

# MOBIWEB: ENABLING ADAPTIVE CONTINUOUS MEDIA APPLICATIONS OVER 3G WIRELESS LINKS

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**Abstract** - *MobiWeb* is a proxy-based network architecture designed to enhance the performance of adaptive real-time streams over 3G wireless links. *MobiWeb* includes a priority scheme that preserves media smoothness despite short-term fluctuations of the link, as well as an adaptation mechanism applied to streams responding to long-term link changes and handoffs. A set of timers permits the rapid exploration of the link, increasing the utilization of resources when they are abundant, while forcing enhanced streams to back-off to more moderate resource usage when resources are scarce. *MobiWeb* uses admission control for real-time traffic in order to provide a base level of quality, while remaining transparent to unaware, best-effort traffic. This paper validates the enhanced performance of adaptive real-time streams when *MobiWeb* is used through the evaluation of several scenarios simulated on NS – the Network Simulator tool.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The major trend in the personal communications industry's efforts these days is to provide the end user with ubiquitous access to the Internet. At the same time, Web content providers want to offer uninterrupted services to the client, even when mobility is involved. The most frequently accessed Web sites, however, tend to be rich in real-time multimedia content and they were designed having in mind the abundance in resources that the wired Internet infrastructure can provide.

Attempting to expand the access to this kind of applications into the wireless domain poses some important problems. Wireless links suffer from limited resources and constantly variable characteristics. The available bandwidth can be orders of magnitude less, the imposed delay much higher and the loss rate orders of magnitude more. Furthermore, these characteristics can vary unpredictably due to frequent handoffs and various phenomena like atmospheric conditions, electromagnetic interference, physical obstacles and multi path propagation. Such conditions significantly affect the performance of real-time applications. These applications demand large amounts of, usually variable, bandwidth, pose stringent delay constraints and suffer from bursty errors. Moreover, they perform better with long-term operational stability.

This situation has ignited a burst of research in this area, which produced several solutions that attempt to

overcome the aforementioned problems [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8]. Some of the solutions have concentrated in solving only part of the problem and some of these are lacking several key features. This has motivated us to develop *MobiWeb* [9, 10].

## II. DESIGN GOALS

*MobiWeb* is a proxy-based network architecture designed to assist the adaptation and enhance the performance of real-time streams over wireless links. Providing support for adaptation is one of *MobiWeb*'s major goals. A traditional continuous media application uses a single representation that has stringent bandwidth and timing requirements. Thus, when transmitted over a variable wireless link, it is susceptible to loose a significant amount of packets and/or frames, resulting in noticeable degradation of its quality.

An adaptive application, on the other hand, defines several different representations. Its execution is separated into a set of Levels of Quality (LoQ). Each LoQ represents the transmission characteristics required by the application in order to achieve the performance associated with it. The network uses this knowledge, along with the adaptation policy and the current link condition, to decide whether the application must adapt or not. This allows the application to gracefully degrade its perceptual quality to an acceptable to the user level.

*MobiWeb* supports adaptive applications through the means of proxies residing at the two ends of the wireless link, as illustrated in figure 1. Filtering mechanisms tailor each stream according to the characteristics of the wireless link and the capabilities of the mobile device. Selecting the proxy solution over an end-to-end one is imperative in order to minimize the response time to the variations of the link and optimize the adaptation performance. Moreover, a local solution requires minimal changes to the base station and the mobile client, in contrast with an end-to-end solution, which demands significant and costly changes to the server and potentially to the entire end-to-end path. Finally, it's worth mentioning that a proxy solution is more suitable for multicasting scenarios. The source does not

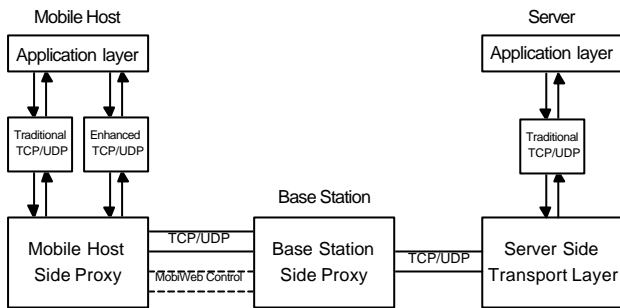


Figure 1. The Proxy-Based Architecture of MobiWeb.

have to be throttled down to the characteristics of the least potent client, which would have forced the rest of the clients in the same multicasting tree to receive the stream with the same (low) quality.

Another important goal is to prevent inter-stream interference incurred from the contention between streams for the limited link resources. Real-time applications require a Quality-of-Service that can be guaranteed by reserving a certain amount of resources throughout their execution, in contrast to best-effort applications that can operate utilizing any amount of resources. The existing solutions either lack any support for guarantees or use, at best, a weighted-fair sharing algorithm that proportionally splits the link resources between the existing streams. These solutions are inadequate for constantly variable wireless links, since resources not only need to be allocated for each transmitting stream, but they also need to be “protected” from fluctuations in link quality. Whenever degradation occurs, proportionally sharing the resources leads to smaller shares for each stream, forcing all of them to adapt at the same time. Preventing such inter-stream interference, however, forces the streams to adapt one at a time, reducing the overall adaptation workload and retaining the stability in execution for most of them.

*MobiWeb* contributes a unique solution that allows only one stream at a time to adapt until no further adaptation is necessary. Such a solution is based on the combination of an admission control algorithm and a dynamic prioritization scheme. Admission control reserves resources for each stream in order to guarantee at least the minimum acceptable level of quality in the stream’s performance. The dynamic prioritization scheme protects the higher priority streams from losing their shares of resources to streams with lower priority. In addition, when degradation in the link quality occurs, the adaptation process will start with the stream that has the lowest priority and it will continue as long as more resources need to be freed. In contrast, a static prioritization scheme would have favored those applications that were initiated with a higher priority and it would have been unfair to the rest of them. *MobiWeb*’s

dynamic prioritization scheme relates the priority of a stream inversely proportionally to its Level of Quality (LoQ). Whenever a stream is forced to adapt backwards by dropping a LoQ, its priority is increased by a level and vice versa. This scheme provides robustness and fairness to streams that are already receiving a low LoQ, since they most likely have a high priority level.

Besides long-term stability, *MobiWeb* also provides shielding in the performance of real-time applications from short-term variations in the wireless link. The adaptation process must be robust to these fluctuations and avoid forcing the applications into frequent and meaningless adaptations. Drastic and significant changes, however, in the link quality must still alert the applications to immediately adapt to the new conditions, while fairly stable conditions must prevent them from frequently probing the link for a different LoQ. Previously proposed mechanisms to overcome this problem included the specification of a range in allocated bandwidth, within which the application can tolerate variations without having to adapt [3, 4, 5]. This solution succeeds in covering short-term variations of small magnitude. It interprets, however, a short but abrupt degradation in quality as a reason for adaptation, failing in this case to retain a steady state operation. In *MobiWeb* we experiment with a novel approach, utilizing a set of specialized timers that reflect the current quality of the link. These timers provide the short-term shielding in the time dimension rather than in the bandwidth dimension. They dynamically adjust to the current link conditions, which permits them to absorb all short-term variations, while allowing fast adaptation when resources become available and steady state operation when the link is fairly stable.

Finally, *MobiWeb* aims in remaining transparent to traditional best-effort Internet traffic and in providing a simple interface for the user. The scheme has to be able to be deployed gradually and transparently to the existing Internet infrastructure in order to be a viable solution. Concurrently, the user must have the flexibility to declare his preferences regarding all the streams he receives, but the actual adaptation mechanism should be hidden from him. Even though most of the existing schemes remain transparent to traditional traffic, they require the user’s involvement in the initiation of the adaptation process every time a change occurs. In contrast, *MobiWeb* not only transparently accommodates best effort traffic, but also provides a simple yet powerful interface to the user, successfully hiding the adaptation details.

### III. MOBIWEB’S FEATURES

#### A. Architecture

*MobiWeb* is intended to be deployed locally, between or near the two ends of the wireless link. In a typical setup, a

Mobile Host (MH) is connected with the Internet via a Base Station (BS) via a wireless, shared or point-to-point, link. The BS uses a fixed network connection to relay traffic to the Internet, so the point of contention is expected to be the wireless link between the BS and the MH. Such a setup favors a local solution for several reasons. First, it allows for fast and seamless deployment over the Internet, since only two nodes have to be modified instead of the entire end-to-end path. In addition, capturing the local link characteristics is accomplished substantially easier with a local than an end-to-end approach. Finally, having the point of interaction close to the client side is essential for fast and effective adaptation. In an end-to-end solution, feedback describing the wireless link performance may arrive too late at the source, for it to adapt before flooding the path's bottleneck link.

*MobiWeb's* architecture is based on the proxy model. Two symmetric proxy layers are added to both the MH and the BS at the two ends of the wireless link. Vertically, the proxy layer is inserted above the transport layer of the current Internet protocol stack providing an enhanced transport interface to the application layer. If the application is adaptive, it can use this interface to take advantage of *MobiWeb's* functionality. Otherwise, the proxy layer will still accommodate traditional Internet applications, without though the benefits of adaptation.

Packets from adaptive applications are marked with their respective priority, which is utilized by *MobiWeb's* dynamic prioritization queuing algorithm. At the same time, the link layer determines the transmission rate of the packets based on knowledge about the link conditions received from lower layers. Such knowledge consists of statistics about throughput and error rates of the link, transmission and reception power characteristics, and handoff notifications. This information is also propagated upwards to the management sub-layer of the proxy layer, which is responsible for the accounting of the available and utilized resources, as well as the admission of new streams.

### B. Admission of new streams

In order to assure performance guarantees, *MobiWeb* uses admission control applied only to adaptive real-time streams. Admission is initiated in two cases. The first is when the mobile moves into a new cell and the second is when a new stream attempts to initiate transmission. Admission is performed based on the amount of resources necessary for the stream to operate with its lowest acceptable quality. With this approach, we keep *MobiWeb's* complexity low, while we retain the functionality of the admission control. In addition, new real-time streams can still be initiated, even when the link

is currently fully utilized, as long as all streams are able to operate with at least their minimum Level of Quality.

The management sub-layer of the proxy keeps track of the aggregate resources that the current streams require to operate with their minimum quality. It also keeps track of the nominal rate and the recent loss rate history of the current wireless link. Combining this knowledge it estimates the current measured resources available to the admission control. When a new stream is initiated, its minimum requirements are compared with the subtraction residue of the current measured resources from the aggregate sum of minimums. The new stream is accepted only if the residue is greater in this comparison.

### C. Dynamic prioritization

Each newly initiated stream is associated with a priority value ranging from 0 to 9 (highest). The user provides the initial priority for each stream, indicating the relevant importance of this stream against the others. In addition, traditional non-adaptive streams are initialized with a default priority value (1) that allows them to participate in the dynamic prioritization scheme, even without adapting. In contrast to point-to-point links, assigning priorities in a shared link, like WLAN, requires the presence of incentive enforcement scheme that prevents the user from abusing the link. We currently examine the utilization of a costing scheme as a solution for this problem.

A new stream always starts transmitting with its lowest quality, until it gradually advances to a higher one. The lowest quality of the stream is associated with its highest priority. As long as the stream advances to a higher quality, its priority drops to a lower value. In contrast, during degradation the stream backs off to a lower quality but it is now associated with a higher priority.

The reason for applying this method is because we believe that the mentality of a user is to prefer every stream to perform fairly well rather than have only one stream performing well at the expense of the others. Thus, advancing to a higher quality means also an increase in the possibility that the stream will be a candidate for adaptation during the next degradation period. This protects the streams that already receive a low quality from further degradation. In other words, a stream that was just degraded will not be forced to adapt again, before all other streams, which previously had the same priority with it, adapt at least once. Moreover, higher priority means that when link conditions upgrade, the stream with the lowest quality will be the first to explore the available resources until it advances to a higher LoQ.

### D. Specialized timers

The quality variations of the wireless link can be classified into two categories. First, there are short-term

variations caused by the transmission characteristics of the air interface, which worsen when mobility is involved. Second, there are long-term variations caused mainly by handoffs and initiations/terminations of streams. Consequently, *MobiWeb's* major consideration is to enable the shielding of real-time streams from the short-term variations in link quality, while allowing for fair, fast and efficient adaptation to long-term ones.

*MobiWeb* shields short-term fluctuations by using a *relaxation timer* for each adaptive stream. The proxy layer at the transmitting end of the link checks the performance of each stream over short periods of time. If at the end of such a period a stream did not receive its allocated resources, its relaxation timer is triggered. The duration of this timer spans over a few time periods, giving the stream the opportunity to recover from a few occasional link errors, without falling back to a lower LoQ. The expiration of the timer without improvement in quality is translated as permanent degradation of the link, which in turn forces the stream to adapt.

Conversely, when the link is fairly unoccupied or an existing stream is terminated, but mainly when the mobile host handoffs to a better wireless interface, excess resources are available and adaptive applications are expected to discover and utilize them immediately. Thus, the applications must constantly probe the link to decide whether there exist available resources able to accommodate their next LoQ. However, the timing and the frequency of the probing can have a severe impact upon their performance. *MobiWeb* alleviates the above concerns with the use of the *exploration timer* and the *exploration mode* of adaptation for each adaptive stream. If the application received all the allocated resources during the last time period, the exploration timer is triggered. As long as the quality supported by the link remains the same until the timer expires, *MobiWeb* adapts the stream to its next higher (if any) LoQ. This action puts this stream into the exploration mode of adaptation. During this mode, *MobiWeb* decides whether the newly utilized excess resources are enough to fully accommodate the higher LoQ of the stream.

In the exploration mode, when resources are available but not enough to advance a LoQ, the next exploration timer is set to be exponentially higher than the previous one. This will put the stream less often in the exploration mode, effectively allowing it to enter a steady state operation. However, after a handoff to a wireless link with better quality or after the termination of an existing stream, enough resources may be available for several streams to upgrade to a higher LoQ. In this situation, *MobiWeb* rushes the adaptation process by forcing the next candidate stream for exploration to adapt immediately while reducing the exploration timers of the rest of the streams. In conclusion, *MobiWeb* protects the performance of a stream from short-term fluctuations,

while allowing fast exploration of available resources and a steady state operation during stable link conditions.

#### E. Adaptation mechanisms - Filtering

*MobiWeb* uses filtering as the adaptation mechanism for adaptive applications. Filters are small pieces of transformation code inserted into the proxy layer as plugins. Due to their position in the transmission path they illustrate several important properties. They can be changed almost immediately when adaptation occurs, they require no modifications of the server and they perform optimally in multicasting scenarios [11].

During the initiation of the stream, the application indicates the filters that will be used for each LoQ. The proxy layer can have a set of generic filters for the most known real-time media and the most probable representations that they can take, from which the application can choose the appropriate ones. Conversely, if the application uses proprietary filtering it can download the filters into the proxy at the base station side prior to initiation of the transmission. The final solution, if both the client and the proxy are lacking support of some filters, is to have the proxy address a well-known, third party filter server for those filters, much like plug-in repositories are currently working for the major Web browsers.

According to the way that they manipulate media, filters are classified into several categories: hierarchical, frame-dropping, codec, splitting/mixing filters, etc [12]. Even though *MobiWeb* is capable of operating with all kinds of filters, we are currently using only frame-dropping filters in our simulation environment, since they nicely exemplify *MobiWeb's* utility and are easy to implement.

## IV. SIMULATION RESULTS

To illustrate *MobiWeb's* utility, we performed several simulation experiments, using NS-2 [13]. In this paper we extend our previous research with CBR real-time adaptive applications [10], with the evaluation of VBR traffic, and specifically MPEG streams, in *MobiWeb's* context. A series of scenarios were executed on top of a simulated dynamic wireless environment, with variability in resources due to fluctuations in link quality and handoffs. Over this testbed, we transmitted streams using either traditional Internet protocols or *MobiWeb*.

For real-time adaptive traffic we used three MPEG streams with different representation characteristics (frame rate, GOP, resolution, duration). In addition, we simulated background traffic in the form of real-time CBR streams that use UDP/IP and best-effort FTP traffic transmitted over TCP/IP. When adaptation was enforced, *MobiWeb* used the frame-dropping filter to shape the transmission of the MPEG streams. The filter breaks the operation of the stream into 3 levels of quality. In the highest level all

TABLE 1  
TRACE RESULTS FROM THE SIMULATION TESTS

Test #	MPEG Stream	Good frames	Corrupted frames	Delayed frames	Dropped frames
1	M1+MobiWeb	933	74	58	15
	M1+UDP	934	251	66	642
2	M2+MobiWeb	546	34	31	17
	M2+UDP	478	3	247	158

frames are transmitted. In the intermediate, B packets are discarded and in the lowest both B and P frames are discarded.

#### A. First simulation scenario

In the first scenario, we used the M1 MPEG stream along with a CBR real-time stream over the same wireless link. Doing so, we were able to evaluate the interference that UDP traffic introduces in M1's performance with and without the presence of *MobiWeb*. With *MobiWeb*, we prioritized M1 higher than the CBR stream. Consequently, the initiation of the CBR stream did not severely interfere with M1. M1 adapted its performance only during the two periods of degradation in the link quality, as figure 2a shows. *MobiWeb's* absence on the other hand, allows the CBR stream to interfere and forces the MPEG stream to virtually shut down its performance (figure 2b).

Another important notification about those two figures is the preservation of I frames when *MobiWeb* is used. Since I frames are necessary for the decoding of the rest of the frames, prioritizing their transmission through adaptation is extremely important for preserving a certain Level of Quality for the MPEG stream.

Table 2 shows that in both cases the frames that arrived complete and in time were virtually the same. With UDP, M1 transmits more frames overall, since it cannot adapt to a lower frame rate. This however causes a significant amount of frames to be dropped at the BS. Nearly 1/3 of all frames is dropped before they can reach the client. Since a significant amount of the good frames are depending on the dropped frames for decoding, they will either not be displayed or displayed with unrecognizable content. Finally, the large amount of corrupted frames with UDP implies that artifacts in the perceptual playback quality often appear and get carried over for several frames before the next correct I frame arrives.

#### B. Second simulation scenario

In the second scenario we replaced the CBR stream with an FTP one, in order to evaluate the interference that TCP traffic introduces to an MPEG stream. We also used M2 as our MPEG stream. Figures 3a and 3b show the results of this simulation. As it was expected, the presence

of a TCP stream does not affect the transmission of M2 when resources are available due to TCP's congestion control. When the quality of the wireless medium lowers, however, the interference from the TCP stream becomes noticeable.

As table 2 shows, comparing the results with the previous scenario with the CBR stream, there is a shift in the statistics from frames that are corrupted due to loss of some packets, to frames that are delayed due to the concurrent transmission of the TCP stream. The result however is even worse, since corrupted frames can be displayed even with some artifacts in them, while late frames can only aid in decoding of succeeding ones.

The simulation tests showed that *MobiWeb* allows adaptive real-time streams to achieve decent quality when the wireless link is severely degraded. Instead of dropping packets indiscriminately, *MobiWeb's* filtering mechanism favors the transmission of the most important frames, achieving an acceptable quality for the MPEG streams. Furthermore, inter-stream interference due to background traffic is avoided during time of contention, without being unfair to traditional traffic when resources are available. Overall, the simulation tests proved the importance and the utility of a management scheme, like *MobiWeb*, for the transmission of real-time multimedia streams over limited wireless links.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

We discussed the implications that frequent handoffs and wireless link variations introduce to the seamless execution of Internet applications, especially real-time ones. We analyzed the parameters of the problem that motivated the design of *MobiWeb*, a proxy-based architecture that substantially increases the utility of continuous media over bandwidth limited and error-prone wireless links. Using admission control and a dynamic prioritization scheme it shields the performance of important applications from the remainder of the traffic. With the LoQs and the specialized timers, it allows for both fast exploration of the available resources and efficient adaptation during long-term variations, while protecting the real-time streams from frequently adapting to short-term ones.

We showed, through simulation, *MobiWeb's* importance and utility to adaptive real-time streams over wireless links comparing to traditional Internet protocols. Their performance is substantially enhanced, particularly when frequent mobility and rapid fluctuations change the wireless environment.

We contribute three new features: The first is dynamic priorities designed to lower a stream's priority when it advances a LoQ, in order to give a chance to higher priority streams to both adapt **last** during degradation and explore available resources **first**. The second is the

prevention of inter-stream interference by allowing only one stream at a time to adapt when the link quality changes. Finally, the third contribution is the introduction of the specialized timers in order to shield the streams from short-term variations, while allowing fast explorations and a steady state operation during link stability.

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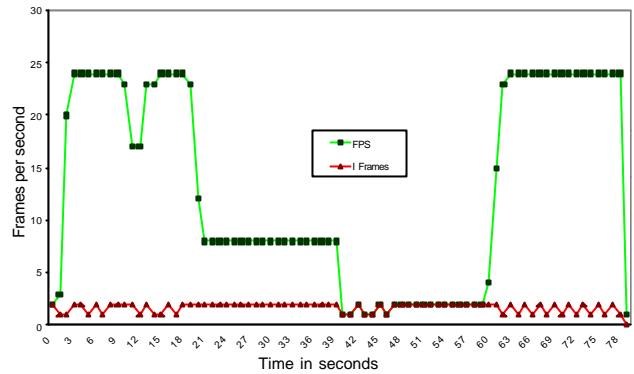


Figure 2a: FPS of first simulation with MobiWeb

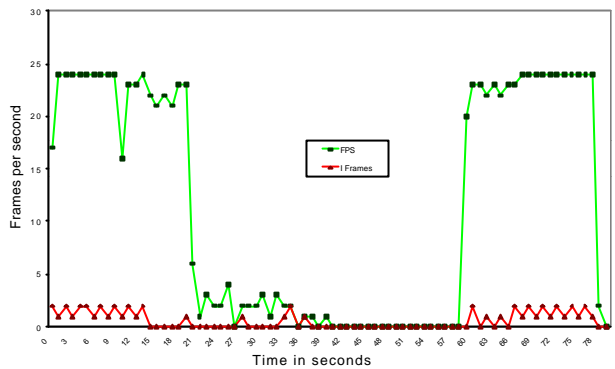


Figure 2b: FPS of first simulation w/o MobiWeb

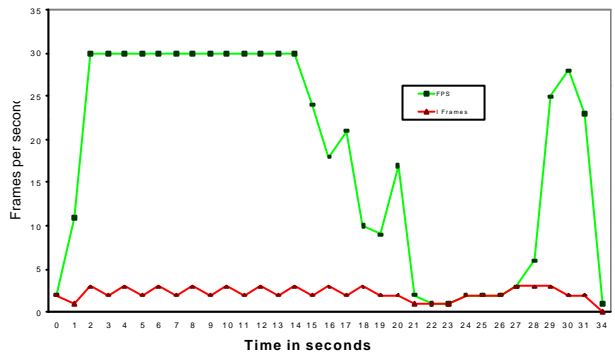


Figure 3a: FPS of second simulation with MobiWeb

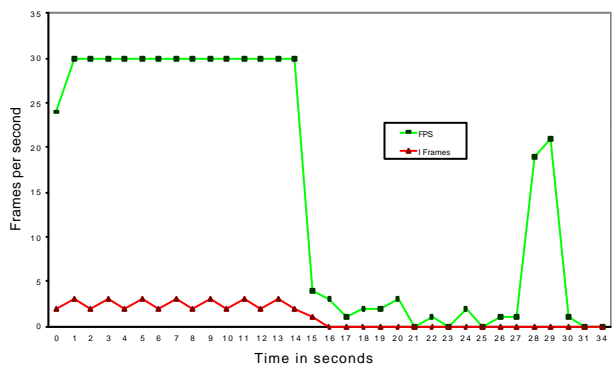


Figure 3b: FPS of second simulation w/o MobiWeb