

IoT Access Technologies- LoRaWAN

In recent years, a new set of wireless technologies known as Low-Power Wide-Area (LPWA) has received a lot of attention from the industry. Particularly well adapted for long-range and battery-powered endpoints, LPWA technologies open new business opportunities to both services providers and enterprises considering IoT solutions.

Physical Layer

Semtech LoRa modulation is based on chirp spread spectrum modulation, which trades a lower data rate for receiver sensitivity to significantly increase the communication distance. In addition, it allows demodulation below the noise floor, offers robustness to noise and interference, and manages a single channel occupation by different spreading factors. This enables LoRa devices to receive on multiple channels in parallel.

LoRaWAN 1.0.2 regional specifications describe the use of the main unlicensed sub-GHz frequency bands of 433 MHz, 779–787 MHz, 863–870 MHz, and 902–928 MHz, as well as regional profiles for a subset of the 902–928 MHz bandwidth. For example, Australia utilizes 915–928 MHz frequency bands, while South Korea uses 920–923 MHz and Japan uses 920–928 MHz.

A LoRa gateway is deployed as the center hub of a star network architecture. It uses multiple transceivers and channels and can demodulate multiple channels at once or even demodulate multiple signals on the same channel simultaneously. LoRa gateways serve as a transparent bridge relaying data between endpoints, and the endpoints use a single-hop wireless connection to communicate with one or many gateways.

The data rate in LoRaWAN varies depending on the frequency bands and adaptive data rate (ADR). ADR is an algorithm that manages the data rate and radio signal for each endpoint. The ADR algorithm ensures that packets are delivered at the best data rate possible and that network performance is both optimal and scalable. Endpoints close to the gateways with good signal values transmit with the highest data rate, which enables a shorter transmission time over the

wireless network, and the lowest transmit power. Meanwhile, endpoints at the edge of the link budget communicate at the lowest data rate and highest transmit power.

An important feature of LoRa is its ability to handle various data rates via the spreading factor. Devices with a low spreading factor (SF) achieve less distance in their communications but transmit at faster speeds, resulting in less airtime. A higher SF provides slower transmission rates but achieves a higher reliability at longer distances.

MAC Layer

MAC layer takes advantage of the LoRa physical layer and classifies LoRaWAN endpoints to optimize their battery life and ensure downstream communications to the LoRaWAN endpoints. The LoRaWAN specification documents three classes of LoRaWAN devices:

- **Class A:** This class is the default implementation. Optimized for battery-powered nodes, it allows bidirectional communications, where a given node is able to receive downstream traffic after transmitting. Two receive windows are available after each transmission.

Class B: This class was designated “experimental” in LoRaWAN 1.0.1 until it can be better defined. A Class B node or endpoint should get additional receive windows compared to Class A, but gateways must be synchronized through a beaconing process.

- **Class C:** This class is particularly adapted for powered nodes. This classification enables a node to be continuously listening by keeping its receive window open when not transmitting.

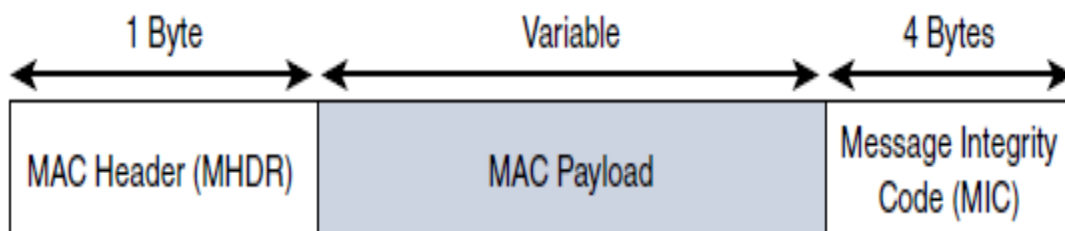


Figure 4-16 High-Level LoRaWAN MAC Frame Format

Ref: David Hanes, Gonzalo Salgueiro, Patrick Grossetete, Robert Barton, Jerome Henry, "IoT Fundamentals: Networking Technologies, Protocols, and Use Cases for the Internet of Things", 1st Edition, Pearson Education (Cisco Press Indian Reprint).

LoRaWAN messages, either uplink or downlink, have a PHY payload composed of a 1-byte MAC header, a variable-byte MAC payload, and a MIC that is 4 bytes in length. The MAC payload size depends on the frequency band and the data rate, ranging from 59 to 230 bytes for the 863–870 MHz band and 19 to 250 bytes for the 902–928 MHz band. Figure 4.6 shows a high-level LoRaWAN MAC frame format.

Topology

LoRaWAN topology is often described as a “star of stars” topology. As shown in Figure 4.7, the infrastructure consists of endpoints exchanging packets through gateways acting as bridges, with a central LoRaWAN network server. Gateways connect to the backend network using standard IP connections, and endpoints communicate directly with one or more gateways.

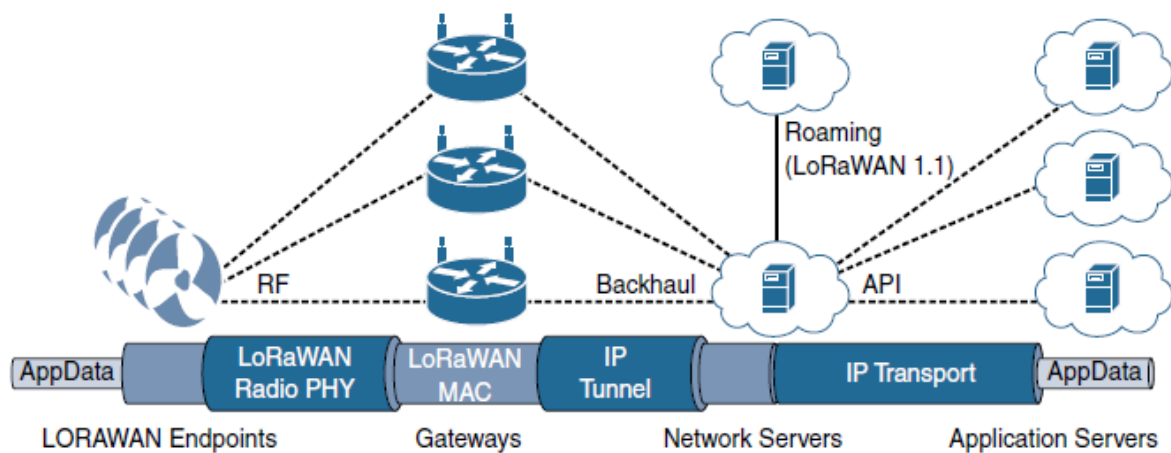


Figure 4.7 LoRaWAN Architecture

Ref: David Hanes, Gonzalo Salgueiro, Patrick Grossetete, Robert Barton, Jerome Henry, "IoT Fundamentals: Networking Technologies, Protocols, and Use Cases for the Internet of Things", 1st Edition, Pearson Education (Cisco Press Indian Reprint).

In Figure 4.7, LoRaWAN endpoints transport their selected application data over the LoRaWAN MAC layer on top of one of the supported PHY layer frequency bands. The application data is contained in upper protocol layers. These upper layers are not the responsibility of the LoRa Alliance, but best practices may be developed and recommended. These upper layers could just be raw data on top of the LoRaWAN MAC layer, or the data could be stacked in multiple protocols.

The LoRaWAN network server manages the data rate and radio frequency (RF) of each endpoint through the adaptive data rate (ADR) algorithm. ADR is a key component of the network scalability, performance, and battery life of the endpoints. The LoRaWAN network server forwards application data to the application servers.

Security

Security in a LoRaWAN deployment applies to different components of the architecture, as detailed in Figure 4.8. LoRaWAN endpoints must implement two layers of security, protecting communications and data privacy across the network.

The first layer, called “network security” but applied at the MAC layer, guarantees the authentication of the endpoints by the LoRaWAN network server. Also, it protects LoRaWAN packets by performing encryption based on AES. Each endpoint implements a network session key (NwkSKey), used by both itself and the LoRaWAN network server. The NwkSKey ensures data integrity through computing and checking the MIC of every data message as well as encrypting and decrypting MAC-only data message payloads.

The second layer is an application session key (AppSKey), which performs encryption and decryption functions between the endpoint and its application server. Furthermore, it computes and checks the application-level MIC, if included. This ensures that the LoRaWAN service provider does not have access to the application payload if it is not allowed that access.

Endpoints receive their AES-128 application key (AppKey) from the application owner. This key is most likely derived from an application-specific root key exclusively known to and under the control of the application provider. For production deployments, it is expected that the LoRaWAN gateways are protected as well, for both the LoRaWAN traffic and the network

management and operations over their backhaul link(s). This can be done using traditional VPN and IPsec technologies that demonstrate scaling in traditional IT deployments. Additional security add-ons are under evaluation by the LoRaWAN Alliance for future revisions of the specification.

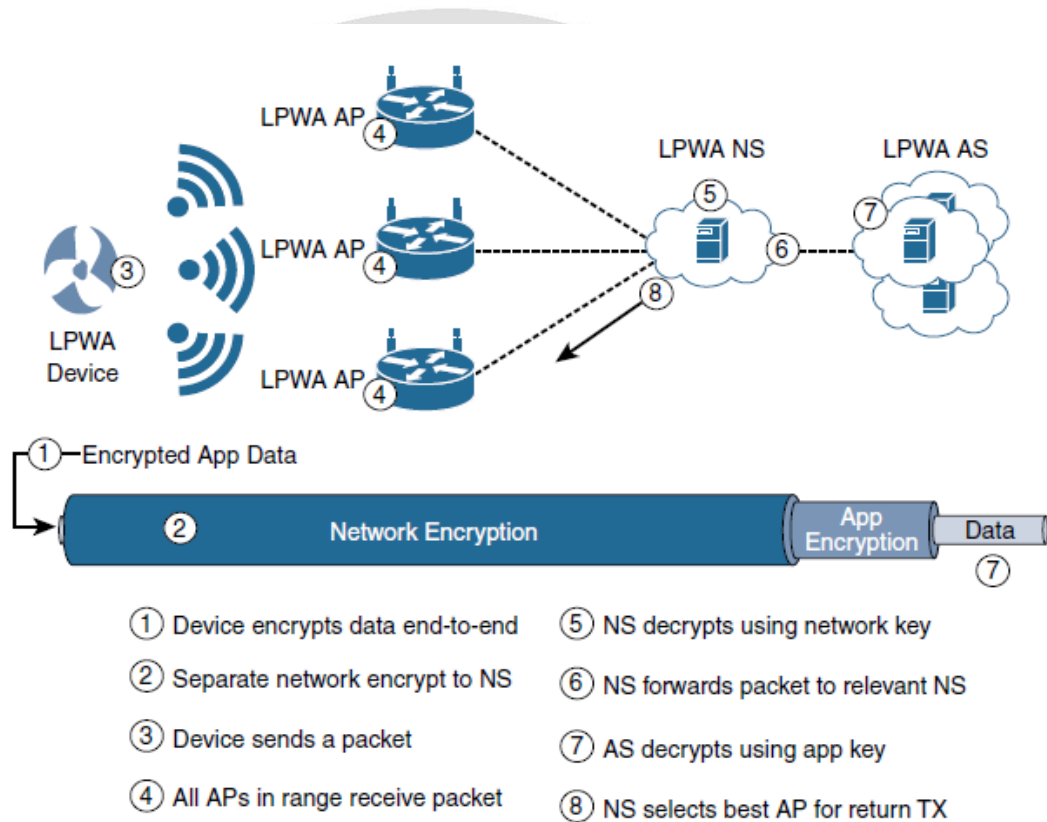


Figure 4-18 LoRaWAN Security

Ref: David Hanes, Gonzalo Salgueiro, Patrick Grossetete, Robert Barton, Jerome Henry, "IoT Fundamentals: Networking Technologies, Protocols, and Use Cases for the Internet of Things", 1st Edition, Pearson Education (Cisco Press Indian Reprint).

LoRaWAN endpoints attached to a LoRaWAN network must get registered and authenticated. This can be achieved through one of the two join mechanisms:

■ **Activation by personalization (ABP):** Endpoints don't need to run a join procedure as their individual details, including DevAddr and the NwkSKey and AppSKey session keys, are preconfigured and stored in the end device. This same information is registered in the LoRaWAN network server.

■ **Over-the-air activation (OTAA):** Endpoints are allowed to dynamically join a particular LoRaWAN network after successfully going through a join procedure. The join procedure must be done every time a session context is renewed. During the join process, which involves the sending and receiving of MAC layer join request and join accept messages, the node establishes its credentials with a LoRaWAN network server, exchanging its globally unique DevEUI, AppEUI, and AppKey. The AppKey is then used to derive the session NwkSKey and AppSKey keys.

