. Any internal chip simulation results are unknown, making the tuning even more difficult. Thus, this simulation is not useful as the source we are matching to is not 50 ohms. Since source impedance is unknown, there is no way of optimizing the loss very well because mismatch loss is also unknown. An option of getting port 1 and port 2 impedance values is by measuring using two pigtailed to find the s11 and s22 of the ports directly. This was not possible since a 6 GHz VNA instrument or RF calibrated probe was not available to us at the time and due to other mechanical constraints of the board. Even with pigtail results, getting the simulation to align with the measurement would be difficult due to high error from parasitic capacitance, inductance of components and pigtail tip interface to the board track changing the values each time. However, this simulation is considered a good starting point in going forward with the rest of tuning steps.

Results shown in Figure 9 and 10 is tuning steps using various component values. The strategy for optimizing the balun was to start replacing component values with 10 percent increment and decrements from left to right on layout. That means components closest to the chip were altered first based on 10 percent change rule and the best measured value was kept. As seen from Figure 9, at tune step 18, we were able to match the balun to highest possible power level and EVM while keeping current under 220 mA. The power level was at an average of 8.6 dBm, -28.2 EVM and 170 mA current. This was achieved through sheer hard work of trial and error while keeping simulations results in mind.

## Simulation 2 : Band Pass Filter Section

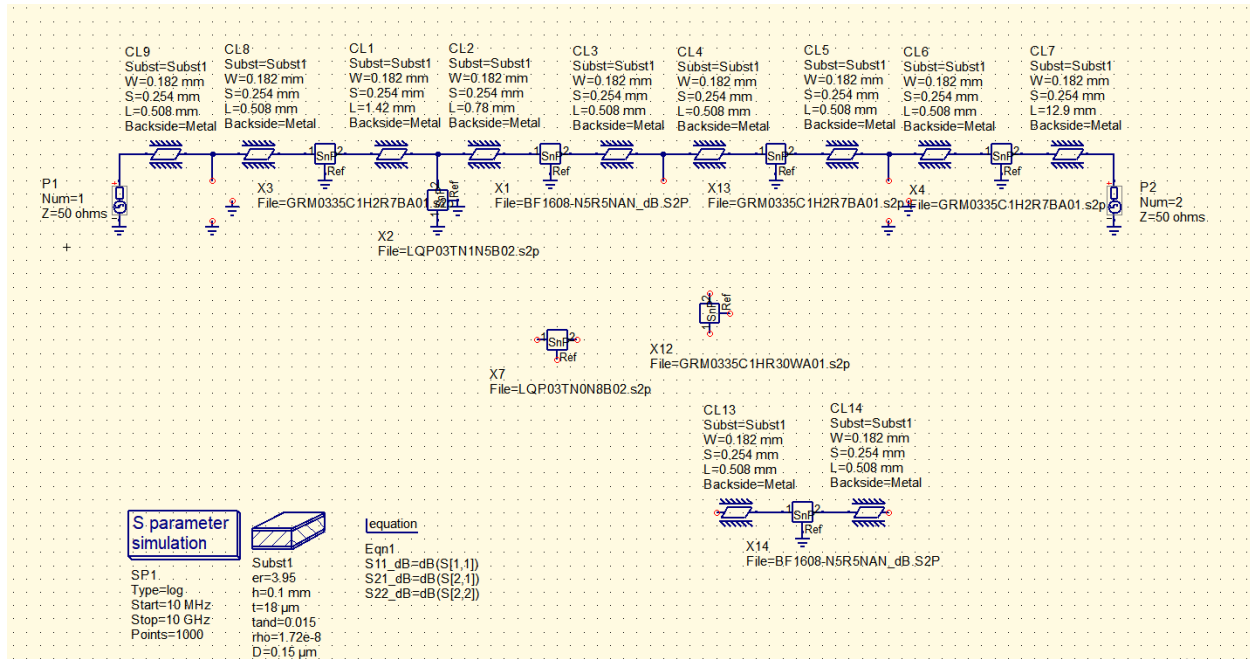


Figure 5: Original Band Pass Filter Section Topology in QUACS

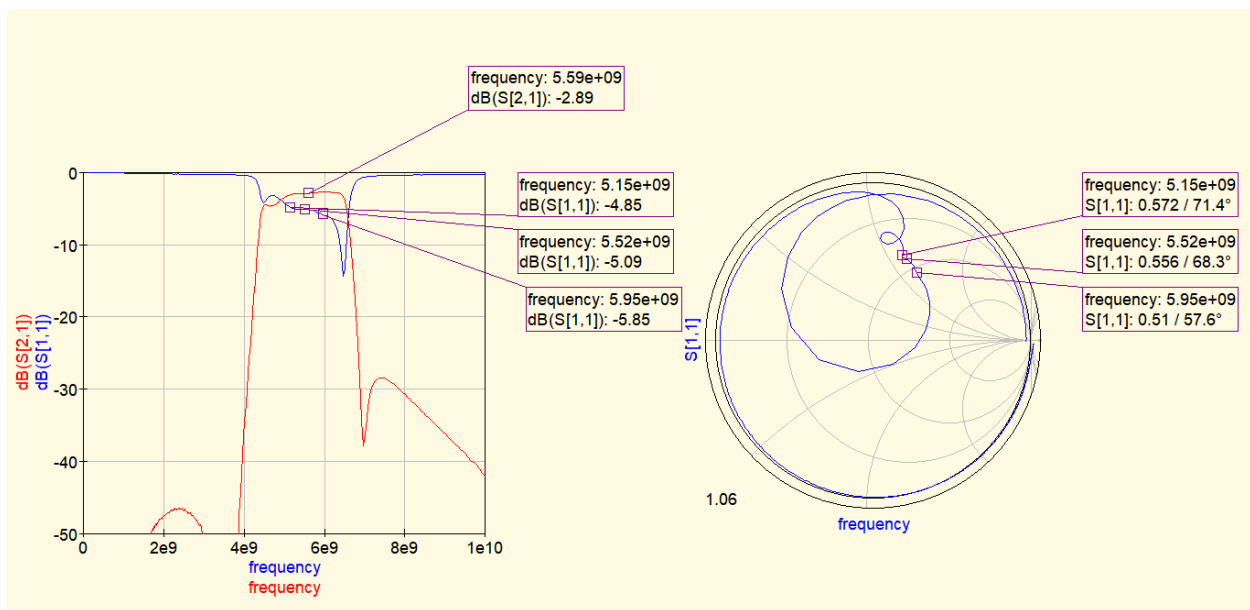


Figure 6: Frequency Response and Smith Chart for Band Pass Filter Section

After correcting the balun, the next section to optimize is the filtering section shown in Figure 5. The lowpass filter network is designed to attenuate the TX harmonics and spurious emissions below the level required to meet applicable regulatory standards. If the selected filter provides acceptable attenuation of the harmonic signal energy and reasonable insertion loss, it is a “good” filter [2]. This was started by setting up the simulation of the filtering and impedance matching section of the Wi-Fi TX path. This includes the track from the exit of the balun through the matching filter and out to the 50 ohm RF switch. It is reasonable to assume that the end of balun (Port 1) in the simulation is 50 ohm and the RF switch (Port 2) is 50 ohm impedance since it ends up going to the antenna and at that point matching is typically done.

Figure 6 shows the results of the original filtering topology as per schematic diagram. As seen from the plots, the  $s_{11}$  is around -5 dB and  $s_{21}$  is -2.89 dB, which shows that the throughput loss / reflection is minimized. However, the Smith Chart shows that this topology is not matched to 50 ohm characteristic impedance since the  $s_{11}$  frequency points are not clustered at the centre.

In order to try to cluster the frequency points to centre of Smith Chart, further simulation was performed by removing shunt inductor L8. The simulation showed adding a shunt inductor moves the current point on the Smith Chart in counter-clockwise direction along the Ycircle. Smith Chart in Figure 6 shows the clustered points are in top-right side and so removing the shunt inductor would mean shifting the clustered points towards the centre in a clockwise direction along the Ycircle.

### Simulation 3: Shunt Inductor

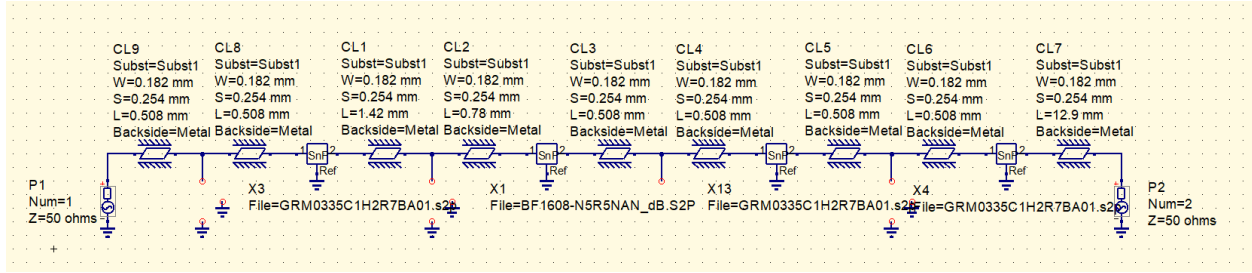


Figure 7: Band Pass Filter ith no Shunt Components

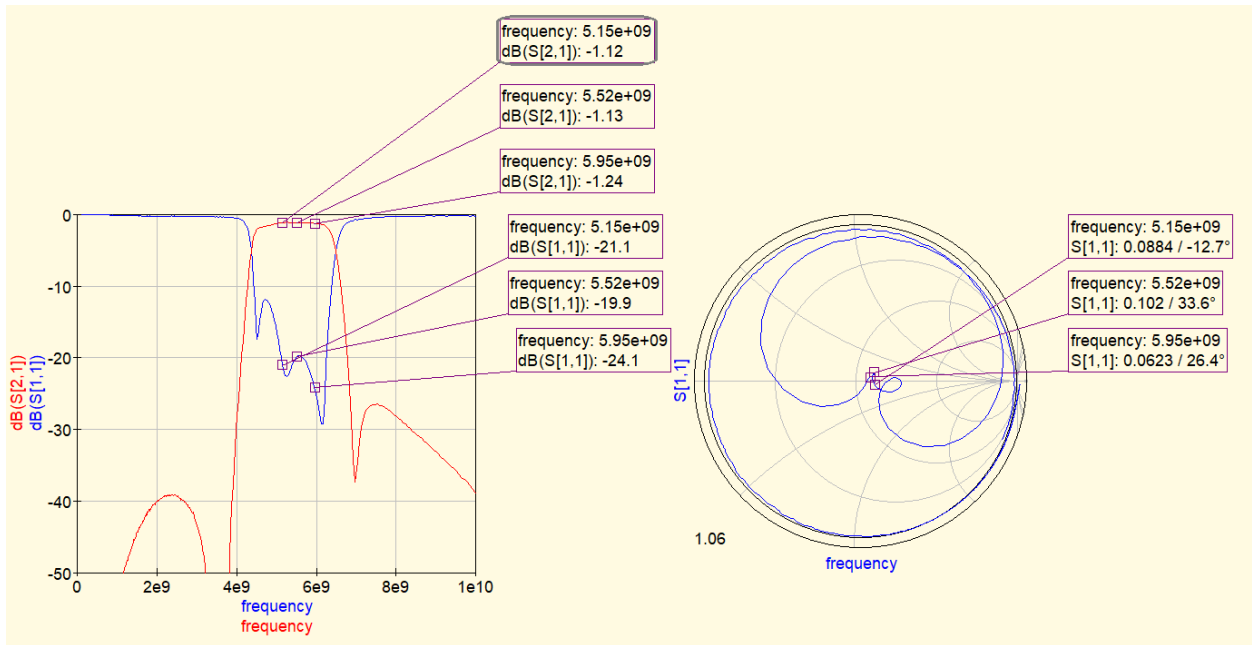


Figure 8: Frequency Response and Smith Chart for Band Pass Filter Section with no Shunt Components

The goal of simulation in Figure 7 was to centre the clustered points on Smith Chart. This is shown by optimizing s11 and s22, which means minimum s11 and maximum s21 values in the frequency plot, indicating good performance of the Wi-Fi PA at all frequencies. This was achieved in simulation by removing shunt inductor component as described in previous section of this report. As seen in Figure 8 plot, the reflection is -20 dB and pass through loss is -1dB, which is pretty good since the band pass filter (BPF-1608) itself has about 1 dB loss as per data sheet. Furthermore, the power level is flat across the 5GHz band which means it is a good match.

## Tuning with Trial Error

Simulation from Figure 7 suggested that this topology and components should be tested on the Thunderchild board. At tune step 57 from Figure 10, we had implemented the above topology and found the results opposing. As seen in step 57, at low frequencies there was poor EVM and power was also not a fit. The measured performance of this topology and components did not match the simulation results. At the low frequencies, there was failing EVM (-23 dB) and high end EVM became reasonable value (-30 dB), creating a large slope across the band. This proved that the impedance from end of balun at port 1 is not 50 ohms since it did not improve the performance and the EVM is not flat across the frequency range. Port 1 was determined to have a large complex component that varies with frequency and it was determined to add the shunt inductor back in after coplanar line (CL1) as per guidelines from Qualcomm design. In this stage after tune step 57, we wanted to make sure that results were flat, good or bad. Based on further simulation and analysing the  $s_{21}$ ,  $s_{11}$  from frequency plots and Smith chart clustered points, it was deduced that the Wi-Fi TX path was designed for inductive load.

Since the source impedance is unknown, the result was starting point for systematic tuning. Ultimately, it was left to trial error of various components from end of balun to RF switch so there is no significant slope in EVM which can lead to current spikes and Wi-Fi spurious emissions.

Trial and error led to final tuning at step 64 shown in Figure 10 and Figure 11, where the results matched closest to Wi-Fi TX specs and Qualcomm development boards. At tune step 64, the average results are power level at 9.4 dBm, -30 dB for EVM, current at 164 mA, and spectral mask passing across all frequencies in the band. This topology and component changes were tested across various boards, which showed very similar results, as indicated in green rows, with tune step 64 labelled in Figure 10.



Figure 9: Tuning Results till Step 48 [3]





Figure 11: Tunign Step 64 Passing Results on D49 and Qualcomm Dev Board Test Results [3]



## Wi-Fi 5 GHz Band Edge Emission Tests

After the topology and components were finalized, additional tests were conducted to measure power consumption across various data rates, power level in dBm, EVM in dB, current, and mask compliance. Furthermore, band edge testing was conducted using Spectrum Analyzer to make sure that there is no spurious emissions and it would pass FCC levels highlighted in red lines.

### Test Mode Power Measurements

D10/D17			AVG			Lo channel		Mid channel		Hi channel	
Radio	Mode	Data rate	P(W)	Vi(V)	I(mA)	Vi(V)	I(mA)	Vi(V)	I(mA)	Vi(V)	I(mA)
WiFi 5GHz (D10)	TX	11g 6Mbps	0.965	5.002	193.0	5	195	5.005	189	5	195
		11g 54Mbps	0.952	5.004	190.3	5.012	179	5.008	185	4.991	207
		11n HT20 MCS0	0.991	4.998	198.3	5	196	4.994	203	5	196
		11n HT20 MCS7	0.879	5.016	175.3	5.017	174	5.016	175	5.014	177
		11n HT40 MCS0	0.991	4.998	198.3	5	196	5.004	190	4.99	209
		11n HT40 MCS7	0.894	5.013	178.3	5.013	178	5.014	177	5.012	180

Table 2: Test Mode Power Measurements

## Wi-Fi 5 GHz Transmit Performance Results

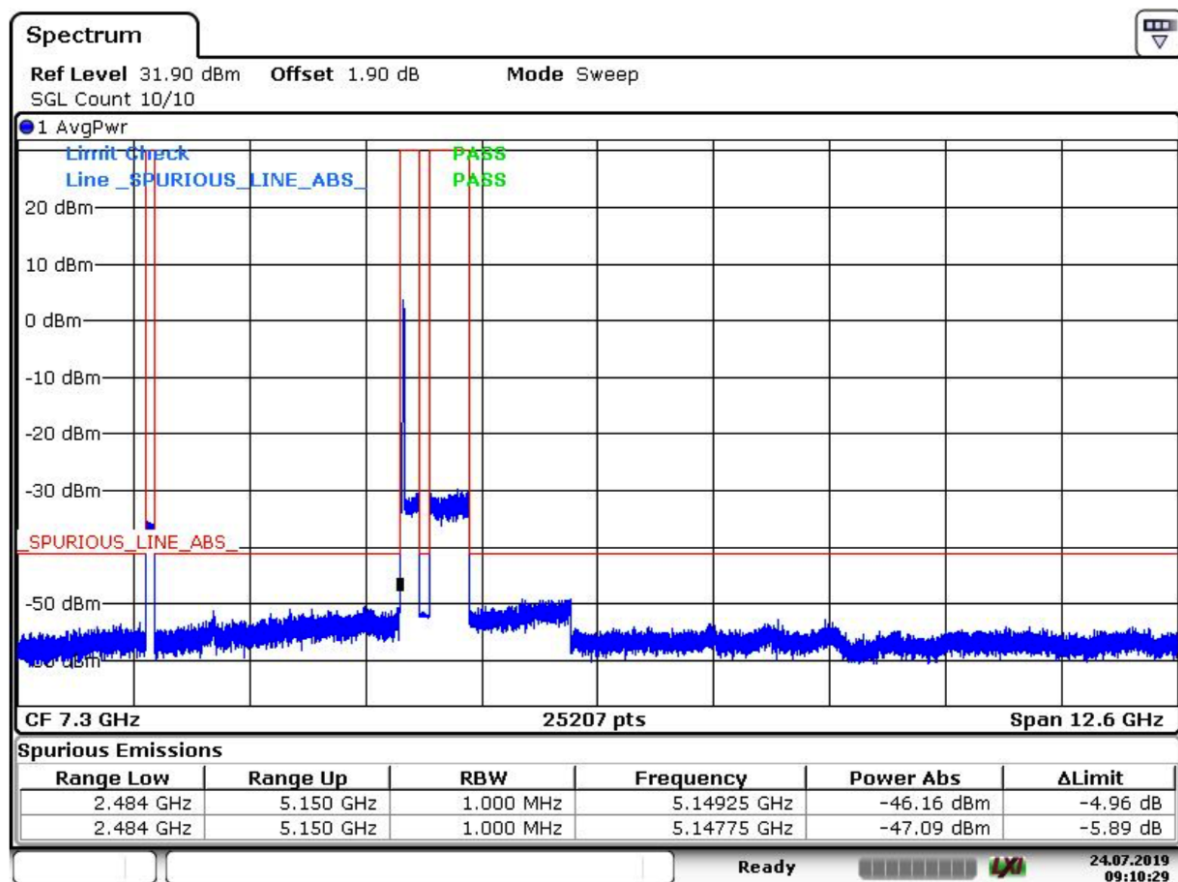
The expected output power ranges from 9 to 14 dBm (dependent on the modulation rate). EVM is required to be compliant with as shown in Table 1. The following results matched with all Wi-Fi TX specs and improved performance significantly than original Qualcomm design. Various boards were also tested to make sure they match specs.

Parameter	Data rate	Chan Avg	5180 5190	5320 5310	5500 5510	5700 5710	5825 5795	Unit
Power	802.11a 6Mbps	13.5	14.8	12.8	13.7	13.2	13.0	dBm
	802.11a 54Mbps	11.6	11.7	11.1	11.7	11.7	11.6	
	802.11n HT20 MCS0	13.3	14.5	12.7	13.5	12.9	13.2	
	802.11n HT20 MCS7	9.5	9.7	9.1	9.8	9.4	9.5	
	802.11n HT40 MCS0	12.4	12.8	11.9	12.4	12.8	12.2	
	802.11n HT40 MCS7	9.3	8.9	9.0	9.5	9.5	9.4	
EVM (dB)	802.11a 6Mbps	-22.3	-22.0	-21.7	-22.9	-22.8	-22.2	dB
	802.11a 54Mbps	-30.3	-29.6	-29.6	-29.2	-32.4	-30.8	
	802.11n HT20 MCS0	-21.4	-21.3	-20.7	-22.1	-21.8	-21.1	
	802.11n HT20 MCS7	-32.2	-30.1	-34.1	-30.1	-33.4	-33.4	
	802.11n HT40 MCS0	-14.5	-14.7	-14.3	-14.9	-14.4	-14.2	
	802.11n HT40 MCS7	-30.0	-29.5	-30.3	-28.3	-30.9	-30.9	
Mask compliance	802.11a 6Mbps	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	
	802.11a 54Mbps	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	
	802.11n HT20 MCS0	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	
	802.11n HT20 MCS7	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	
	802.11n HT40 MCS0	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	
	802.11n HT40 MCS7	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	

Table 3: Board Performance Test Results for Wi-Fi 5 GHz

## Wi-Fi 5 GHz Transmit Mode Spurious Emissions

### 802.11a TX 9Mbps 5180 MHz



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Figure 12: 802.11a TX 9Mbps 5180 MHz

802.11n TX MCS0\_20 5180 MHz

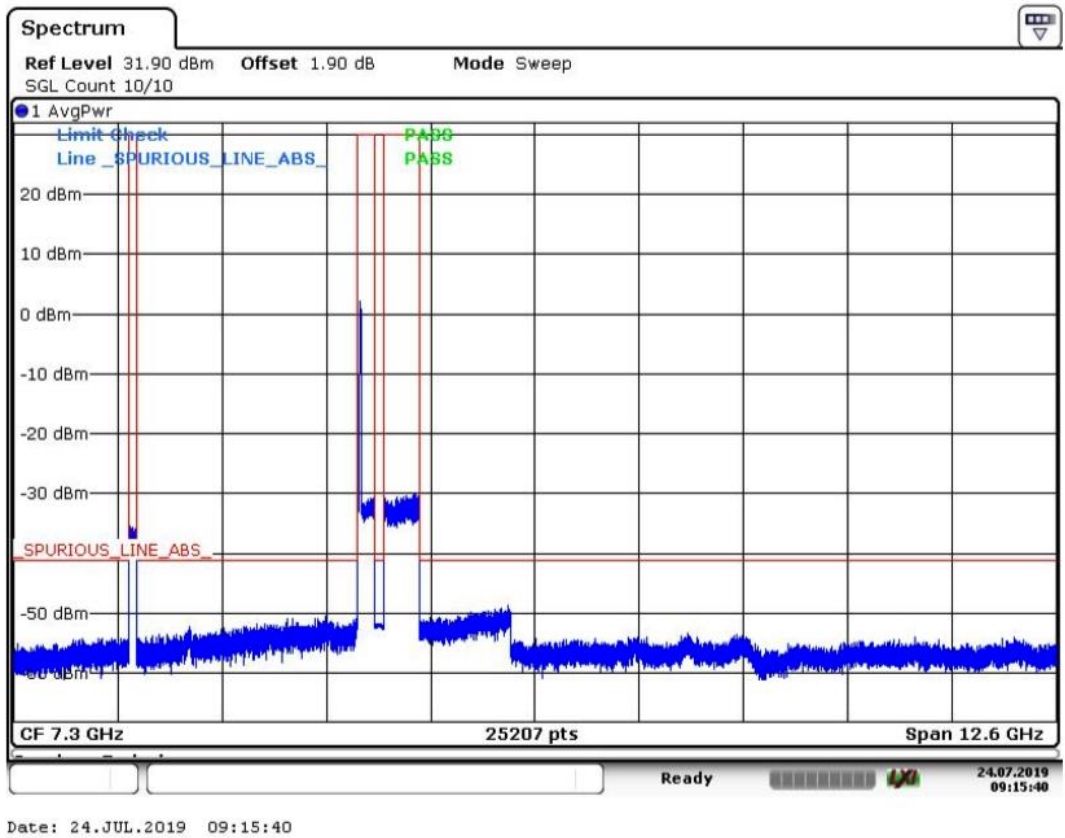
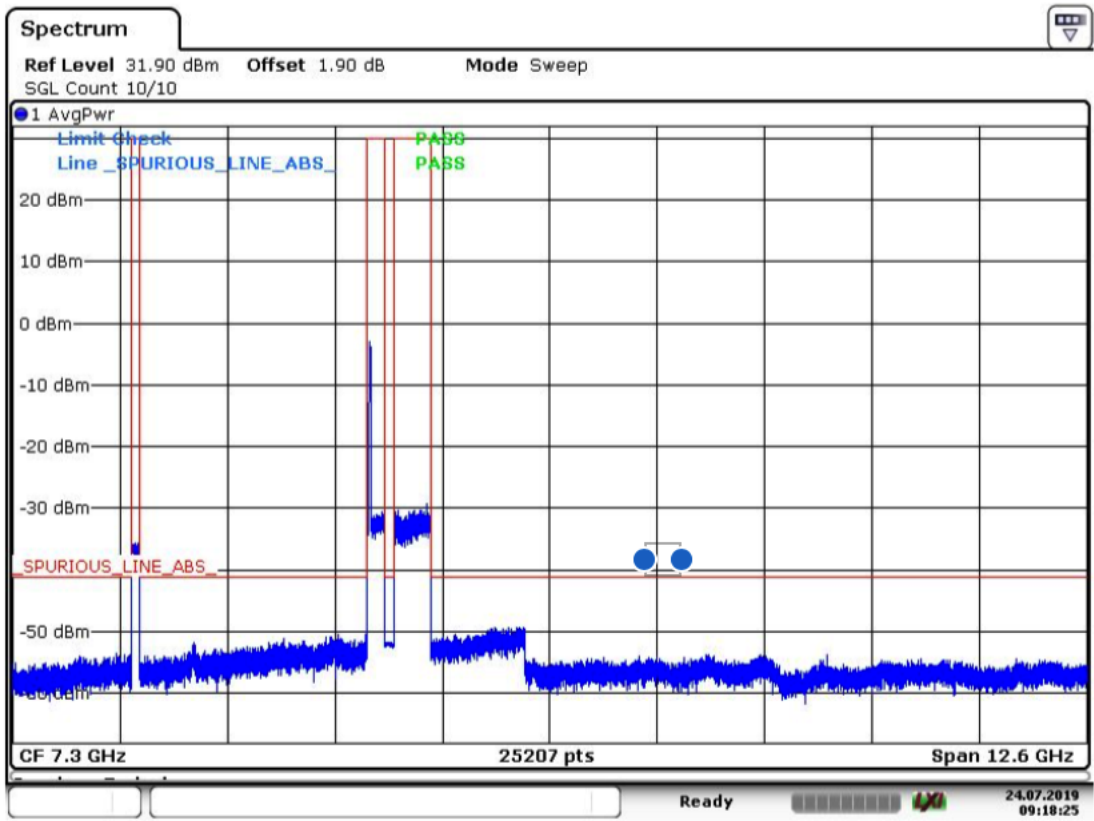


Figure 13: 802.11n TX MCS0\_20 5180 MHz

802.11n TX MCS7\_20 5180 MHz



Date: 24.JUL.2019 09:18:24

Figure 14: 802.11n TX MCS7\_20 5180 MHz

## Test Equipment

Table 5 shows all test equipment that were used to conduct the various tests and perform the tuning exercise for 5 GHz Wi-Fi and other testing related to Thunderchild board for internal use. Qualcomm test automation software QSPR was used to gather and process data from Anritsu test box and current meters over LAN to pass/fail appropriate tests.

Manufacturer	Model Number	Description	Used for
Rigol	MSO1104Z	4-channel mixed-signal oscilloscope	Voltage rail stability, power-on transients, button testing
Fluke	179	Digital multimeter	Average/instantaneous current/voltage, voltage rail stability
Anritsu	MT8870A	Wireless test set	RF transmit/receive performance
Ramsey	STE3300	Shielded test box	RF receive performance, WLAN benchmarking
Rohde & Schwarz	FSV13	Spectrum analyzer with frequency counting	Spurious emissions, oscillator frequency accuracy
Rohde & Schwarz	ZVL6	Network analyzer	Antenna S11 measurements
TP-LINK	Archer C7	Dual-band AC1750 Gigabit Wi-Fi router	WLAN benchmarking

*Table 4: Test Equipments used in Thunderchild Testing*

## References

- [1] Bevelacqua, P. (2019). *EVM - Error Vector Magnitude*. [online] Antenna-theory.com. Available at: <http://www.antenna-theory.com/definitions/evm.php> [Accessed 12 Aug. 2019].
- [2] Silabs.com. (2019). [online] Available at: <https://www.silabs.com/documents/public/application-notes/AN923-subGHz-Matching.pdf> [Accessed 12 Aug. 2019].
- [3]<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Dv2STQ9tcgVLb3Lsh9wcvK4a9Gs37ucCxrvmOsJphI/edit?usp=sharing>.