Introduction to Real-Time Communications

Real-Time and Embedded Systems (M)

Lecture 15

UNIVERSITY
of
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Lecture Outline

- Modelling real-time communications
  - Traffic and network models
  - Properties of networks
    - Throughput, delay and jitter
    - Clock skew
    - Congestion and loss
- Examples
  - Controller area networks
  - Ethernet

Material corresponds to chapter 11 of Liu's book

Real Time Communications

- In most data communications, important that data arrives reliably
  - Would like it to be fast, but prefer reliable
    - E.g. web, email, p2p, etc.
  - Often characterised as *elastic* applications

- In real time communications it is important that the message arrives in a timely manner
  - Timeliness may be *more* important than reliability
  - Messages may have priority
  - Examples:
    - A “drive by wire” system in a car
    - Packet voice and telephony applications

Modelling Real Time Traffic

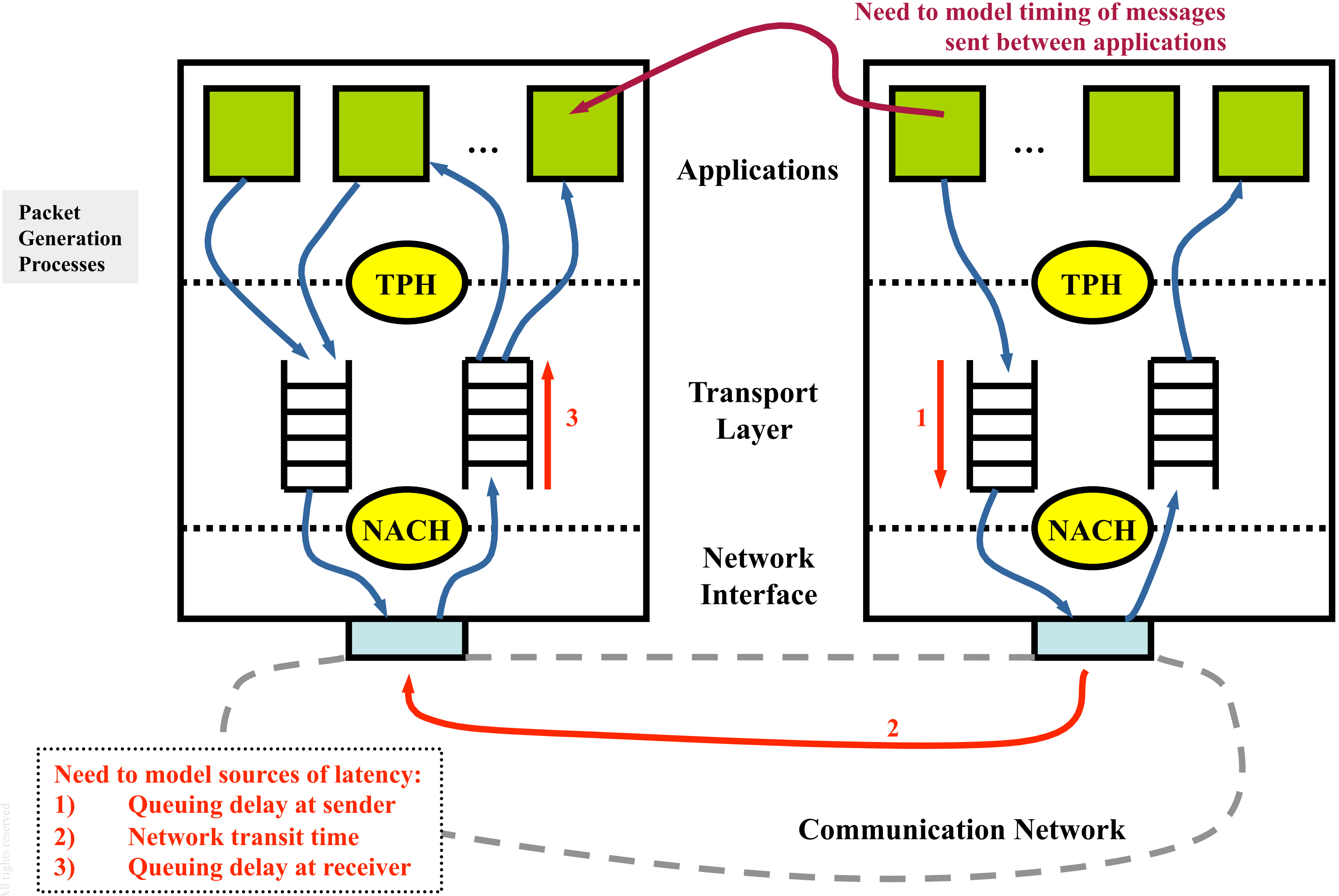
- Assume a packet-based network
  - Real-time traffic on circuit switched network trivial after connection setup
- Traffic falls into two categories:
  - Synchronous periodic flows
    - Produced and consumed in a continuous basis, according to some schedule
    - Generally require some performance guarantee
    - Can be generated by periodic tasks
      - Fixed rate ("isochronous") flows (e.g. sensor data, speech)
      - Characterise by inter-packet spacing, message length, reception deadline
    - Can be generated by sporadic tasks
      - Variable rate flows (e.g. MPEG-2 video, control traffic)
      - Characterise by average throughput + maximum burst size
  - Aperiodic (asynchronous) messages
    - No deadline, best effort delivery, but want to keep delays small
    - Characterise by average delivery time

Modelling Sources of Timing Variation

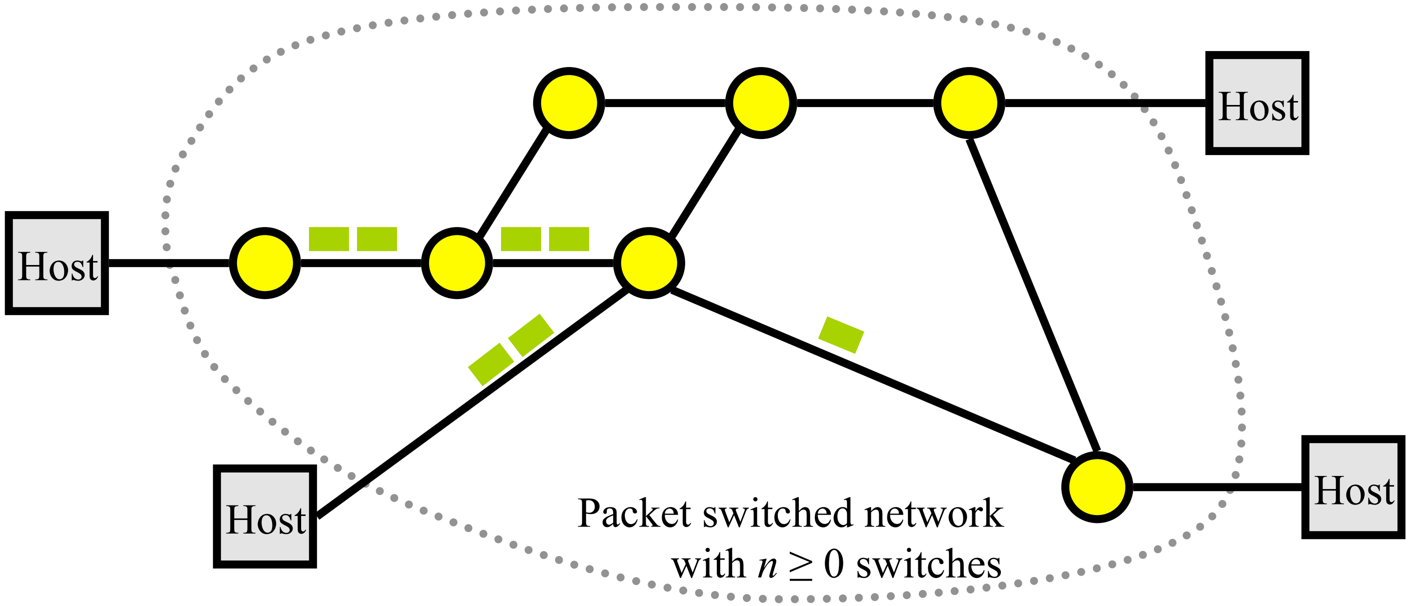
- Ideally the network delivers messages to receiver with no delay, preserving timing
- In reality there is:
  - Queuing delay at sender
    - Network not always ready to accept a packet when it becomes available; data may be queued if produced faster than the network can deliver it
  - Queuing delay at receiver
    - Application not always ready to accept packets arriving from network
    - Network may deliver data in bursts
  - Queuing delay in the network
    - Due to cross-traffic or bottleneck links
  - Network transit time
    - Fixed propagation delay

Model of Hosts

TPH = Transport Protocol Handler
NACH = Network Access Control Handler



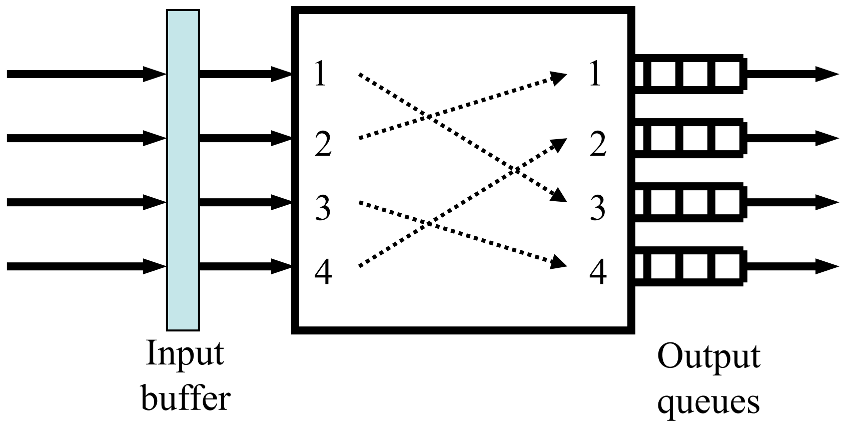
Model of Packet Switched Networks



Links have constant *propagation delay*

Switches queue packets for transmission if output link busy (additional variable delay)

Choice of *job scheduling algorithm* on the output link is critical for real time traffic

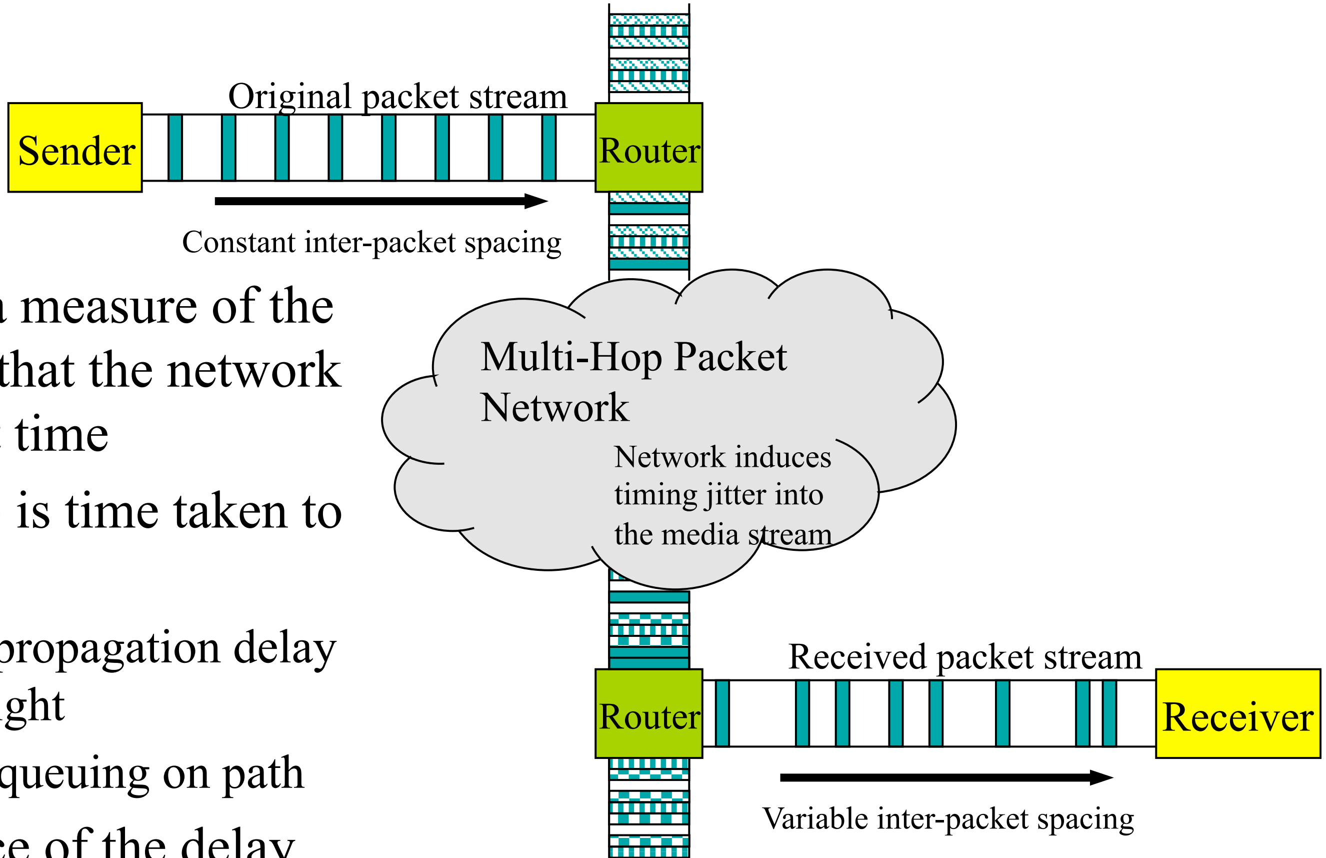


Performance Metrics and Constraints

- From these models, derive performance metrics:
  - Throughput and delay
  - Jitter and buffer requirements
  - Miss rates, when jitter causes a deadline to be missed
  - Packet loss and invalid rates

- Characterise traffic and network according to metrics to schedule communications
  - Need to meet application timing constraints

Throughput, Delay and Jitter

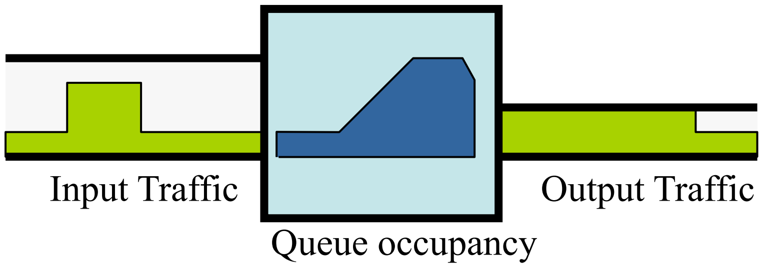


- The *throughput* is a measure of the number of packets that the network can deliver per unit time
- The *delay* (latency) is time taken to deliver a packet
  - Fixed minimum propagation delay due to speed of light
  - Variation due to queuing on path
- The *jitter* is variance of the delay

- Throughput, delay and jitter vary according to router scheduling algorithms
  - Possible to derive bounds for delay/jitter in some cases
  - Lecture 16

Throughput and Delay

- Clear that throughput and delay depend on the capacity of each link, and on the queuing delay at each hop
  – Queuing delay will vary based on the traffic
  – Throughput variation may cause queues to build up at bottleneck links



Leads to "packet pair" techniques; see S. Keshav, "A Control-theoretic Approach to Flow Control", SIGCOMM 2001.

  – Cross traffic will also affect queue occupancy
  – Throughput may be limited by an intermediate link, which cannot be directly observed by sender and receiver
    - How to tell if the throughput is limited by the network, or by other traffic using the network?
    - Cannot know if capacity available, unless requirements signalled in advance

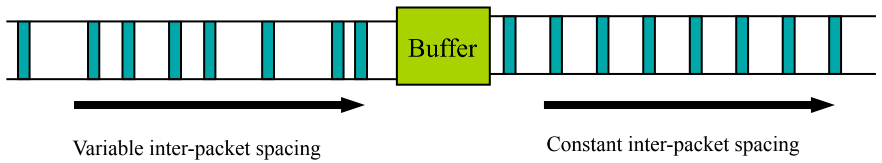
Throughput and Delay

- Delay matters for some applications, but not others
  - Interactive applications need low delay
    - Telephony, video conferencing and games
    - Control applications often need low delay in the sensor ⇒ controller ⇒ actuator loop
    - Limiting factor often propagation delay; queuing delay an important and controllable factor
  - Non-interactive applications are less delay sensitive
    - Video on demand, TV and radio distribution
- Throughput typically very important
  - Need to sustain a certain rate, to support the application
  - May wish to use scheduling algorithms to prioritise which packets are to be sent, and guarantee throughput

Jitter and Buffering Requirements

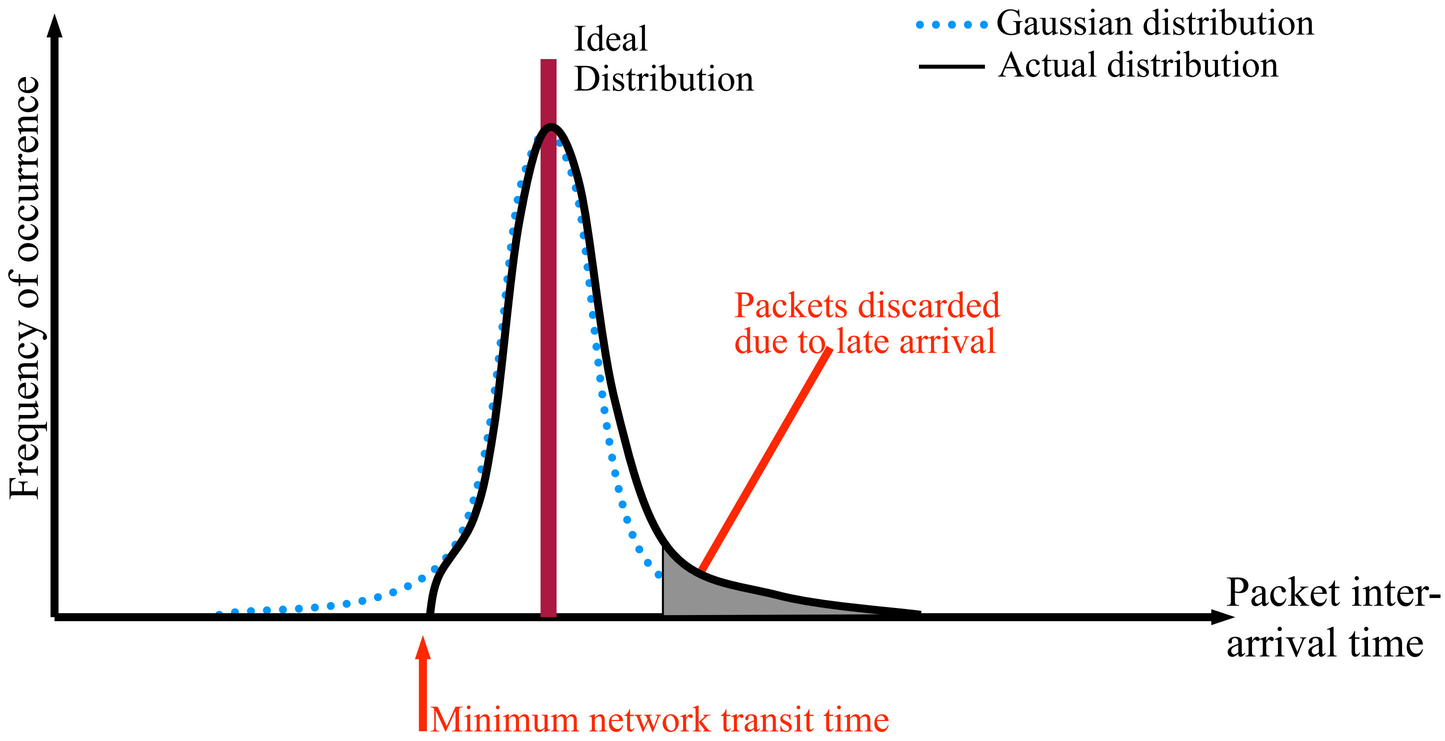
- Delay *jitter* is the variation in delay across a network path
  - For isochronous traffic, often talk about absolute value and standard deviation of packet inter-arrival time
  - Assumes we can characterise the jitter – see examples later

- Jitter imposes requirement for receiver buffering
  - Isochronous applications must be fed data correctly spaced



    - Need buffer to smooth and reconstruct timing
    - Larger jitter implies more buffering is needed
  - Packet scheduling algorithms can bound jitter

Jitter and Miss Rate



- Want to characterise jitter distribution
  - Hope for something approximating a Gaussian distribution ⇒ simple statistics to derive the *miss rate*
    - Fraction of packets lost due to jitter
  - Actual distribution will be more complex

Clock Skew and Synchronisation

- Sender and receiver are typically widely distributed
  - Clocks are often free-running and unsynchronised
  - Results in a steady increase or decrease in the inter-packet spacing observed at the receiver
  - Problematic for isochronous applications:
    - Queues can build up in the receiver or in intermediate systems
      - Eventually buffer space will be exceeded
      - Some data will be dropped
    - Queues can empty in the receiver
      - Initial queue created, to buffer for jitter
      - Sender is slightly slower than receiver
      - Queue slowly empties, eventually there is no data to process
  - How to resolve?
    - May be able to tune clock frequency to match
    - May have to discard/generate data to compensate
      - Application knowledge needed

Congestion and Loss

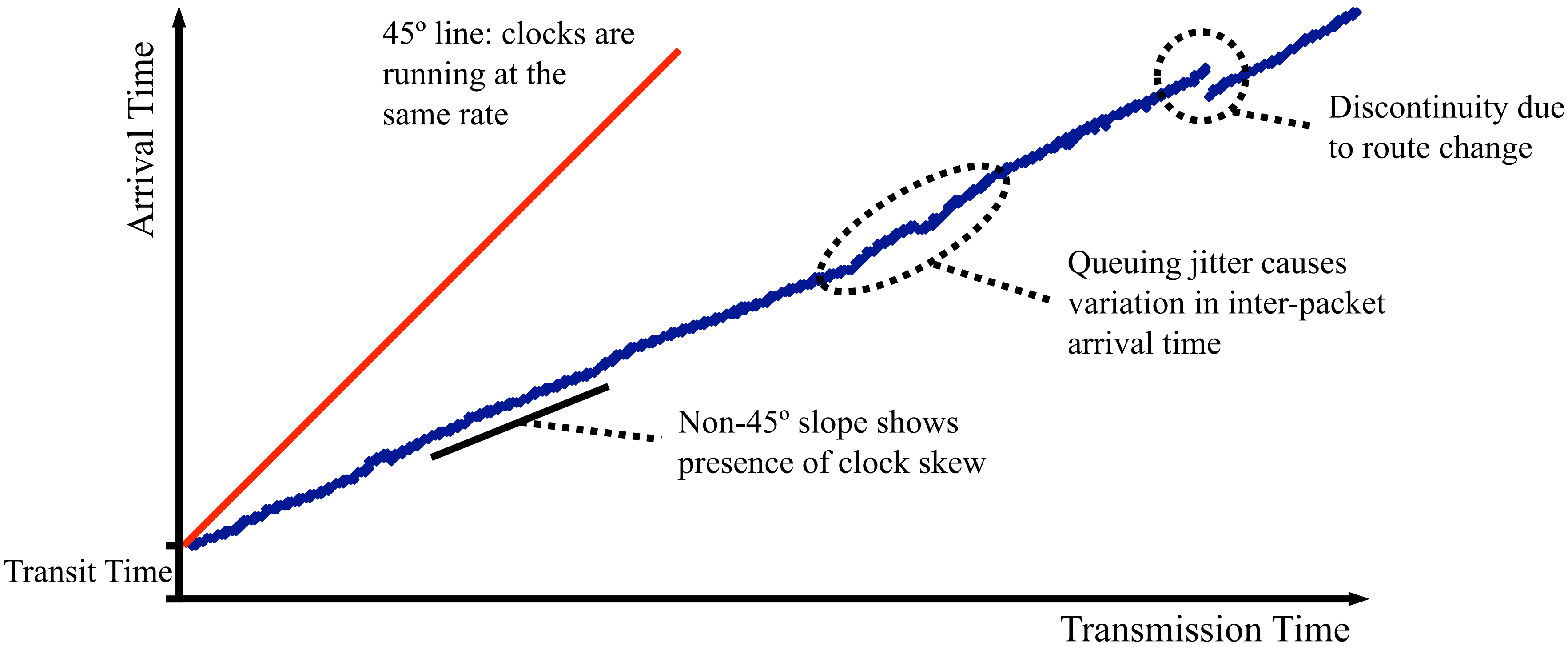
- Assumed that no traffic is ever blocked or lost because there is no space in the ready queue when it becomes available for execution
  - Usually valid for operating systems and LAN communication
  - Not valid for many wide-area communication systems
    - Too expensive to provision buffering in all routers
    - Provision for typical load plus a safety factor, not worst case
    - Queues may overflow, hence packets are dropped
      - The *loss rate* gives the fraction of packets that are dropped
      - Patterns of loss may also be important: affected by packet scheduling algorithms

- Packets may also be dropped due to corruption or other errors
  - Not discussed further, since not affected by scheduling

Congestion and Loss

- Implication: not only may we cause overloads and congestion, so might the cross traffic
  - Temporary congestion will cause queuing delays
  - Persistent congestion will result in queues that stay full, hence packets may be lost
- How to avoid this?
  - Control the amount of traffic at a bottleneck link
    - Applications need to signal their requirements
    - Network needs to perform admission control
  - Or prioritise traffic, to give preference to important flows
    - What scheduling algorithm to use?
    - May allow real-time traffic, but discard best effort data traffic when the network is overloaded

Visualising Disruption to Packet Timing



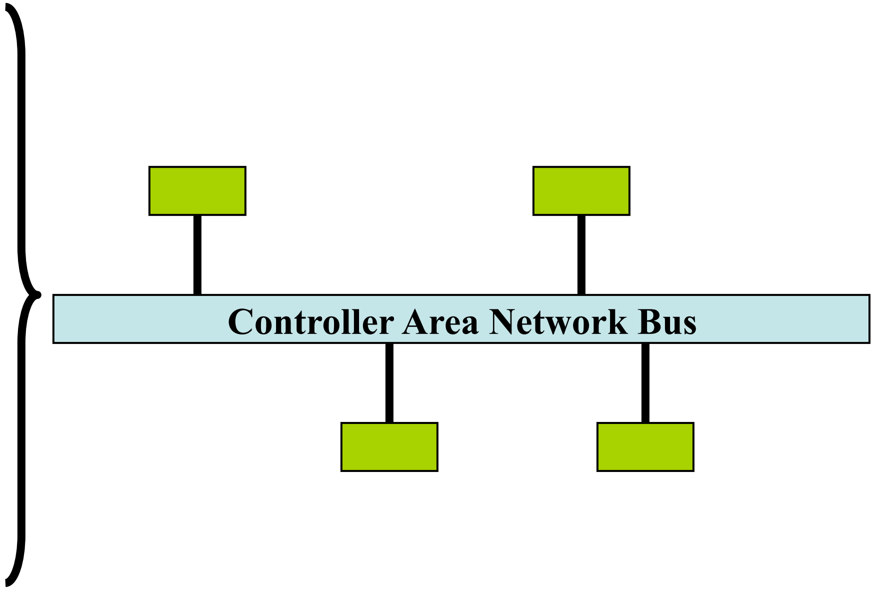
Characterisation of Networks

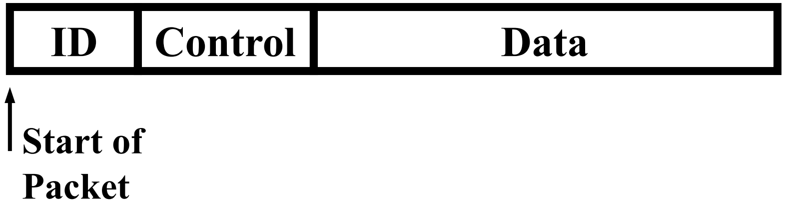
- Real-world performance constraints force us to characterise the timing behaviour of a network
  - Prove/demonstrate that throughput, latency, and jitter are within appropriate bounds for the application

- Some network technologies allow this, others do not
  - Examples: CAN, Ethernet

Example: Controller Area Networks

- Shared serial bus, send at 1Mbps, maximum bus length is 50 metres
- All stations hear transmissions within a fraction of a bit time
- Connections wired together as a logical AND function
  - Stations only see a 1 bit on the bus if all transmitters are sending a 1 bit
- Packets start with an ID, then control and data
- Slotted CSMA/CD: wait until start of slot, then begin to send with the ID field, but:
  - Stop if you hear a 0 on the bus when you are sending a 1
  - Packet with smallest ID is sent first; priority network protocol





Example: Controller Area Networks

- Widely used in automotive systems, for example
- Allows communications to be scheduled using the fixed priority scheduling algorithms we have discussed
  - Look at the communications patterns, assign deadlines to each message exchange
  - Use deadline monotonic scheduling to assign priorities
    - 11 bit ID field, implies 2048 priority levels
    - Treat sporadic messages as periodic messages, according to worse case assumptions
      - Waste capacity, but ensures schedulability
  - The CAN will not interrupt a message once it has started
  - Low utilisation, but can prove that all messages will be delivered before their deadlines and calculate jitter
    - Standard schedulability analysis, as for any set of jobs

Example: Ethernet

- Recall that Ethernet uses CSMA/CD with exponential back off
  - Try to transmit, listening for collision
  - If a collision occurs, stop sending, wait before retry
  - Random binary exponential back-off
    - After *i* collisions back-off by up to 2*i* slots, randomly chosen
- Potentially unbounded delay on busy network
  - Cannot schedule transmissions to avoid collision
- No prioritisation of messages

- Implications:
  - Cannot easily reason about timing properties
  - Difficult to schedule messages to ensure timely delivery

Summary

- What is real time communication
- Factors that affect real time communication
  - Throughput, delay and jitter
  - Clock skew
  - Congestion and loss
- Examples of networks and their timing properties
  - Some networks provide timing guarantees, others do not