Congestion

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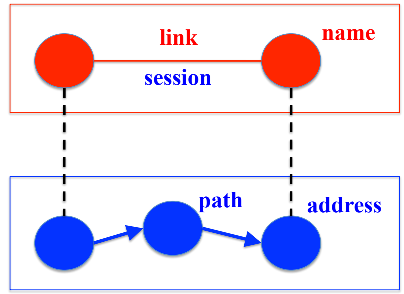
COS 461: Computer Networks
Lectures: MW 10-10:50am in Architecture N101

http://www.cs.princeton.edu/courses/archive/spr12/cos461/

Last Week: Discovery and Routing

Provides end-to-end *connectivity*, but not necessarily good *performance*



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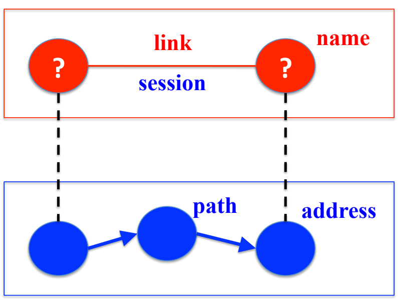
Today: Congestion Control

What can the *end-points* do to collectively to make good use of shared underlying resources?



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Distributed Resource Sharing

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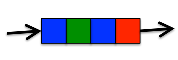
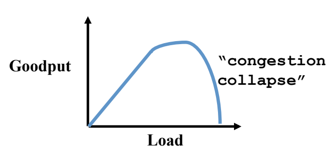
Congestion

- Best-effort network does not "block" calls
  - So, they can easily become overloaded
  - Congestion == "Load higher than capacity"
- Examples of congestion
  - Link layer: Ethernet frame collisions
  - Network layer: full IP packet buffers
- Excess packets are simply dropped
  - And the sender can simply retransmit



Congestion Collapse

- Easily leads to *congestion collapse*
  - Senders retransmit the lost packets
  - Leading to even *greater* load
  - … and even *more* packet loss



Increase in load that results in a *decrease* in useful work done.

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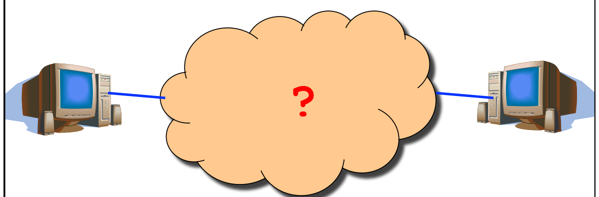
Detect and Respond to Congestion



- What does the end host see?
- What can the end host change?

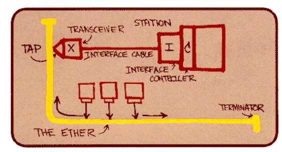
Detecting Congestion

- Link layer
  - Carrier sense multiple access
  - Seeing your own frame collide with others
- Network layer
  - Observing end-to-end performance
  - Packet delay or loss over the path

Responding to Congestion

- Upon detecting congestion
  - Decrease the sending rate
- But, what if conditions change?
  - If more bandwidth becomes available,
  - … unfortunate to keep sending at a low rate
- Upon *not* detecting congestion
  - Increase sending rate, a little at a time
  - See if packets get through

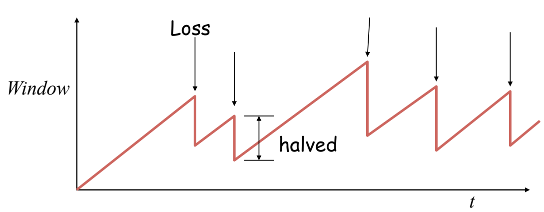
Ethernet Back-off Mechanism



- **Carrier sense:**
  - Wait for link to be idle
  - If idle, start sending
  - If not, wait until idle
- **Collision detection:** listen while transmitting
  - If collision: abort transmission, and send jam signal
- **Exponential back-off:** wait before retransmitting
  - Wait random time, exponentially larger per retry

TCP Congestion Control

- Additive increase, multiplicative decrease
  - On packet loss, divide congestion window in half
  - On success for last window, increase window linearly



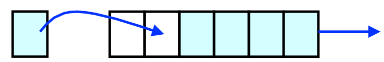
Why Exponential?

- Respond aggressively to bad news
  - Congestion is (very) bad for everyone
  - Need to react aggressively
- Examples:
  - Ethernet: *double* retransmission timer
  - TCP: divide sending rate in *half*
- Nice theoretical properties
  - Makes efficient use of network resources

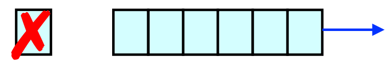
TCP Congestion Control

Congestion in a Drop-Tail FIFO Queue

- Access to the bandwidth: first-in first-out queue
  - Packets transmitted in the order they arrive



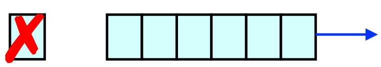
- Access to the buffer space: drop-tail queuing
  - If the queue is full, drop the incoming packet



How it Looks to the End Host

- Delay: Packet experiences high delay
- Loss: Packet gets dropped along path

- How does TCP sender learn this?
  - Delay: Round-trip time estimate
  - Loss: Timeout and/or duplicate acknowledgments



TCP Congestion Window

- Each TCP sender maintains a congestion window
  - Max number of bytes to have in transit (not yet ACK'd)

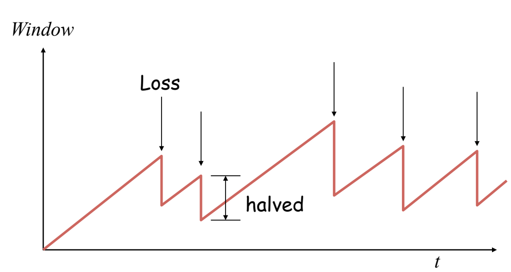
- Adapting the congestion window
  - Decrease upon losing a packet: backing off
  - Increase upon success: optimistically exploring
  - Always struggling to find right transfer rate

- Tradeoff
  - Pro: avoids needing explicit network feedback
  - Con: continually under- and over-shoots "right" rate

Additive Increase, Multiplicative Decrease

- How much to adapt?
  - Additive increase: On success of last window of data, increase window by 1 Max Segment Size (MSS)
  - Multiplicative decrease: On loss of packet, divide congestion window in half
- Much quicker to slow than speed up!
  - Over-sized windows (causing loss) are much worse than under-sized windows (causing lower thruput)
  - AIMD: A necessary condition for stability of TCP

Leads to the TCP "Sawtooth"



Receiver Window vs. Congestion Window

- Flow control
  - Keep a *fast sender* from overwhelming *a slow receiver*
- Congestion control
  - Keep a *set of senders* from overloading the *network*
- Different concepts, but similar mechanisms
  - TCP flow control: receiver window
  - TCP congestion control: congestion window
  - Sender TCP window =

    min { congestion window, receiver window }

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Starting a New Flow

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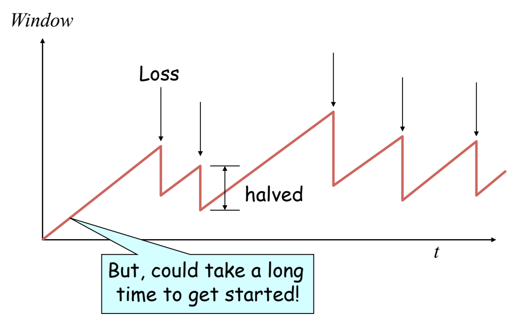
How Should a New Flow Start?

Start slow (a small CWND) to avoid overloading network



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"Slow Start" Phase

- Start with a small congestion window
  - Initially, CWND is 1 MSS
  - So, initial sending rate is MSS / RTT
- Could be pretty wasteful
  - Might be much less than actual bandwidth
  - Linear increase takes a long time to accelerate
- Slow-start phase (really "fast start")
  - Sender starts at a slow rate (hence the name)
  - … but increases rate exponentially until the first loss

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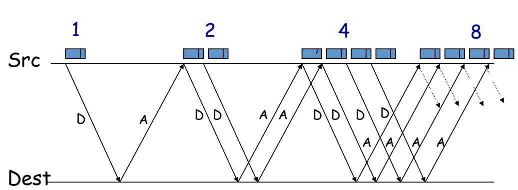
Slow Start in Action

Double CWND per round-trip time



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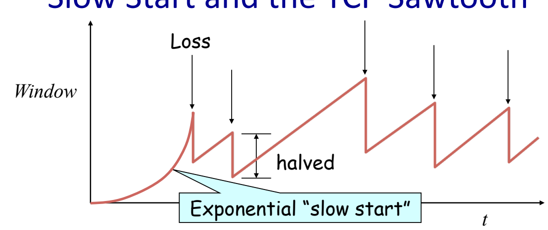
Slow Start and the TCP Sawtooth



- TCP originally had *no* congestion control
  - Source would start by sending entire receiver window
  - Led to congestion collapse!
  - "Slow start" is, comparatively, slower

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Two Kinds of Loss in TCP

- Timeout
  - Packet n is lost and detected via a timeout
  - Blasting entire CWND would cause another burst
  - Better to start over with a low CWND
- Triple duplicate ACK
  - Packet n is lost, but packets n+1, n+2, etc. arrive
  - Then, sender quickly resends packet n
  - Do a multiplicative decrease and keep going

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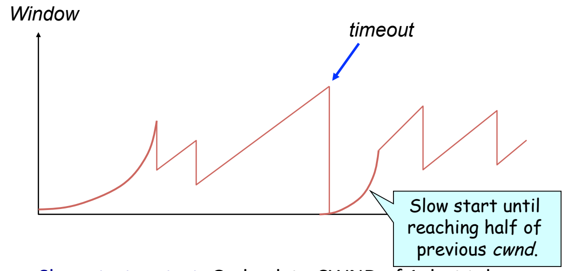
Repeating Slow Start After Timeout



Slow-start restart: Go back to CWND of 1, but take advantage of knowing the previous value of CWND.

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Repeating Slow Start After Idle Period

- Suppose a TCP connection goes idle for a while
- Eventually, the network conditions change
  - Maybe many more flows are traversing the link
- Dangerous to start transmitting at the old rate
  - Previously-idle TCP sender might blast network
  - … causing excessive congestion and packet loss
- So, some TCP implementations repeat slow start
  - Slow-start restart after an idle period

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Fairness

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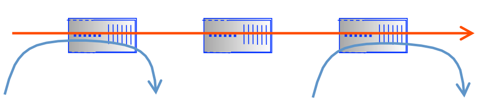
TCP Achieves a Notion of Fairness

- Effective utilization is not only goal
  - We also want to be *fair* to various flows
- Simple definition: equal bandwidth shares
  - N flows that each get 1/N of the bandwidth?
- But, what if flows traverse different paths?
  - Result: bandwidth shared in proportion to RTT



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What About Cheating?

- Some folks are more fair than others
  - Running multiple TCP connections in parallel (BitTorrent)
  - Modifying the TCP implementation in the OS
    - Some cloud services start TCP at > 1 MSS
  - Use the User Datagram Protocol
- What is the impact
  - Good guys slow down to make room for you
  - You get an unfair share of the bandwidth

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Preventing Cheating

- Possible solutions?
  - Routers detect cheating and drop excess packets?
  - Per user/customer failness?
  - Peer pressure?

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Conclusions

- Congestion is inevitable
  - Internet does not reserve resources in advance
  - TCP actively tries to push the envelope
- Congestion can be handled
  - Additive increase, multiplicative decrease
  - Slow start and slow-start restart
- Fundamental tensions
  - Feedback from the network?
  - Enforcement of "TCP friendly" behavior?

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