



## On-chip boost regulator with projected off- and on-time control\*

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**Abstract:** The boost type power supplies are widely used in portable consumer electronics to step up the input voltage to adapt for the high voltage applications like light-emitting diode (LED) driving and liquid crystal display (LCD) biasing. In these applications, a regulator with small volume, fewer external components and high efficiency is highly desired. This paper proposes a projected off- and on-time boost control scheme, based on which a monolithic IC with an on-chip VDMOS with  $0.2 \Omega$  on-state resistance  $R_{DS-ON}$  was implemented in  $1.5 \mu\text{m}$  bipolar-CMOS-DMOS (BCD) process. A 12 V, 0.3 A boost regulator prototype is presented as well. With projected off-time and modulated on-time in continuous conduction mode (CCM), a quasi fixed frequency, which is preferred for ripple control, is realized. With projected on-time and modulated off-time in discontinuous conduction mode (DCM), pulse frequency modulation (PFM) operation, which is beneficial to light load efficiency improvement, is achieved without extra control circuitry. Measurement results show that an efficiency of 3% higher than that of a conventional method under 0.5 W output is achieved while a step load transient response comparable to that of current mode control is maintained as well.

**Key words:** Boost regulator, Integrated circuits, Pulse frequency modulation, Projected off-time, Projected on-time  
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### INTRODUCTION

Boost dc-dc voltage regulators are widely used in portable consumer electronics systems, like light-emitting diode (LED) drivers and liquid crystal display (LCD) bias circuits. In these applications, a voltage regulator with fewer external components is desired for reducing the product size. High efficiency, which is closely related to battery life, is also an important consideration. Boost type power converters are intrinsically unstable as there are two conjugate poles and one right half plane (RHP) zero in the duty cycle to output transfer function (Erickson and Maksimovic, 2001). A conventional type III compensator needs a cross over frequency higher than the LC resonant frequency; otherwise, the filter will ring. But the RHP zero restricts the achievable crossover frequency. In 1978, the current mode control was introduced into power converters design (Deisch, 1978).

A major drawback of the constant frequency current mode control is the well-known subharmonic oscillation. Inductor current slope compensation was proposed to solve this issue (Deisch, 1978). Unfortunately, this slope compensation significantly complicates the system analysis and controller design. Insufficient slope compensation will reduce the stable margin or even make it unstable when system parameters fluctuate. On the other hand, over designed slope compensation will degrade the current mode control to voltage mode control (Ridley, 1990).

Recently, hysteretic control has become popular in power converter design for its fast load transient response and no need for loop compensation. The discontinuous output current in a boost converter makes the hysteretic control more complex than that for a buck one. Several implementations of hysteretic control have been reported, but all solutions need additional external components (Nabeshima *et al.*, 2005; Keskar and Rincon-Mora, 2008). Constant on-time control (COT) (Cardoso *et al.*, 1992; Ling, 2007), an improved hysteretic control, is now developed for buck voltage regulator design, for it features

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easy control to maintain frequency stability. Its counterpart for a boost converter has also been developed (Xu et al., 2008), but with the drawback of a certain number of equivalent serial resistors (ESRs) at the output capacitor which increases the output voltage ripple.

On the basis of the COT boost converter (Xu et al., 2008), this paper presents a projected off- and on-time control method without external ESR requirements. With the projected off-time control, the switch off-time is calculated based on the input and output voltage aiming at quasi fixed frequency operation in continuous conduction mode (CCM) as fixed frequency operation is preferred for ripple control. In consideration of efficiency in discontinuous conduction mode (DCM) operation, the projected on-time combined with modulated off-time enables the converter to run in pulse frequency modulation (PFM) operation automatically without additional control circuits.

PROPOSED CONTROL SCHEME

System block diagram

Fig.1 shows the system block diagram of the proposed boost regulator. Figs.2a and 2b are control waveforms in CCM and DCM, respectively. In CCM operation, e.g., with proposed projected off-time control, the switch off period  $T_{OFF}$  is prefixed at  $T_{POFF}$  by an on-chip timer. The output voltage programming signal  $V_P$  is subtracted by the inductor current information  $V_{IS}$  to generate a new control signal,  $V_{CTRL}$ . Then  $V_{CTRL}$  is compared with the feedback voltage to generate the boost switch on-time. In reference to Fig.2a, the switch off-time  $T_{OFF}$  of the previous switching cycle finishes at  $t_1$ , from where a new on period begins. Between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ , it is the projected on-time  $T_{PON}$ , but the actual on-time  $T_{ON}$  will last till  $V_{CTRL}$  reaches  $V_{FB}$ . It is always longer than  $T_{PON}$  in CCM just as its name—modulated on-time—indicates. Then, the  $V_{OC}$  will go high, and consequently the switch on-time is terminated and a new projected off-time will be triggered. Once the off period of the boost switch begins and the sensed voltage  $V_{IS}$  goes zero,  $V_{CTRL}$  will return to  $V_P$  abruptly, which helps to improve noise immunity. When  $T_{POFF}$  finishes, another modulated on-time will start as long as the output of the comparator remains low.

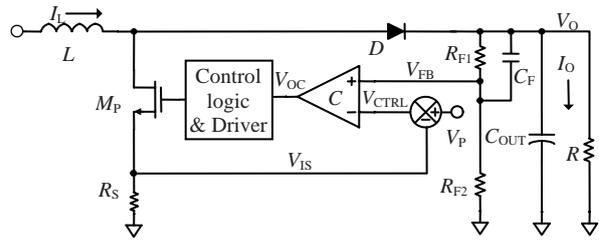


Fig.1 System block diagram of the proposed boost regulator

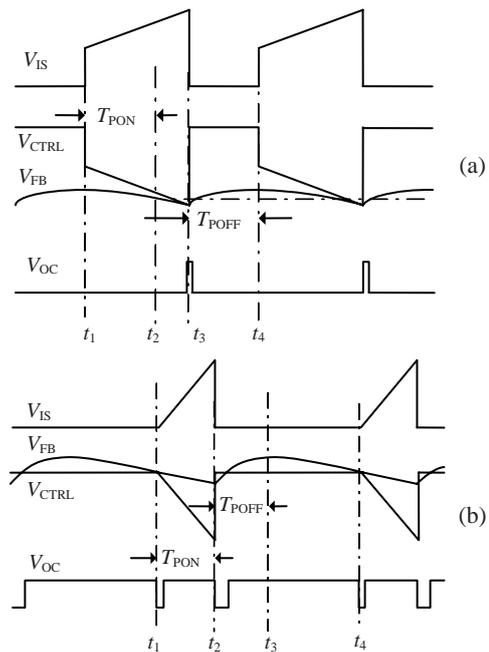


Fig.2 Control waveforms in CCM (a) and DCM (b)

Compared with conventional hysteretic control, the main advantage of this control method is that the inductor current needs sampling only during the boost switch on period. It can be simply implemented in a boost converter. As mentioned above, projected off-time is related to input and output voltage to reduce the frequency variation under CCM operation. Its implementation will be discussed in the following section.

As the load decreases, the power stage will finally run in DCM, and  $T_{ON}$  will also decrease. The relationship between load current  $I_O$ , off-time  $T_{OFF}$  and on-time  $T_{ON}$  in DCM is

$$T_{ON} = \frac{1}{V_{IN}^2} \left\{ I_O L (V_O - V_{IN}) + \left[ I_O^2 L^2 (V_O - V_{IN})^2 + 2V_{IN}^2 I_O L T_{OFF} (V_O - V_{IN}) \right]^{1/2} \right\} \quad (1)$$

As shown in Eq.(1), assuming  $T_{OFF}$  is kept constant at about  $T_{POFF}$  (i.e., the projected off-time),  $T_{ON}$  becomes smaller and smaller as the load current  $I_O$  decreases. Hence, the converter efficiency will deteriorate since the switching frequency increases. In order to maintain high efficiency under light load condition,  $T_{ON}$  is clamped to  $T_{PON}$  while  $T_{OFF}$  is modulated in DCM to keep the charge balance of the external capacitor  $C_{OUT}$  (Fig.2b). The design criteria for projected on-time  $T_{PON}$  and projected off-time  $T_{POFF}$  will be discussed in the next section.

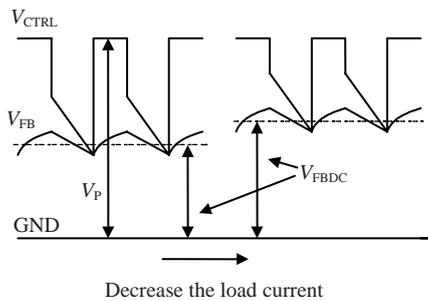
As a result, another advantage of the proposed control method is that, under light load condition, the minimum on-time  $T_{ON}$  is clamped to  $T_{PON}$  and the off-time will be modulated by the output ripple. In other words, the PFM operation under light load condition is realized, which increases the system efficiency without additional control circuitry.

**Initial accuracy analysis**

In power regulator design, the output voltage should be precisely regulated; that is to say, the relationship between program signal  $V_P$  and output voltage  $V_O$  should be well defined. However, there is a control error due to the coupling of  $V_O$  and inductor current  $V_{IS}$  in the feedback voltage.

When the load current is decreased, input current will be reduced correspondingly. Hence, the current signal in  $V_{CTRL}$  decreases as well. Consequently,  $V_{FB}$  will rise to fill the headroom, as shown in Fig.3. This phenomenon is like ripple induced load regulation. In Fig.1, with feedback programming resistors  $R_{F1}$  and  $R_{F2}$ , the relationship between the dc component of the feedback voltage  $V_{FBDC}$  and the output voltage  $V_O$  under CCM operation is given by

$$V_O = \frac{R_{F1} + R_{F2}}{R_{F2}} \times V_{FBDC} \tag{2}$$



**Fig.3 Feedback node waveforms with ripple induced load regulation**

With conventional amplifier based feedback structure,  $V_{FBDC}$  should be equal to a precise reference voltage (e.g.,  $V_P$  in Fig.1) in order to get an accurate output voltage. In the proposed control method, however,  $V_{FBDC}$  in CCM operation is given by

$$V_{FBDC} = V_P - V_{ISP} + V_R \tag{3}$$

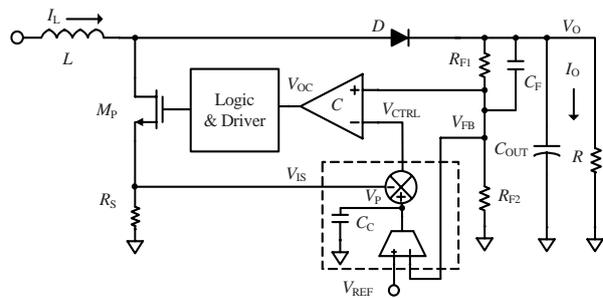
where  $V_{ISP}$  is the peak value of  $V_{IS}$ , and  $V_R$  is the dc component of the output voltage ripple.  $V_R$  is given by

$$V_R = \frac{T_{ON}}{12C_O} \left( \frac{T_{ON}(V_O - V_{IN})^3}{V_O L} + \frac{6I_O V_{IN}}{V_O - V_{IN}} \right) \tag{4}$$

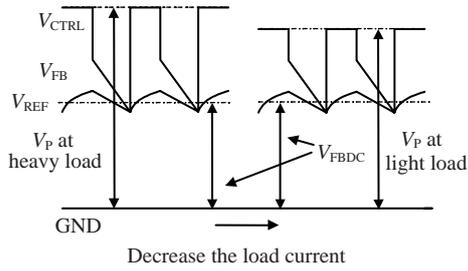
From Eqs.(3) and (4), the relationship between  $V_P$  and  $V_O$  is predicted, and the load dependent  $V_{ISP}$  and  $V_R$  will introduce an error component between  $V_P$  and  $V_{FBDC}$ . This error voltage will be further amplified by the voltage divider composed of  $R_{F1}$  and  $R_{F2}$ , as demonstrated in Eq.(2). So programming voltage  $V_P$  is not appropriate to be the reference signal. For accurate output voltage regulation, an outer voltage loop is needed.

**Outer voltage loop design**

In order to overcome the problem of ripple induced load regulation, an external voltage loop is added to the basic boost regulator, as shown in Fig.4. An operational transconductance amplifier (OTA) senses the feedback voltage and compares it with an accurate reference voltage  $V_{REF}$ . The difference between them is then amplified as the error signal, which acts as the  $V_P$  signal in Fig.1. The new control waveforms are shown in Fig.5. By the negative feedback of the output voltage,  $V_P$  will be adjusted to keep the  $V_{FBDC}$  equal to  $V_{REF}$ . Thus the output voltage  $V_O$  is precisely controlled as in Eq.(2).



**Fig.4 Proposed boost regulator with precise output voltage regulation**



**Fig.5 Feedback node waveforms without ripple induced load regulation**

Parameters of the integrator should be chosen properly for keeping the converter stable. According to (Sable *et al.*, 1990), the small signal control law at the boost switch prior to open instant is

$$\hat{V}_P - \hat{V}_{IS} = \hat{V}_O. \quad (5)$$

Based on the equivalent small signal model of current program control (Erickson and Maksimovic, 2001), the transfer function of inductor current to the output voltage is

$$\frac{\hat{V}_O}{\hat{V}_{IS}} = D' \times \frac{1 - \frac{sL}{(D')^2 R}}{2 + sRC_{OUT}} \times \frac{R}{R_S}. \quad (6)$$

Substituting Eq.(6) into Eq.(5) gives the transfer function from programming voltage  $V_P$  to  $V_O$  as

$$\frac{\hat{V}_O}{\hat{V}_P} = \frac{1 - s \frac{L}{(D')^2 R}}{1 + 2 \frac{R_S}{R} + s \left( \frac{R_S C_{OUT}}{D'} - \frac{L}{(D')^2 R} \right)}. \quad (7)$$

Typically, for an on-chip boost regulator, load resistor  $R$  is much larger than  $R_S$  in Eq.(7). Thus, the dc gain from  $V_P$  to  $V_O$  is approximately equal to one. To keep the system stable, the current sensing resistor  $R_S$  should be larger than  $L/(D'RC_{OUT})$  to keep the dominant pole located at the left half plane. For a physical understanding, the down slope of the current sensing signal should be larger than the capacitor voltage discharging slope during the switch on-time. Otherwise,  $V_{CTRL}$  will not cross over  $V_{FB}$  during on-time modulation.

Based on Eq.(7), setting the compensation pole, which is equal to  $g_m/(2\pi C_C)$ , below the dominant pole

will secure sufficient phase margin and acceptable bandwidth of the system as the right half plane zero is typically located beyond the unit gain frequency.

Under light load DCM operation, compared with conventional current mode control, the error amplifier in the proposed control scheme never falls into the saturation region since its output contains a certain dc voltage to balance  $V_{FBDC}$ . This merit improves the dynamics of the transient response from extremely light load to heavy load since the control loop maintains a high loop gain and wide bandwidth.

## CIRCUIT DESIGN

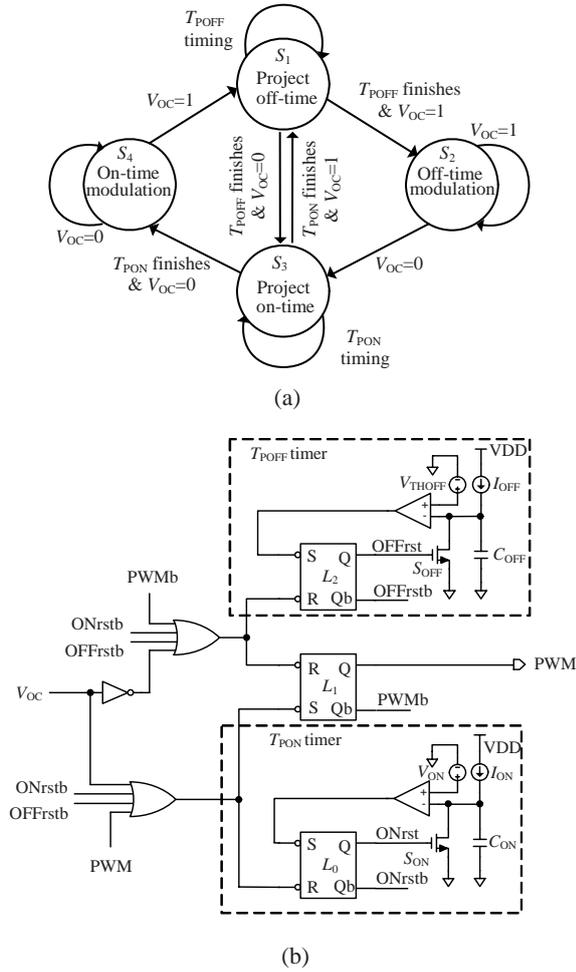
### Control logic

According to the control logic described previously, the state-chart diagram of projected off- and on-time control is shown in Fig.6a. There are four states in a normal operation. During CCM operation, the state 'off-time modulation' will not occur, and the system runs in a sequence of  $S_1$ - $S_3$ - $S_4$ - $S_1$ . While in PFM operation, the state  $S_4$ , on-time modulation, will not occur, and the system runs with  $S_1$ - $S_2$ - $S_3$ - $S_1$ .

The synthesized control logic corresponding to the state chart is shown in Fig.6b. There are two timers, one for the projected off-time and the other for projected on-time. Take the  $T_{POFF}$  timer as an example. Once  $Q$  of  $L_2$  is set low and the switch  $S_{OFF}$  is open, the controlled current source  $I_{OFF}$  will charge the capacitor  $C_{OFF}$ . When the voltage on  $C_{OFF}$  reaches the charging threshold voltage  $V_{THOFF}$ , the comparator outputs a low signal, which is applied on  $S$  of  $L_2$ , and  $S_{OFF}$  will be set high to terminate the  $T_{POFF}$  timing.  $T_{PON}$  is with the same structure.  $T_{POFF}$  and  $T_{PON}$  are controlled by the input and output voltage.

### Projected off- and on-time generator

With fixed off-time duration, the switching frequency varies under different input and output voltage conditions. Power converters are typically designed to operate at a constant frequency in compliance with the usual industrial standards (Tan *et al.*, 2008). A phase lock loop (PLL) is always needed to synchronize the switching frequency of the hysteretic controlled power converter with a reference clock (Grant, 2002; Tso and Wu, 2003), but on-chip PLL will complicate the circuit design and increase the die area. In this study, projected off-time control (Redl and



**Fig.6 Logic design of the proposed control method**  
(a) State-chart diagram; (b) Synthesized finite state machine

Sokal, 1986) is adopted for CCM frequency stabilization. Besides, as frequency reduction is always employed in a power converter to improve the light load efficiency (Deng *et al.*, 2005; Ferguson, 2006; Chen H.M. *et al.*, 2007; Chen H. *et al.*, 2008), projected on-time control is proposed during DCM to turn the converter into PFM operation.

Theoretically, for a boost converter with fixed switching period  $T_S$  in CCM operation, the boost switch off period  $T_{OFF}$  and on period  $T_{ON}$  should be

$$T_{ON} = T_S \times \frac{V_O - V_{IN}}{V_O}, \quad (8)$$

$$T_{OFF} = T_S \times \frac{V_{IN}}{V_O}, \quad (9)$$

which means that  $T_{OFF}$  is proportional to the input voltage while inversely proportional to the output voltage. One embodiment to generate the  $T_{POFF}$  and  $T_{PON}$  is shown in Fig.7. The instantaneous input and output voltages are converted into current signals, and then the voltage subtraction in Eq.(8) is implemented by the subtraction of their corresponding currents. As a result, the charging threshold for the off-timer shown in Fig.7 is given by

$$V_{THOFF} = \frac{V_{IN}}{K_1}. \quad (10)$$

And the charging current  $I_{OFF}$  will be

$$I_{OFF} = \frac{K_2 V_O}{K_1 R_T}. \quad (11)$$

Finally the timing constant  $T_{POFF}$  of the off-timer is calculated:

$$T_{POFF} = \frac{V_{THOFF} C_{OFF}}{I_{OFF}}. \quad (12)$$

Substituting Eqs.(10) and (11) into Eq.(12) yields

$$T_{POFF} = \frac{R_T C_{OFF}}{K_2} \times \frac{V_{IN}}{V_O}. \quad (13)$$

Comparing Eq.(13) with Eq.(8), if the term  $R_T C_{OFF}/K_2$  is set equal to  $T_S$ , then the designed converter will operate at the quasi fixed frequency under CCM operation.

The projected on-time is implemented in a similar way. In Fig.7, the timing constant  $T_{PON}$  of the on-timer is

$$T_{PON} = \frac{K_4 R_T C_{ON}}{K_3} \times \frac{V_O - V_{IN}}{V_O}. \quad (14)$$

The on-time should be modulated in CCM operation to avoid subharmonic oscillation. Thus,  $T_{PON}$  in Eq.(14) is designed smaller than  $T_{ON}$  in Eq.(8). In other words,  $K_4 R_T C_{ON}/K_3$  is set equal to  $K_5 T_S$  with  $K_5$  smaller than one. Since a small  $K_5$  degrades the PFM performance, in this design, a coefficient of 0.8 was used to avoid subharmonic oscillation and to ensure acceptable PFM performance.

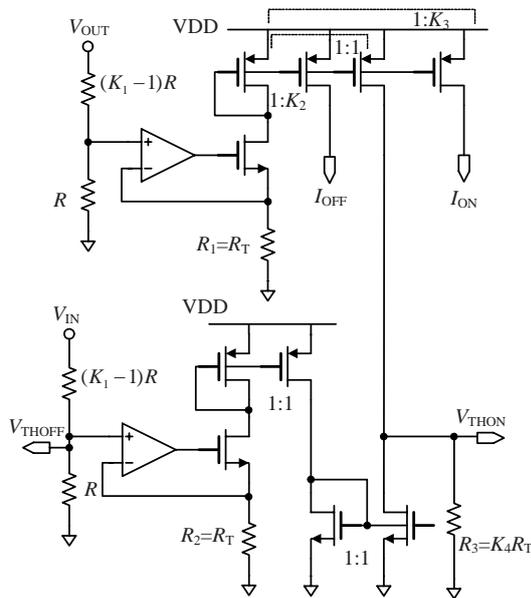


Fig.7  $T_{POFF}$  and  $T_{PON}$  generator

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

Based on the proposed control scheme, a boost voltage regulator with a power MOSFET on chip was fabricated in  $1.5\ \mu\text{m}$  BCD process. An on-chip DMOS with 5400 cells or  $200\ \text{m}\Omega$   $R_{DS-ON}$  was used as the boost power switch. Fig.8 shows the microphotography of the fabricated chip. Two demo boards were built with the final chip. One was with the proposed solution. The other was with a current mode boost controller, LM3488, from National Semiconductor (LM3488 Datasheet, 2009). Both of them employed the on-chip DMOS (its source, drain, and gate are all bonded out for external connection). System parameters for the proposed design are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of parameters used in measurements

Parameter	Value	Parameter	Value
$V_{IN}$ (V)	5	$C_{OUT}$ ( $\mu\text{F}$ )	2.8
$V_{OUT}$ (V)	12	$L$ ( $\mu\text{H}$ )	10.0
$I_O$ (A)	0.3	$R_S$ ( $\Omega$ )	0.3
$f_s$ (kHz)	780		

Steady state

Fig.9 gives the steady-state switching node waveforms. Under heavy-load condition, the boost regulator will run in CCM and the corresponding waveforms are presented in Fig.9a. The upper trace is

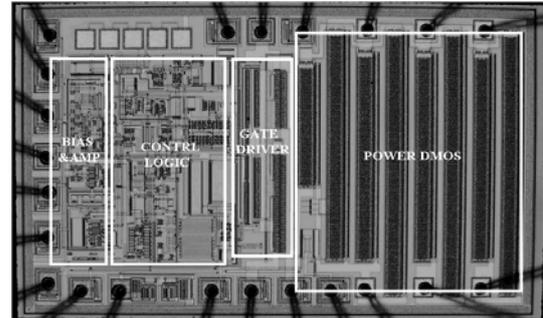


Fig.8 The microphotography of the fabricated chip

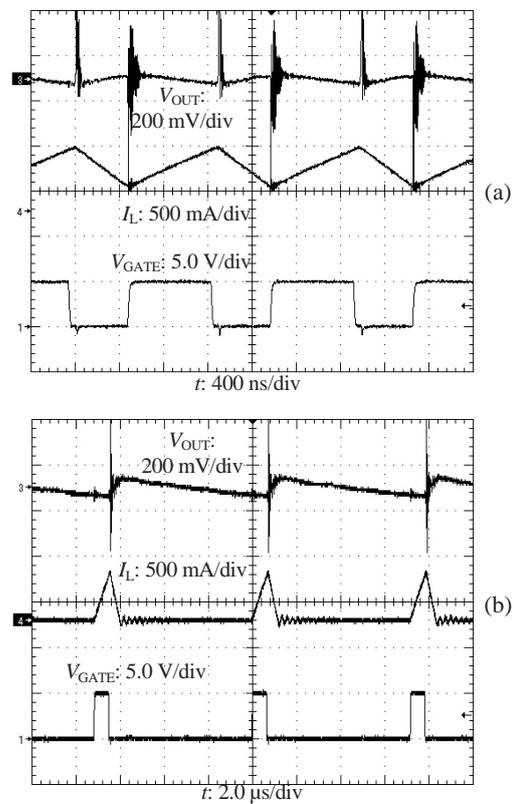


Fig.9 Switching node waveforms in CCM operation (a) and DCM operation (b)

the output voltage ripple, the middle trace is the inductor current, and the bottom trace is the gate drive signal. The switching period in CCM was measured to be about  $1.28\ \mu\text{s}$  with  $T_{OFF}$  of 496 ns (equal to  $T_{POFF}$ ) and  $T_{ON}$  of 784 ns. Decreasing the load current will turn the operation mode to DCM and PFM will occur as shown in Fig.9b. The switching period was about  $7\ \mu\text{s}$ , and  $T_{OFF}$  was about  $6.38\ \mu\text{s}$ , much longer than  $T_{POFF}$ .  $T_{ON}$  in PFM was clamped at about 620 ns, approximately 0.8 times the 784 ns  $T_{ON}$  in CCM,

which is just as expected. As mentioned previously, in PFM operation, the off-time was modulated to keep the charge balance of the output capacitor.

Fig.10 gives the frequency control performance under CCM operation. The solid lines are with the proposed projected off-time control while the dashed lines are with a fixed 340 ns off-time. With projected off-time control, the operation frequency under different input and output voltages are much more stable.

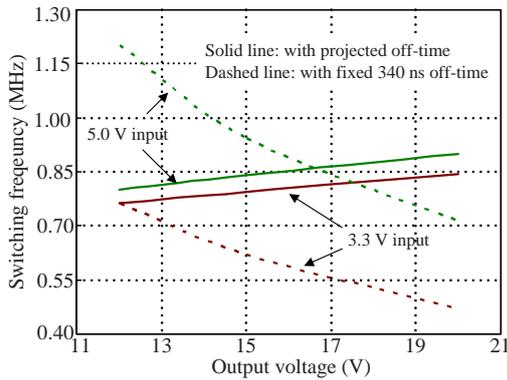


Fig.10 Frequency control performance with proposed projected off-time

**Transient response**

Fig.11a shows the load transient response of the proposed solution compared with the reference design. The reference design was with  $C_C$  and  $R_C$  of 16 nF and 2.2 k $\Omega$  respectively, which resulted in a 30 kHz crossover frequency and roughly 60° of phase margin. For the proposed design, the time constant of  $g_m/(2\pi C_C)$  was set to about 30 kHz, which is a little lower than the dominant pole in Eq.(7). The load step was realized by an electronics load with current steps of 0.03-0.27-0.03 A. As shown by the output voltage and inductor current waveforms, the transient response of the proposed method is better than that of LM3488. This improvement mainly benefits from the linearly operated error amplifier. Another load transient from no-load condition to full load is shown in Fig.11b. And PFM operation in light load of the proposed solution is much more obvious compared with that in Fig.11a.

**Efficiency**

The comparison of efficiency between the proposed boost regulator and the reference design is shown in Fig.12. The LM3488 was with a minimum

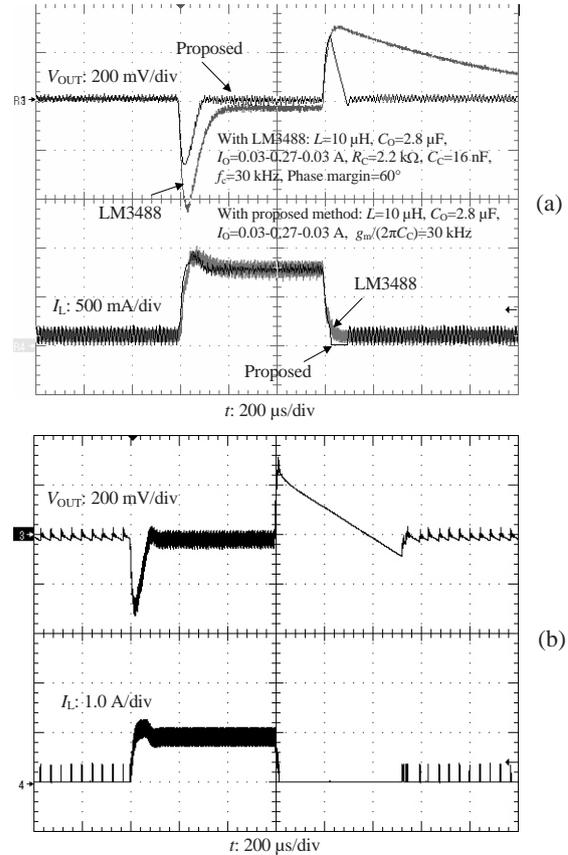


Fig.11 Load transient response compared with LM3488 based current mode control (a) and with zero to full load step test (b)

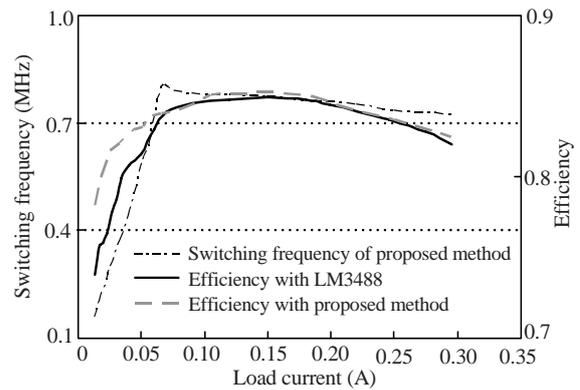


Fig.12 Efficiency comparison of the proposed method and LM3488

of about 325 ns on-time. If the output load was below 5%, due to the intermittent saturation of the error amplifier, the pulse skip mode will also occur. However, this mode was achieved at the expense of lower loop gain and worse load step transient response as shown in Fig.11a.

Back to the efficiency comparison, if the load was higher than 65 mA, both the two systems ran in CCM operation and the frequencies were all around 750 kHz. As a result, the two systems show the similar curve of efficiency vs load. However, for the load condition between 15 and 65 mA, the proposed system ran in PFM operation and the frequency decreased linearly with load current, and its efficiency performance was better than that in the reference design which still ran at a fixed frequency.

## CONCLUSION

This paper presents a novel boost regulator based on projected off- and on-time control. Projected off-time of the regulator in CCM was implemented to keep the converter run at a quasi fixed frequency. Under light load condition, the projected on-time adaptively clamped the switch on-time to a minimum value to realize a highly efficient PFM operation. The proposed control method was applied to an on-chip boost voltage regulator with a die area of 2.54 mm×1.52 mm. With the chip, a 5 V input, 12 V, 0.3 A output demo board was built. Experimental results showed that the proposed on-chip boost regulator works well in both CCM and DCM. The load transient response better than that of the conventional current mode control was achieved. Besides, the light load efficiency of the proposed regulator was much higher than that with fixed frequency current mode control.

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