Overlay topology based inter-domain Qos paths building

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The transport of multimedia flows over the internet needs to manage and control end to end Quality of Services (QoS) at transport level. Open issues still exist related to finding and maintaining QoS enabled paths through one or several independently administered domains. Among others, two tasks need to be solved: QoS routing or QoS enabled path finding and then maintaining these paths during data transfer. This paper deals with the problem of establishing QoS enabled aggregated multi-domain paths, to be later used for many individual streams. It is proposed a simple but extendable procedure, running at management overlay level, to find through communication between domain managers, several potential inter-domain end to end paths. Then, through resource negotiation process performed also in the management plane, QoS enabled aggregated pipes are established.

Index Terms—QoS path finding, QoS routing, end to end QOS management, pSLS, management system, overlay network topology.

1. Introduction

The real time multimedia services, delivered on internet networks, raised new challenges for the network regarding the end to end (E2E) quality of services (QoS) control in order to ensure the proper delivery of the services from content provider (source) to content consumer (destination). But traffic processing in real internet deployments is still mostly best effort. Several approaches have been proposed, focused on provisioning aspects – usually solved in the management plane - and then in the control plane: e.g. well known dynamic techniques have been standardized, like IntServ, Diffserv, or combinations. The routing or - more generally - QoS enabled path finding and then maintaining, are also a part of the scene. Offering multimedia services in multi-domain heterogeneous environments is an additionally challenge at network/ transport level. Service management is important here, for provisioning, offering, handling, and fulfilling variety of services. Appropriate means are needed to enable a large number of providers to co-operate in order to extend their QoS offerings over multiple domains. To this aim, an integrated management system can be a solution, preserving each domain independency but offering integration at a higher (overlay) layer in order to achieve E2E controllable behavior.

This paper deals with the problem of establishing QoS enabled aggregated multi-domain paths, to be later used for many individual streams. It is proposed a simple but extendable procedure, running at management level, to find (through communication between domain managers) several potential inter-domain end to end paths. Then, using a resource negotiation process performed also in the management plane, QoS enabled aggregated pipes are established. All these function are performed at an overlay level based on abstract characterization of intra and inter-domain capabilities delivered by an intra-domain resource manager. The subsystem is part of an integrated management system, multi-domain, dedicated to end to end distribution of multimedia streams.

The QoS path finding is not a traditional routing process: it is not implemented on routers and it doesn't choose a route between network devices but between two or more nodes of an overlay virtual topology described at inter-domain level. Together with the intra-domain QoS routing available inside each network domain we will obtain an E2E QoS routing solution.

2. State of the art

Because our approach deals with QoS path finding and routing short overview of the available approaches for QoS routing is presented below related to [12],[13],[14], [16], [17]. We distinguish between intra and inter-domain problems.

The intra-domain QoS routing solutions could be divided in two major approaches.

Classically, intra-domain QoS routing protocols run on the routers and find paths with QoS constraints from source to destination.

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Other solutions are based on the existence of a central manager of the domain, (having knowledge of the total resource allocation inside the domain) and use an algorithm to determine QoS routes between source and destination. In this the QoS path finding process is run by a dedicated module of the domain manager, and the resulted route is installed in the network equipments by a network controller. Usually the QoS routing process is triggered by a new request for a QoS path through the domain.

For inter-domain QoS routing also we can distinguish between two kinds of approaches. The first one proposes enhancements for the BGP protocol in order to support QoS features. The BGP advertises QoS related information between autonomous systems (ASes), and the routing table is build taking into consideration this additional QoS information. The Q-BGP protocol proposed in MESCAL [19], project is such an example.

Another category of inter-domain QoS routing solutions are based on the overlay network idea [12], [13]. An overlay network is built which abstracts each domain with a node, represented by the domain service manager, or with several nodes represented by the egress routers from that domain. Then protocols are defined between nodes for exchanging QoS information, and based on this information QoS routing algorithms are used to choose the QoS capable path. In [12] a Virtual Topology solution is proposed. The VT is formed by a set of virtual links that map the current link state of the domain without showing internal details of the physical network topology. Then a *Push* and a *Pull* model for building the VT at each node are considered and analyzed. In *Push* model each AS advertise their VT to their neighbor ASes. This model is suited for small topologies. In *Push* model the VT is requested when needed and only from the ASes situated along the path between source and destinations, path which is determined using BGP routing information. If BGP kept several routes between source and destination than the VTs for each domain situated along the founded paths are requested. Based on this VTs information the QoS route from source to destination is calculated. After that an end to end QoS negotiation protocol is used to negotiate the QoS resources along the path.

One problem with these solutions is that they are based on the virtual available resource topology information obtained from other ASes. This requirement could be not accepted by the actual network providers, due to their confidentiality policy regarding their resource availability.

Also, this solutions family is based on an end to end QoS negotiation process. After the QoS path is found the negotiation process is started. While the advantage is increasing the chance of negotiation success, it implies two QoS searching processes: building the QoS topology and secondly negotiation in order to reserve resources.

This paper proposes a simpler approach by separating the process of path searching from the process of QoS negotiation (QoS searching path). By combining these two processes we will obtain a QoS inter-domain routing solution.

This solution is integrated and it is currently in development in an E2E QoS management system [1],[7],[8],[9]. The system is developed by an European consortium in the FP6 European project ENTHRONE [1],[2],[3], [4] and continued with ENTHRONE II, [5], [6], [7]. The ENTHRONE project is an integrated management solution based on the end-to-end QoS over heterogeneous networks and terminals. It proposes an integrated management solution that covers the entire audio-visual service distribution chain, including protected content handling, distribution across networks and reception at user terminals.

The overlay QoS path finding solution is based on the overlay network topology abstracting each pair (IP domain + manager) with a node. The overlay network in this case is only a connectivity one, with no information about the resources available intra and inter-domain. The target of this, is to offer possibility to managers to compute alternative/several "international" paths, at overlay level. Then, the end to end QoS negotiation mechanisms is used to reserve resources. Together they will act as a QoS inter-domain routing algorithm.

The section 3 shortly describes the general Enthrone architecture focusing on the service management at the network level. The section 4 introduces the proposed QoS inter-domain path finding solution. Section 5 presents details about the implementation and section 6 contains conclusions and possibilities of extensions and open issues.

3. Enthrone end to end qos management system

As mentioned before the ENTHRONE project IST 507637 (continued with ENTHRONE II, IST 038463) European project cover the delivery of real time multimedia flows with end to end quality of services (QoS) guarantees, over IP based networks. To achieve this goal, it has proposed [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6], a complex architecture to cover an entire audio-visual service distribution chain, including content generation and protection, distribution across QoS-enabled heterogeneous networks and delivery of content at user terminals. A complete business model has been considered, containing actors (entities) such as: *Service Providers (SP), Content Providers (CP), Network Providers (NP), Customers (CST - e.g. Content Consumers – CC), etc.*

Enthrone features

ENTHRONE has defined an E2E QoS multi-domain *Enthrone Integrated Management Supervisor (EIMS).* The service management (SM) is a part of EIMS. It considers all actors mentioned above and their contractual service related relationships *Service Level Agreements (SLA)* and *Service Level Specifications (SLS)* as defined in [1], [2], [3],[4],[5], [6]. The SM is independent on particular management systems used by different NPs in their domains. The SM entities should cooperate to realize the E2E chain. They are present in different amounts in SP, CP, NP CC entities, depending on the entity role in the E2E chain. The SM located in NPs should cooperate with each IP domain manager and also with other actors in the E2E chain.

ENTHRONE supposes a multi-domain network composed of several IP domains and access networks (AN) at the edges. The CPs, SP, CCs, etc. are linked to these networks. The QoS transport concepts of ENTHRONE are shortly described below. First, provisioning QoS enabled aggregated pipes based on forecasted data, are established (decided by a service planning function) crossing the core IP part of the multi-domain network; this is done at management level. An aggregated QoS enabled pipe (called pSLS-links) is identified by an inter NP provider SLS (pSLS) agreement, which is an agreement between two NP managers in order to reserve the requested resources. Each pSLS-link belongs to a given QoS class, [19].

Then slices/tracks of pSLS-links are used for individual flows based on individual cSLA/SLS contracts. An individual QoS enabled pipe is identified by a cSLS, which is an agreement established between the manager of a Service Provider (EIMS@SP) and a CC for reserving the necessary resources for the requested quality of service. Several cSLSs pipes are aggregated at the core network level into an aggregated pSLS pipe.

In the data plane of core IP domains Diffserv or MPLS can be used to enforce service differentiation corresponding to the QoS class defined. In the ANs, the traffic streams addressed to the users (Content Consumers) is treated similar to the *intserv*, i.e. individual resource reservations and invocations are made for each user.

Service Management at Network Provider

The EIMS architecture at NP (EIMS@NP) contains four functional planes: the *Service Plane (SPl)* establishes appropriate SLAs/SLSs among the operators/ providers/customers. The *Management Plane (MPl)* performs long term actions related to resource and traffic management. The *Control Plane (CPl)* performs the short term actions for resource and traffic engineering and control, including routing. In a multi-domain environment the *MPl* and *CPl* are logically divided in two sub-planes: inter-domain and intra-domain. Therefore, each domain may have its own management and control policies and mechanisms. The *Data Plane (DPl)* is responsible to transfer the multimedia data and to set the DiffServ traffic control mechanisms to assure the desired level of QoS.

The main task of the EIMS@NP is to find, negotiate and establish a QoS enabled pipe from a Content Server (CS) of a CP, to a, region where potential CCs are located. Each pipe is established and identified by a chain of pSLS agreements between successive NP managers. The forwarded cascaded model is used to build the pSLS pipes, [4]. The pipes are unidirectional ones. An E2E negotiation protocol is used, [4] to negotiate the pSLS pipe construction across multiple network domains.

The process of establishing a pSLS–link/pipe is triggered by the SP. It decides, based on market analyses and users recorded requirements, to build a set of QoS enabled pipes, with QoS parameters described by in pSLS agreements. It starts a new negotiation session for each pSLS pipe establishment. It sends a pSLS Subscribe request to the EIMS@NP manager of the Content Consumer network domain. The EIMS@NP manager performs the QoS specific tasks such as admission control, (AC) routing and service provisioning. To this aim it splits the pSLS request into intra-domain respectively inter-domain pSLS request. It also performs intra-domain routing to find the intra-domain route for the requested pSLS, and then it performs intra-domain AC. If these actions are successfully accomplished, and if the pSLS pipe is an inter-domain one, then the manager uses the routing agent to find the ingress point in the next domain, does inter-domain AC and then send a pSLS Subscribe request towards the next domain. This negotiation is continued in the chain and up to the destination domain, i.e. the domain of the CC access network. If the negotiation ends successfully the QoS enabled pipe is considered logically established along the path from source to destination.

The actual installation and configuration of routers is considered in ENTHRONE a separate action and is done in invocation phase in a similar signaling way plus the "vertical" commands given by EIMS@NP to the intra-domain resource manager.

After the pSLS pipe is active (i.e. subscribed and invoked) the Service Provider is ready to offer the new service to the users from the access network situated at the end of the pipe. Now the process of cSLS individual agreements establishment, for this new pSLS pipe, could be started.

4. Finding an end to end path with guarantied QoS

General considerations

The main concepts of ENTRONE as stated in [7] are:

a. E2E QoS over multiple domains is a main target of EIMS. This is accomplished by negotiating QoS aware pSLS pipes.

b. But each AS has complete autonomy for the management of its network resources including off-line traffic engineering (TE), network dimensioning and dynamic routing.

c. Each Network Service Manager (cooperating with Intra-domain network resources manager) is supposed to know about its network resources in terms of QoS capabilities. ENTHRONE assumed that each AS manager has an abstract view of its network and output links towards neighbors in a form of a set of virtual pipes (called Traffic Trunks in ENTHRONE I, see [3], [4]) each such pipe belonging to a given QoS class.

In order to establish multiple domain pSLS-links inter-domain QoS aware routing information is necessary to increase the chances of successful pSLS establishment when negotiating the pSLSes. Several approaches are possible [5]:

1. NPs advertise their QoS capabilities with their associated scope through different methods (from automated peer-to-peer processes down to conventional techniques). A NP manager can locate and find out the QoS-classes offered by other domains (QoS capabilities, capacities, destination prefixes and costs).

2. NPs implement a small number of well-known QoS classes. Inter-domain QoS services are created by constructing paths across those domains that support a particular QoS class. The BGP information is used to find destination prefixes. But QoS capabilities, capacities and costs can be determined during pSLS negotiations – which may be successful or not.

3. NPs advertise their QoS class capability and reachability through a protocol. Inter-domain QoS services are then created by constructing paths (which may not necessarily be the BGP path) across those domains that support a particular QoS class. This is path advertisement through a protocol.

The proposed overlay inter-domain QoS path finding solution

We proposed a simplified version which takes into account the following assumption regarding the specific characteristics of the Enthrone system:

• The number of E2E QoS enabled pipes is not very large because they are long term aggregated pipes.

• The number of NP entities is much lower than the number of routers

• The EIMS@NPs are implemented on powerful and reliable machines, having enough computing and storage capabilities.

• The inter-domain core IP topology is rather stable and fixed; new elements are added at large time intervals.

This solution is also based on the idea of Overlay Virtual Network (OVN) [12], but in the first approach of our case, the OVN consists only from network domains (autonomous systems) abstracted as nodes. Each node will be represented by an EIMS@NP in this Overlay Virtual Network. This virtual network contains only information on connectivity between the domains, represented by the EIMS@NP nodes, or additionally static information regarding the inter-domain QoS parameters: links bandwidth, maximum jitter and delay, mean jitter and delay, etc.

This virtual connectivity topology (VCT) can be learned statically (offline) or dynamically.

The statically approach considers that the OVCT is built on a dedicated server – a topology server, like in the Domain Name Service (DNS). When a Network Provider wants to enter in the Enthrone system, then its EIMS@NP should register on this topology server. The topology server will return the Overlay Virtual Connectivity Topology. So we will consider that each EIMS@NP has the knowledge of this connectivity topology. In the dynamic case each the EIMS@NP if wanting to build the OVCT will query its directly linked (at data plane level) neighbor domains. It is supposed that it has the knowledge of such neighbors.

Each queried EIMS@NP returns only the list of its neighbors. At receipt of such information, the queerer EIMS@NP updates its topology data base (note that this process is not a flooding one as in OSPF). Then it queries the new nodes learned and so on. The process continues until the queerer node EIMS@NP learns the whole graph of "international" topology.

As we mentioned above the graph contains as nodes the EIMS@NP which means that is made from the Network Service Managers of Enthrone capable domains.

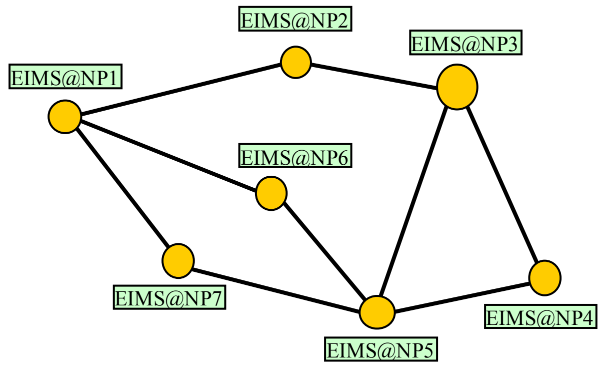

Figure 1: Overlay Virtual Connectivity Network

If the Enthrone system will be implemented at large scale the number of nodes in the graph will be large, which means that the time required calculating the routing table will be also large. But because the topology structure changes events (adding new EIMS domains) are seldom ones (weeks, months), the topology construction process could be run at large time intervals (once a day for example). In this case the routes calculation is triggered also at large time intervals, which means that it is enough time to determine the overlay paths. Another consequence is that the messages used to build the OVCT will not overload significantly the network. Enthrone capable domains can be separated by normal domains, with no Enthrone capabilities. In this case we consider that static initially QoS enabled pipes are built between Enthrone capable domains, pipes crossing the Enthrone non capable domains. These domains (Enthrone non capable) will be transparent for the Enthrone domains.

On the graph learned each EIMS@NP can compute several paths between different sources and destinations, thus being capable to offer alternative routes to the negotiation function.

The number of hops is used as a metric for the path choosing process. By the "hop" term we refer to a node in the Overlay Virtual Topology.

The process of route selection is as follows:

- When a request for a new pSLS arrived at one EIMS@NP, it will use a search algorithm to find the best path to the destination (the next EIMS@NP node that belong to this path), based on information regarding the topology.
- After the next "hop" is determined, the EIMS@NP will check if it has an intra-domain QoS enabled path for this route, i.e. between an appropriate ingress router and an egress router to the chosen next hop domain. If there is no such QOS enabled route, another domain is determined as the next hop.
- In case that in the intra-domain it is found a QoS enabled route the EIMS@NP, based on mechanisms defined in Enthrone, a request for a new pSLS or a modify pSLS negotiation to the chosen EIMS@NP neighbor is triggered.
- This process continues until the destination is reached. If the negotiation ends with success than the pSLS pipe with guaranteed QoS parameters is found. If the process fails then the EIMS@NP uses the search algorithm to find another path to the destination and starts a new negotiation.

This solution has the advantage of being simple and that it not require at an AS the knowledge of current traffic trunks for the other network domains as in [12].

A drawback of our solution (proposed above) is a larger failure probability in negotiating a segment (therefore a longer mean time for negotiation process), if comparing with solutions which calculate the QoS path before the negotiation process. The latter approach increases the probability that the negotiation finished with success at the first try.

The path finding process described above is not based on BGP information at all. BGP is used only for best effort traffic. The process of QoS routing takes place at service management level. But it is possible in principle to use such BGP information.

5. Design details

Routing tables

As mentioned before this solution is based on the knowledge of the overlay network connectivity topology. The topology can be kept in a form of a square matrix. The dimension M is equal to the number of nodes in the overlay topology network. Each entry r_{ij}, has an integer value. A zero value means that there is no direct connectivity between the nodes *i* and *j*. A value different from zero, value *1* for example, implies that there is a direct connection between the two nodes:

Because the matrix is a sparse one it can be easily compress in order to be stored in case that the dimension M is big.

Based on this overlay topology each EIMS@NP builds a routing table which contains, for each node in the network- the destination node, the whole set of possible paths to this destination node, and the costs associated with each of this paths. In the routing table several entries will exists for each destination, one entry for each possible next hope towards the destination.

Even if the number of possible routes from source to destination could be high if the number of nodes in the Overlay Topology is high, the routing table kept by an EIMS@NP node is limited by the number of its direct connected neighbor nodes. It is used the same principle as in the case of distance vector protocols. In the case when there are several paths to the same destination EIMS@NP node using as first next hop the same node, in the routing table we will store the best cost of all the possible paths going through that node.

This is not a limitation because in our case the routing decision is taken hop by hop so the source node has no idea what route to the destination will be chosen at the node where the paths are splitting. An EIMS@NP does not need to keep the whole path information (but the total cost only) because it cannot influence the route chosen decision at the next hops along the path.

Let's suppose that the $EIMS@NP_k$ node has the neighbor nodes $EIMS@NP_m$, $EIMS@NP_n$, $EIMS@NP_p$. The routing table from $EIMS@NP_k$ node to $EIMS@NP_l$ node will be:

Table1: Routing table at node *k* for node *l* destination

Destination	$EIMS@NP_l$	$EIMS@NP_l$	$EIMS@NP_l$
Nex Hop	$EIMS@NP_m$	$EIMS@NP_n$	$EIMS@NP_n$
Cost (Nb of hops)	5	0	3

The EIMS@NP at node *k* builds such a record for each node in the overlay network. Also it searches and stores each possible path to the destination, with the associated cost. This process of searching all possible paths for each possible destination in this overlay network topology is an expensive one in terms of calculation. But based on the assumptions presented above, which are realistic ones if such a management system will be implemented in the network domains, this routing table building process will be run only on topology updates, which means at very long time intervals. Such a process will put low computing overhead on the Service Manager. Also it could be scheduled to run on intervals with low management activity (see Resource Provisioning Cycle defined in ENTHRONE philosophy, [4]). Taking this in consideration we could consider that the routing table is a static one, and the route search process reduces to a simple database search one. We do not need to run the searching algorithm for each pSLS subscription request. It is enough to search in the routing table the route to the destination with the smallest cost and forward the request to the chosen next node. If the negotiation for QoS parameters along this path failed then we will chose the next path, in terms of cost, from the routing table.

Possible improvements

We said that we did not take into consideration any QoS parameters in the first phase for path building process. We let this task for the second phase (negotiation).

This approach allows policies to be applied during the routing process. For example based on agreements with Service Managers of some domains, or based on service monitoring results, the Policy Based Management module could associate different costs for the links in the topology matrix. In such a way the Policy module could influence the routing decision process. In this case the matrix element r_{ij} could be expressed as:

$$r_{ij} = \begin{cases} c_{ij} & if\ \exists\ L_{ij} \\ 0 & if\ not\ \exists\ L_{ij} \end{cases}$$

The value c_{ij} is the cost for the link L_{ij}, and could be weighted appropriately by the Policy Based Management module.

Also the cost of a link could be modified based on statistics regarding the acceptance or rejection rate of previous negotiated pSLS pipes. For example, if some domain with a good link cost rejects several times our requests we could modify the costs of the links crossing that domain.

Also, when we build the path cost, we could take into account the existence of resource price agreements between some domains. These agreements could be negotiated using pull model, based on some statistics. For example an EIMS@NP node has two different paths towards a destination with similar path costs. It chose the path with a better cost, but it also could periodically request resource price information from both neighbor nodes crossed by the two paths. If the second node has available resources and is interested to carry traffic from the source domain, it will propose a better resource price as a response to resource price requests. So the EIMS@NP source node could modify the routing table by improving the path cost for the second path, and the future pSLS pipe requests will be routed through the second path. Such a resource price communication could be easily implemented because the EIMS@NP managers are built as web-services, which implies very flexible communication capabilities.

6. Functionality tests

This solution was implemented on the test-bed build at our university in the Enthrone project framework. The test-bed consists of several Autonomous Systems, each managed by a Network Service Manager (EIMS@NP). The EIMS@NP managers are implemented using web services technology. Between domains the BGP protocol is used to route the best effort traffic. A Network Manager is used to install the pSLS pipes on network devices. Also the test-bed has a Service Provider EIMS Manager, and the other modules required by the Enthrone system. The connectivity tests involved only the Network Provider managers and Service Provider manager.

The EIMS@SP was used to trigger pSLS subscribe requests, between a Content Provider and one of the available Access Networks, until the resources on the lowest cost path between the chosen source and destination, were consummated. Then we triggered additional requests between the same source and destination. These new requests were admitted but the pSLS pipes were built along the next cheapest path between the chosen end points.

7. Conclusions

We have proposed a simple solution for solving the problem of QoS enabled inter-domain path finding in the presence of a Network Service Management system capable of pSLS pipes with imposed QoS parameters negotiation.

This solution has the main advantage that it does not burden a given domain manager with the need of knowing the available traffic trunks of other network domains. It is simple and is well suited for ENTHRONE Integrated Management System. The solution is also naturally extensible for more sophisticated techniques in QoS capable paths finding.

Further studies and simulations will be done in order to validate this solution for a real network environment.

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