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## 1 **Scope**

2 The scope of this report is the characterization, from a unified perspective, of network streams  
3 and flows in IEEE 802 networks, and in some networks that are typically connected to IEEE 802  
4 networks, including an assessment of the process of interworking flows and streams across  
5 network boundaries and the feasibility and value of such interworking in achieving end-to-end  
6 flow management and QoS. Standardization implications are identified.

## 7 **Purpose**

8 By taking a unified perspective toward the assessment of network streams and flows, this  
9 document is intended to encourage a common understanding of concepts that are largely  
10 considered from a unique perspective in each network technology. That unified perspective is  
11 intended to motivate efforts to consider procedures to interwork streams and flows across  
12 network boundaries, so that QoS characteristics that are managed within a single network by  
13 stream and flow control can be joined across network boundaries, allowing a level of end-to-end  
14 QoS control. The intention is not to specify interworking protocols but ideally to identify particular  
15 network pairs that can benefit from stream and flow interworking, assess the feasibility of such  
16 interworking in those cases, identify gaps preventing interworking, and identify standardization  
17 activities that would promote successful interworking.

## 1 Introduction

2

3 This document has been developed within the IEEE 802 IEEE 802 “Network Enhancements for the  
4 Next Decade” Industry Connections Activity (Nendica) in accordance with the Nendica Work Item  
5 on “Network Stream and Flow Interworking” **Error! Reference source not found.**<sup>1</sup>).

## 6 Network Streams and Flows

7 Network traffic is increasingly managed as a set of streams or flows rather than series of frames or  
8 packets. IEEE 802 networks have developed and utilized flow concepts; e.g.:

- 9 • IEEE 802.11 Parameterized Traffic Streams (TSs)
- 10 • IEEE 802.1 TSN Streams for time-sensitive networking (various standards)
- 11 • IEEE Std 1722 Audio/Video Transport Protocol (AVTP) streams
- 12 • IEEE 802.1Qcz Congestion isolation
- 13 • IEEE 802.16 Service Flows for all traffic
- 14 • IEEE 802.15.4 use of Guaranteed Time Slots

15

16 Non-802 networks have developed and utilized flow concepts:

- 17 • MEF Carrier Ethernet Virtual Connections
- 18 • IETF DetNet
- 19 • IETF RAW
- 20 • Software-Defined Networking, including OpenFlow
- 21 • DOCSIS Service Flows
- 22 • 3GPP Bearers
- 23 • IP flows (DSCP; IPV6 flow identifier)
- 24 • other

25 While these network streams and flows can be characterized by various parameters and are  
26 qualitatively different concepts in different networks, some characteristics are common. Here we  
27 attempt to generalize the concept of a stream or flow into a definition suitable for use in this  
28 report...

29

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<sup>1</sup>Information on references can be found at the end of the document in the Citations section.

# 1 Uses for Streams and Flows

2 Stream and flows can be used for:  
3

## 4 Stream and Flow Concepts in Standards

5

### 6 IEEE 802.1 Standards

7 The words “flow” and “stream” are used in IEEE Std 802.1 standards in several contexts, some of  
8 which are only loosely related to others.

#### 9 IEEE Std 802.1Q Flow Identifier for Congestion Notification

10 IEEE Std 802.1Q discusses flows in the context of a “Flow Identifier” used in Congestion  
11 Notification (CN). A congestion-aware end station labels frames of the flow with a Flow Identifier  
12 (Flow ID) within a CN-TAG attached to the frame. When a Congestion Point identifies congestion  
13 due to a particular flow, based on the Flow ID, it may notify a Reaction Point of congestion due to  
14 the particular flow, with reference to the congesting Flow ID. This mechanism reduces the need  
15 for frames to be repeatedly classified.

16  
17 The Flow ID is two bytes in length. Its meaning and encoding are not specified in IEEE Std 802.1Q.

#### 18 IEEE Std 802.1Q Flow Hash for Equal Cost Multipath

19 IEEE Std 802.1Q also discusses flows in the context of “flow filtering.” Per subclause 44.2, flow  
20 filtering “enables Bridges to distinguish frames belonging to different client flows and to use this  
21 information in the forwarding process.” Such flows are used when Shortest Path Bridging operates  
22 in conjunction with Equal Cost Multiple Path (ECMP), which spreads traffic across multiple paths.  
23 In order to prevent problematic frame reordering, frames within an identified flow are  
24 constrained to a single such path. During operation, frames are classified into a flow and identified  
25 with a flow filtering tag (F-TAG) containing a flow hash value. Transmission order is maintained for  
26 all frames from a source to a destination with the same flow hash value. The “flow\_hash”  
27 parameter is passed among the Enhanced Internal Sublayer Service (EISS) service primitives along  
28 with the frame. It appears that the flow hash is not used for other purposes in IEEE Std 802.1Q.

#### 29 IEEE Std 802.1Q stream\_handle for Flow Classification and Metering

30  
31 IEEE Std 802.1Q also discusses flows in the context of “flow classification and metering.” Per  
32 subclause 8.6.5, flow classification “identifies a subset of traffic (frames) that may be subject to  
33 the same treatment in terms of metering and forwarding.” Frames classified to a flow are subject  
34 to a flow meter specified for that flow. Classification rules may be based on destination MAC  
35 address, source MAC address, VID, priority, and connection\_identifier (the last one only for  
36 bridges that support Per-Stream Filtering and Policing (PSFP)). It appears that the flow\_hash is not  
37 considered in classification.

1  
2 PSFP uses the term “stream” rather than flow. IEEE Std 802.1Q does not define “flow” and defines  
3 a stream as “a unidirectional flow of data (e.g., audio and/or video) from a Talker to one or more  
4 Listeners.” Support of PSFP requires use of the stream\_handle provided by the stream  
5 identification function of IEEE Std 802.1CB. PSFP supports differentiated queuing, as well as  
6 filtering and policing, based on the stream\_handle and priority parameters of the frame. The  
7 stream\_handle is considered a sub-parameter of the connection\_identifier parameter and thereby  
8 passes as an EISS service primitive.  
9

10 IEEE Std 802.1Q in some cases refer to Stream ID and “stream identifier” but appears to include no  
11 formal or informal definition of either. IEEE Std 802.1CB (in subclause 7.2, “Use of the term  
12 *Stream*”) says that “IEEE Std 802.1Q defines a StreamID that is used to identify a stream between  
13 a Talker and one or more Listener(s). In contrast, the present standard defines a stream\_handle  
14 subparameter that is used internally to identify a Stream.”  
15

16 IEEE Std 802.1Q defines StreamID as “a 64-bit field that uniquely identifies a stream” (comprising  
17 an EUI-48 MAC Address associated with the stream source [which “can, but does not necessarily,  
18 have the same value as the source\_address parameter of any frame in the actual data stream”]  
19 and a 16-bit Unique ID used to distinguish among multiple streams from source). StreamID is  
20 used in the Stream Reservation Protocol (SRP).  
21

## 22 **IEEE Std 802.1Q Multiple Stream Registration Protocol (MSRP)**

23  
24 IEEE Std 802.1Q discusses streams and StreamID in the context of “Multiple Stream Registration  
25 Protocol (MSRP),” which is used by Stream Reservation Protocol (SRP). MSRP “provides end  
26 stations with the ability to reserve network resources that will guarantee the transmission and  
27 reception of data streams across a network with the requested QoS. These end stations are  
28 referred to as Talkers (devices that produce data streams) and Listeners (devices that consume  
29 data streams).” Bridges “associate Talker and Listener attributes via the StreamID present in each  
30 of those attributes.”  
31

## 32 **IEEE Std 1722 StreamID and Multicast Destination Address**

33 [The following paragraphs summarize the content of IEEE Std 1722 regarding stream identifiers, to  
34 the best of the editor’s current limited understanding.]

35 IEEE Std 1722 (“IEEE Standard for a Transport Protocol for Time-Sensitive Applications in Bridged  
36 Local Area Networks”) uses “Stream ID” and “StreamID” as the 64-bit StreamID parameter of  
37 subclause 35.2.2.8.2 of IEEE Std 802.1Q, comprising an EUI-48 followed by a Unique ID. The  
38 content of the EUI-48 appears not to be specified beyond the requirement of IEEE Std 802.1Q that  
39 it be associated with the source. The StreamID used for stream identification, is said to uniquely  
40 identify a stream, and is carried in the Audio/Video Transport Protocol (AVTP) header of every  
41 AVTP frame carrying stream data.  
42

43 IEEE Std 1722 includes an informative (non-normative) Annex C on “IEEE 802.3 Media-specific  
44 encapsulation” which is provided “to aid in the understanding of the relationship of Audio/Video  
45 Transport Protocol (AVTP) to the overall Ethernet protocol stack.” Annex C indicates that, in the



1 case of SRP reserved frames, the VLAN identifier “is not to be used as a stream identifier in any  
2 way.” Annex C also indicates that the Ethernet source address is the sender’s unicast MAC address  
3 and that, in the case of SRP reserved frames, the Ethernet destination address “of each stream will  
4 be unique for the layer 2 network and may either be a locally administered unicast address or a  
5 multicast address (as defined in SRP).” Furthermore, “Multicast addresses may be assigned by use  
6 of MAAP defined in Annex B. The use of MAAP allows for multicast addresses to be unique per  
7 AVTP stream.”

8  
9 A block of multicast EUI-48 values is reserved for use; these are distributed using the MAC Address  
10 Acquisition Protocol (MAAP), as specified in (normative) Annex B of IEEE Std 1722.

11  
12 Annex C, though non-normative, indicates that an assigned multicast address is used as IEEE 802  
13 Destination Address and that “use of MAAP allows for multicast addresses to be unique per AVTP  
14 stream.” On the other hand, the 64-bit StreamID, which is carried in the AVTP protocol header of  
15 stream data and uniquely identifies the stream, is built from an EUI-48 that is associated with the  
16 source and may be a multicast address. Therefore, it appears permissible, though not mandatory,  
17 to assign the multicast address, which seems to be unique per AVTP stream, as the base of the 64-  
18 bit StreamID. However, in that case, it appears that only one 64-bit StreamID may be constructed  
19 from such an EUI-48; otherwise, multiple StreamIDs would identify multiple streams all associated  
20 with the same Destination Address, leading to an apparent contradiction, depending perhaps on  
21 the interpretation of “MAAP allows for multicast addresses to be unique per AVTP stream.”

22  
23

## 1 **Stream and Flow identification**

2 Stream and flows can be identified by:

3

### 4 **IEEE 802.1Q VLANs**

5 IEEE Std 802.1Q VLANs and VIDs.

6

7

## 8 **Stream and Flow Characterization**

9 Stream and flows can be characterized by parameters including:

- 10 • Specification document
- 11 • Network architecture
- 12 • Conditions
- 13 • Addressing
- 14 • End station
- 15 • Control
- 16 • Flow-sensitive elements
- 17 • Flow name
- 18 • Flow identification
- 19 • Flow quantity
- 20 • Flow descriptor
- 21 • Flow addition process
- 22 • Flow deletion process
- 23 • Flow change process
- 24 • Flow QoS properties
- 25 • Frame classification
- 26 • Request/grant system and polling services
- 27 • Admission control
- 28 • Interworking

29

# 1 Characteristics of Stream and Flow Concepts in 2 Specific Networks

3

4

## IEEE 802.11 Traffic Streams

5

Characteristic	IEEE 802.11 Traffic Streams	notes
Specification document	IEEE Std 802.11	
Sub-specification	HCCA	
Network architecture	Shared medium Point-to-Multipoint	HCCA is centralized
Conditions	Operates under CSMA/CA	Scheduling is by an AP within its BSS; not guaranteed in the presence of non-HCCA devices, or another HCCA BSS
Addressing	802 unicast	
End station	Non-AP STA	
Control	Access point (AP) scheduler	
Flow-sensitive elements	AP	
Flow name	parameterized traffic stream (TS)	
Flow identification	traffic stream identifier (TSID)	
Flow quantity	8 (3 bits)	per connection (AP+STA), per direction
Flow descriptor	traffic specification (TSPEC)	
Flow addition process	add traffic stream (ADDTS)	
Flow deletion process	delete traffic stream (DELTS)	
Flow change process	[none]	
Flow QoS properties	Nominal MSDU Size, Maximum MSDU Size, Minimum Service Interval, Maximum Service Interval, Inactivity Interval, Suspension Interval, Service Start Time, Minimum Data Rate, Mean Data Rate, Peak Data Rate, Burst Size, Delay Bound, Minimum PHY Rate, Surplus Bandwidth Allowance, Medium Time	9.4.2.29
Frame classification	stream classification service (SCS)?	11.26
Request/grant system and polling services	Polled TXOP Buffer status report (BSR) [P802.11ax]	10.23.3.3
Admission control	yes	
Interworking	R.3 QoS mapping guidelines for interworking with external networks	

6

7

8

1 **MEF Carrier Ethernet – Ethernet Virtual Connections**

2

Characteristic	MEF Carrier Ethernet	notes
Specification document	MEF 6.3	and other MEF specs
Sub-specification	EVC: Ethernet Virtual Private Line (EVPL) Ethernet Virtual Private LAN (EVP-LAN) Ethernet Virtual Private Tree (EVP-Tree)	port-based services are not included here
Network architecture	Shared medium EVC Type: Point-to-Point, Multipoint-to-Multipoint, or Rooted-Multipoint	
Conditions		
Addressing	IEEE 802 48-bit address	
End station	Ethernet connected at port (UNI)	
Control		
Flow-sensitive elements	bridges or other operator elements	
Flow name	service	
Flow identification	Customer-Edge VLAN ID	
Flow quantity	4094 (12 bits)	
Flow descriptor	Service attributes	
Flow addition process	manual (historically)	may be automated per MEF Lifecycle Service Orchestration (LSO)
Flow deletion process	manual (historically)	may be automated per MEF Lifecycle Service Orchestration (LSO)
Flow change process	manual (historically)	may be automated per MEF Lifecycle Service Orchestration (LSO)
Flow QoS properties	many	
Frame classification	unspecified	
Request/grant system and polling services	None; full-duplex system, reservation-based	
Admission control	Yes	
Interworking	unspecified	

3

4

1 **DOCSIS Service Flows**  
2

Characteristic	DOCSIS	notes
Specification document	DOCSIS 4.0 MAC and Upper Layer Protocols Interface Specification	key features date to DOCSIS 1.1
Sub-specification		
Network architecture	point-to-multipoint	
Conditions		
Addressing	IEEE 802 48-bit address	
End station	cable modem (CM)	
Control	cable modem termination system (CMTS)	
Flow-sensitive elements	CMTS and CM	
Flow name	service flow	unidirectional
Flow identification	service identifier (SID)	Service flows are identified by SFID and described by QoS parameters. Active service flows are assigned an SID.
Flow quantity	SID 14 bits	SFID is 32 bits
Flow descriptor	QoS Parameter Set	
Flow addition process	Dynamic Service Addition	
Flow deletion process	Dynamic Service Deletion	
Flow change process	Dynamic Service Change	
Flow QoS properties	Traffic Priority, Maximum Sustained Traffic Rate, Maximum Traffic Burst, Minimum Reserved Traffic Rate, etc.	
Frame classification	Upstream and Downstream Classifiers; Payload Header Suppression Rules;	
Request/grant system and polling services	Upstream Service Flow Scheduling Services, including Unsolicited Grant Service (UGS), Real-Time Polling Service (rtPS), Unsolicited Grant Service with Activity Detection (UGS-AD), Non-Real-Time Polling Service (nrtPS) and Best Effort (BE) service	
Admission control	yes	
Interworking		

3  
4

1 **Interworking of Streams and Flows**

- 2 1. Value of interworking
- 3 2. Feasibility of interworking
- 4 3. Network combinations of practical interest

5 **Standardization Implications**

- 6 Suggestions for standardization

7 **Conclusion**

- 8 Conclusions regarding network stream and flow interworking

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