

6.02 – Network: Reliable Transport and Congestion Control

Lecture #11

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0. Introduction

- Last week: how to route scalably in the face of policy and economy
- This week: how to transport scalably in the face of diverse application demands

1. TCP

- Goals: provide reliable transport, prevent congestion
- Broader questions: how do we do this scalably, and how do we share the network efficiently and fairly?
- Today: TCP Congestion Control
 - In particular, a version of TCP known as "New Reno"
- Next lecture: An alternative approach to "resource management" on the Internet

2. Reliable Transport via sliding-window protocol

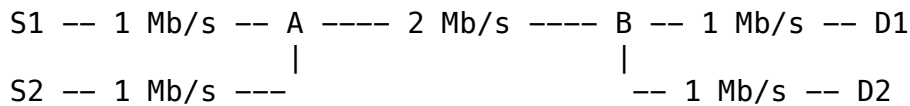
- Goal: receiving application gets a complete, in-order bytestream from the sender. One copy of every packet, in order.
- Why do we need it? Network is unreliable. Packets get dropped, can arrive out-of-order.
- Basics:
 - Every data packet gets a sequence number (1, 2, 3, ...)
 - Sender has W outstanding packets at any given time. W = window size
 - When receive gets a packet, it sends an ACK back. ACKs are cumulative: An ACK for X indicates "I have received all packets up to and including X ."
 - If sender doesn't receive an ACK indicating that packet X has been received, after some amount of time it will "timeout" and retransmit X .
 - Maybe X was lost, its ACK was lost, or its ACK is delayed
 - The timeout = proportional to (but a bit larger than) the RTT of the path between sender and receiver
 - At receiver: keep buffer to avoid delivering out-of-order packets, keep track of last-packet-delivered to avoid delivering duplicates.

3. Main motivation

- What's the "right" value for W ?
- In particular, what if there are multiple senders?
 - Ex:

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S1 -- 2 Mb/s -- A ---- 2 Mb/s ---- B -- 2 Mb/s -- D1
                |                               |
S2 -- 2 Mb/s ----                -- 2 Mb/s -- D2
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- What should happen? Debatable. Reasonable alternative:



- How do S1 and S2 figure this out? What happens if S3 arrives? Or if S1 starts sending less? Etc.

5. Congestion Control: controlling the source rate to achieve high performance

- Goals: Efficiency and fairness
 - Minimize drops, minimize delay, maximize utilization
 - Share bandwidth fairly among all connections that are using it
- FOR NOW: assume all senders have infinite offered load. Fairness = splitting bandwidth equally amongst them.
- But no senders knows how many other senders there are, and that number can change over time.
- We'll use window-based congestion control. Switches are dumb (can only drop packets); senders are smart

6. AIMD

- Need a signal for congestion in the network, so senders can react to it.
- Our signal: packet drops
- Every RTT:
 - If there is no loss, $W = W+1$
 - If there is loss, $W = W/2$
- This is "Additive Increase Multiplicative Decrease" (AIMD)
- Senders constantly readjust => adapt to a changing number of senders, or changing offered loads
- Window size exhibits sawtooth behavior (see slides)
- Why AIMD?
 - It's "safe": senders are conservative about increasing, but scale back dramatically in the face of congestion
 - Efficient and fair

7. Finite Offered Load

- Remove the assumption that everyone has infinite offered load
- Suppose S1 and S2 have offered load of 1Mb/s, S3 has offered load of .5Mb/s, and they all share a bottleneck with capacity 2Mb/s
- What happens?
 - In theory: S3 stops increase once it's sending .5Mb/s. S1 and S2 continue increasing until they reach .75Mb/s
- Is this fair?
 - In some sense. It achieves a type of fairness known as "max-min fairness". But there are other definitions (e.g., "proportional fairness")
- What happens in practice?
 - We might get max-min fairness, or one of the senders might experience a much longer RTT and so not increase its window at

the same rate.

- So: TCP's congestion control utilizes the network reasonably well, but it's hard to measure fairness, or claim that fairness is achieved under skewed workloads, varying RTTs, etc.

8. Additional Mechanisms

- Slow Start
 - At the beginning of the connection, exponential increase the window (double it every RTT until you see loss)
 - Decreases the time it takes for the initial window to "ramp up"
 - (See slide for diagram)
- Fast Retransmit/Fast Recovery
 - When a sender receives an ACK with sequence number X, and then three duplicates of that packet, it immediately retransmits packet X+1 (remember: ACKs are cumulative)
 - Ex: Send 1 2 3 4 5 6
 Receive 1 2 2 2 2
 Sender receives 4 ACKs total with sequence number "2";
 infers that packet 3 is lost, immediately retransmits
 - On fast-retransmit, window decrease is as before: $W = W/2$
 - In fact, when a packet is lost due to timeout, TCP behaves differently: $W = 1$, then do slow-start until the last good window, and then start additive increase.
 - (See slide for diagram)
 - Reasoning: if there is a retransmission due to timeout, then there is significant loss in the network, and senders should back *way* off.

9. Reflection

- TCP has been a massive success, requires no changes to the Internet's infrastructure, is something endpoints can opt-in to, allows the network to be shared among tons of different users, all with different -- and changing -- types of traffic, in a distributed manner.
- BUT: TCP doesn't react to congestion until it's already happening. Is there something better we could do?