

# Stateless Routing in Network Simulations \*

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## Abstract

The memory resources required by network simulations can grow quadratically with size of the simulated network. In simulations that use *routing tables* at each node to perform per-hop packet forwarding, the storage required for the routing tables is  $O(N^2)$ , where  $N$  is the number of simulated network nodes in the topology. Additionally, the CPU time required in the simulation environment to compute and populate these routing tables can be excessive and can dominate the overall simulation time.

We propose new routing technique, known as *Neighbor-Index Vectors*, or *NIx-Vectors*, which eliminates both the storage required for the routing tables and the CPU time required to compute them. We show experimental results using *NIx-Vector* routing in the popular network simulator *ns*. With our technique, we achieve a near order of magnitude increase in the maximum size of a simulated network running *ns* on a single workstation. Further, we demonstrate an increase of two orders of magnitude in topology size (networks as large as 250,000 nodes) by using this technique and running the simulation in parallel on a network of workstations.

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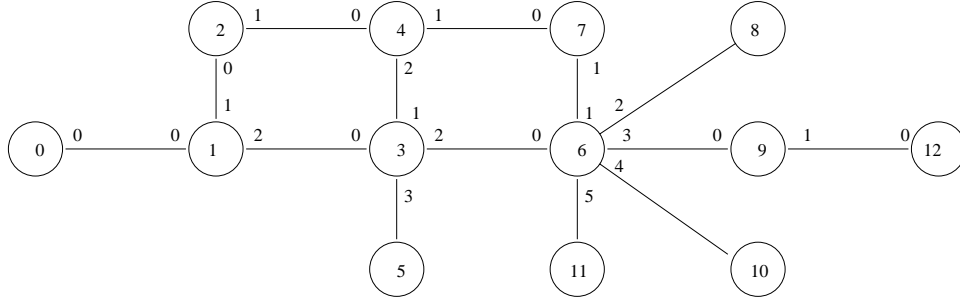


Figure 1: Simple Simulated Network

## 1 Introduction

The use of simulation is becoming increasingly prevalent in the networking research community. The popular *ns*[5] network simulator is used in many areas of networking research, including transport protocols, queue management, scheduling policies, mobility, and multicast[2]. However, limits on the resources available within the simulation environment place severe constraints on the size and complexity of the networks being simulated. In particular, the physical memory required to simulate a network of  $N$  nodes grows proportionally to  $N^2$ , for reasons discussed below.

One approach to simulating larger networks is to utilize distributed simulation techniques, and run the simulation on several loosely coupled systems in a network of workstations, or on a tightly coupled symmetric multiprocessor system. Several researchers, including Nicol[7, 6], Ogielski[3], Perumalla[9, 8], Bagrodia[15, 1], Rao[10], and Riley[11] have discussed various methods for implementing distributed network simulations, each with varying degrees of success. Another approach, proposed by Huang[4], is to reduce the level of detail in the simulation by using abstractions which reduce the amount of state and the number of events needed to model network components.

We chose a two pronged approach approach, reducing the memory requirements in a single system environment, and distributing the application on several systems. By identifying and eliminating the main cause of excessive memory requirements within a single system simulation, we can increase the overall size of the simulated network proportionally. Then by distributing the simulation on several systems, we again can proportionally increase the overall topology size.

As mentioned previously, the memory required by a network simulation grows quadratically with the number of simulated nodes. This is due to the presence of simulated *routing tables* in the simulation environment. Consider the simple topology shown in figure 1, consisting of 13 nodes and 14 links. Further consider that a simulated packet has arrived at node three with the ultimate destination of node twelve. In this example, node three must select from four possibilities (nodes 1, 4, 5, and 6) for the next hop to the final destination. In general, any node must be able to choose a next hop neighbor to route packets to any potential destination. The simplest solution is to create routing tables consisting of  $N$  entries at each of the  $N$  simulated nodes. Each table is indexed by the final destination, and returns the next hop neighbor. This method results in total memory proportional to  $N^2$ . It is easy to see that as  $N$  grows, the routing tables will start to account for the majority of the memory used by the network simulation. In addition, the CPU

time required to compute the routing table information can become excessive and can dominate the overall time required to run a simulation. Techniques for compression of the routing tables have been discussed[12], showing some promising results. However, even with compression, the memory required is  $kN^2$ ,  $0 < k \leq 1$ .

Our approach is to simply delete completely the need for routing tables. We do this by computing routes *on demand* whenever a new packet is generated, and then including the routing information in the simulated packet. As a packet arrives at a simulated node, the routing decision can be made by examining the packet, rather than a routing table lookup. We use a compact representation for routing information known as a *Neighbor-Index Vector*, or *NIx-Vector*. When a *NIx-Vector* is calculated at a given source for a given destination, it is cached at the source and reused repeatedly as more packets are generated for the same destination. By caching the routing information at each node, the CPU overhead to compute a route is incurred only once per source and destination pair. We show in the next section that the routes can be stored in an extremely small amount of memory, resulting in negligible memory overhead for the route caching. This method gives a substantial memory reduction for the overall simulation.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In section 2 we give an overview of *NIx-Vector* routing. In section 3 we discuss our implementation of *NIx-Vector* routing in the popular *ns* network simulator. In section 4 we describe our simulation environment, the large scale topologies used for our experiments, and give memory and CPU usage results for the simulations. In section 5 we give some conclusions and future directions of our research.

## 2 *NIx-Vector* Routing

The use of *NIx-Vector* routing as a technique for efficient packet processing in Internet routers is discussed in detail by Riley et. al. in [13]. We give an overview of *NIx-Vectors* here to explain how this technique can be used to give a compact representation of routing information.

The basis of *NIx-Vector* routing is the observation that, at any *routing decision point* (in the simulation environment this is a simulated router or end host), the routing decision consists of simply choosing one element from an ordered set of *routing neighbors*. If there are  $N$  routing neighbors at a given node, then the decision can be recorded and retained using only  $k = \lceil \lg_2 N \rceil$  bits. A *NIx-Vector* is therefore the concatenation of the routing decisions at each routing decision point along the path from a source to a destination, where each routing decision point uses only the smallest number of bits needed to record the decision. Note that the number of bits needed at each node to record the routing decision will vary from node to node (it is a function of the number of directly connected neighbors at each node), but for a given node it is a constant (as long as routing neighbors are not added or deleted over time during the simulation). To route a packet containing a *NIx-Vector*, each node simply extracts the next  $k = \lceil \lg_2 N \rceil$  bits from the vector, and uses this value as an index into an ordered set of directly connected neighbors.

To illustrate, consider again the simple simulated network topology shown in figure 1 and consider a packet generated at node zero with a destination of node twelve. It is easy to see that

Hop	Node	N	k	<i>Nix</i>	Used	<i>Nix-Vector</i> (binary)
0	0	1	1	0	1	0
1	1	3	2	2	3	0 10
2	3	4	2	2	5	0 10 10
3	6	6	3	3	8	0 10 10 011
4	9	2	1	1	9	0 10 10 011 1

Table 1: *Nix-Vector* Example

the correct shortest path route is 0–1–3–6–9–12. Each link to routing neighbors at any node is numbered sequentially, beginning from zero as shown in the figure, which results in the ordered set of directly connected neighbors. Table 1 shows how a *Nix-Vector* can be created for this route using only nine bits. The column labeled *Node* is the node number where this routing decision is recorded. The column labeled *N* is the number of routing neighbors at each hop, column *k* is the number of bits needed to record the route, column *Nix* is the correct neighbor index for this route, column *Used* is the cumulative length in bits for the *Nix-Vector*, and the last column is the actual *Nix-Vector*.

The resulting *Nix-Vector* for packets traveling from node zero to node twelve is 010100111. To use the *Nix-Vector* to route packets, the source of the packet (node zero in our example), stores this value in the packet header, and makes a routing decision. Since node zero has only one routing neighbor, it extracts the first bit from the vector (0 in this example), and routes the packet to neighbor 0 (which is node one). Since node one has three routing neighbors, it extracts the next two bits (10 in this example), and routes the packet to neighbor two (node three). Since node three has four routing neighbors, it extracts the next two bits (10 in this example) and routes the packet to neighbor two (node six). Since node six has six routing neighbors, it extracts the next three bits (011 in this example) and routes the packet to neighbor three (node nine). Finally, since node nine has two routing neighbors, it extracts the next one bit (1 in this example), and routes the packet to neighbor one (node twelve), which is the final destination.

In the simulation environment, a *Nix-Vector* from any source to any destination can be easily computed using a simple breadth first search algorithm, which runs in  $O(|\mathbf{N}| + |\mathbf{E}|)$ , where  $\mathbf{N}$  is the set of nodes and  $\mathbf{E}$  is the set of edges (links). From a practical standpoint, all *Nix-Vectors* using less than 32 bits are equivalent in storage requirements, since memory is allocated in units of 32 bits. In fact, for our implementation, the minimum size is 96 bits, since we store the maximum length and current length values for each vector, as well as the vector itself.

### 3 *ns* Implementation

We implemented our *Nix-Vector* routing technique in the popular *ns* network simulator, to demonstrate resulting memory and CPU time savings. We started with some basic assumptions about the behavior of the *ns* simulation.

1. The network topology for the simulation is fixed. In other words, the nodes and links are created in advance, and do not change as the simulation progresses in time.
2. The simulation uses *static* routing. Packets from a given source to a given destination will always follow exactly the same path.
3. Routes are computed using constant link weights. In the route computations, no link is “more desirable” than another.
4. In the simulation, the routing tables existed exclusively for the purpose of unicast packet forwarding, and were used for no other purpose.

Assumption 1 is reasonable, excepting for the simulations of mobile networks. Assumptions 2 and 3 are both the default cases in *ns*, and are reasonable for simulations of end-to-end protocols, queuing disciplines, and packet scheduling mechanisms. These two assumptions may not be valid for simulations involving dynamic routing decisions, routing protocols, or mobility. Assumption 4 is reasonable for any simulation where the routing of packets is not of direct interest to the simulation. This is generally the case, but not always. For example, some multicast simulations may require direct access to routing tables at a given node, and thus may not work properly with our method. However, we believe a large fraction of *ns* simulations fit within the assumptions above.

We started with *ns* version 2.1b6a as the baseline software for our modifications. The implementation of *Nix-Vector* routing took approximately three weeks, consisting of the addition of eleven new C++ modules, two new TCL modules, modification of three existing C++ modules, and modification of four existing TCL modules. The new C++ modules consisted of the breadth first search implementation for route computation, the creation of a *Nix-Vector* from the BFS results, and the implementation of a *Nix-Vector* classifier which routes packets based on a *Nix-Vector* in the packet header. The modifications to existing code were extremely minor, consisting of a few lines of code to test for *Nix-Vector* routing and change default behavior when *Nix-Vector* routing is used. Some other small modifications were implemented to help with the instrumentation of memory usage and CPU usage for our experiments.

The specification of *Nix-Vector* routing from the perspective of the *ns* user involves inserting a single command in the *ns* script to specify *Nix-Vector* routing is desired. No other modifications to user code is needed. In our implementation, if *Nix-Vector* routing is not explicitly enabled by the *ns* user, the normal routing table method is used.

## 4 Experiments and Results

We ran three basic types of experiments, using two different types of topologies. Two sets of experiments were run in a single system environment, to measure the beneficial effects of *Nix-Vector* routing in a serial simulation. The third set of experiments were run in a distributed environment, using parallel/distributed *ns*[11] modified to support *Nix-Vector* routing.

We ran our experiments on a cluster Intel systems running the RedHat Linux operating system. Each system has eight 500Mhz CPUs and 4Gb of physical memory (although the Linux kernel limits

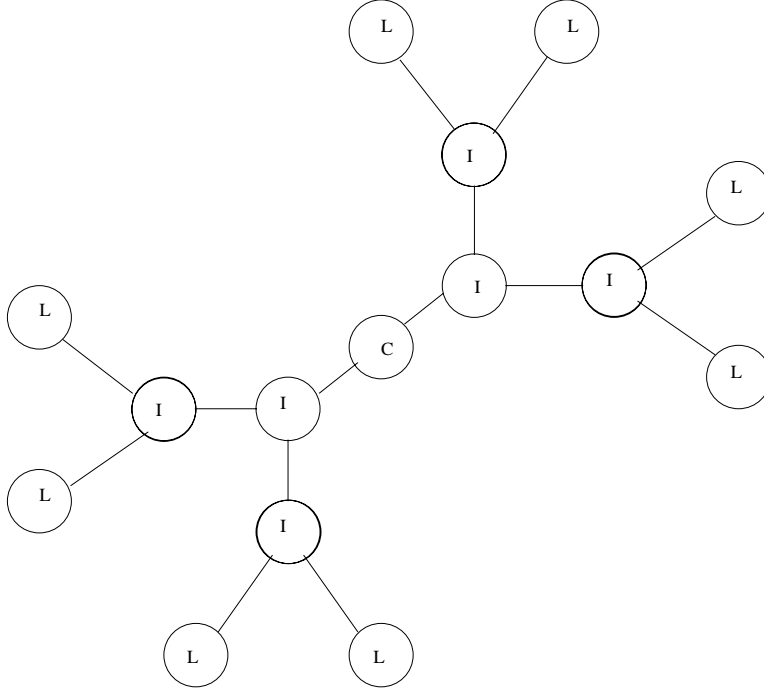


Figure 2: Basic Star Topology

the memory assigned to a single process to 2Gb). Even though each system has eight CPUs, only one CPU per system is used by our applications. All experiments were run on dedicated systems with no other user jobs running. All of the normal operating system overhead and daemons were present.

Our simulation topologies were built using two different methods for creating large topologies.

1. The first method uses a simple hierarchical *star* topology as the basic building block, as shown in figure 2. The number of leaf nodes in the star is configurable for any value  $2^k$ , and each pair of leaf nodes fans into an interior node. Each pair of interior nodes fans into another interior node, and so on. Thus for  $2^k$  leaf nodes, the star topology contains a total of  $2^{k+1} - 1$  nodes and  $2^{k+1} - 2$  links. Using this star as the basic building block, we created larger networks by connecting multiple stars together (using the center node of the star as the border to other stars), to give a linear increase in the total number of nodes. We then defined exactly one TCP connection from each leaf node to one other leaf node, and ran the simulation for 10 seconds of simulation time. To validate that our modified *ns* is functioning properly, we created standard *ns* trace files for the simulations with and without *Nix-Vector* routing enabled, and found them to be identical.
2. The second method was to utilize the Georgia Tech Internet Topology Modeler (*GT-ITM*)[14]. We used the *Transit-Stub* modeling method, and varied the parameters to produce topologies of similar sizes to those created with the prior method. We then created TCP connections between random pairs of nodes, in a fashion similar to the above method, and again ran the simulations for 10 seconds of simulation time.

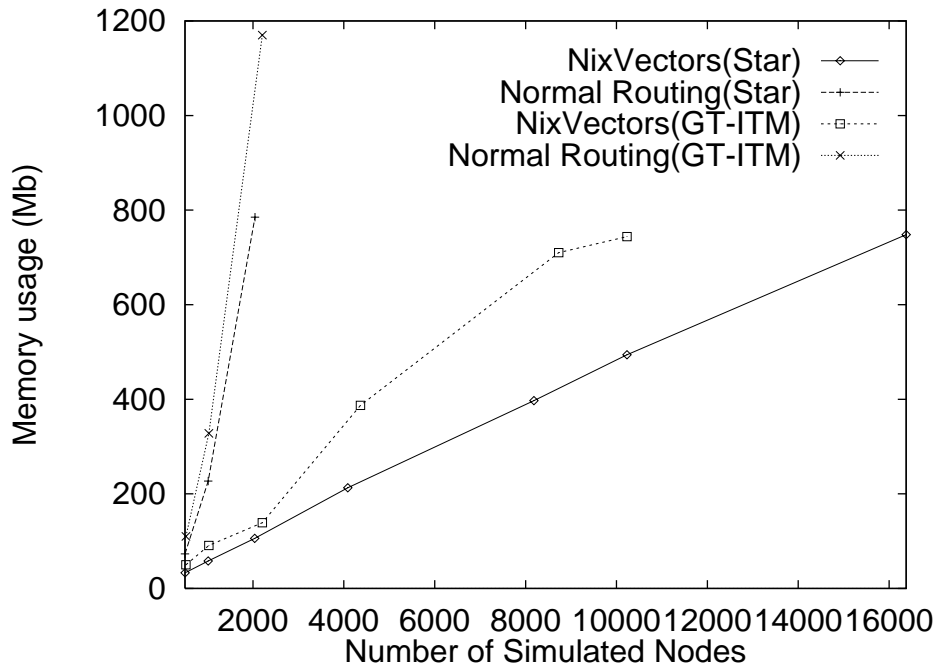


Figure 3: Memory Usage (Mb)

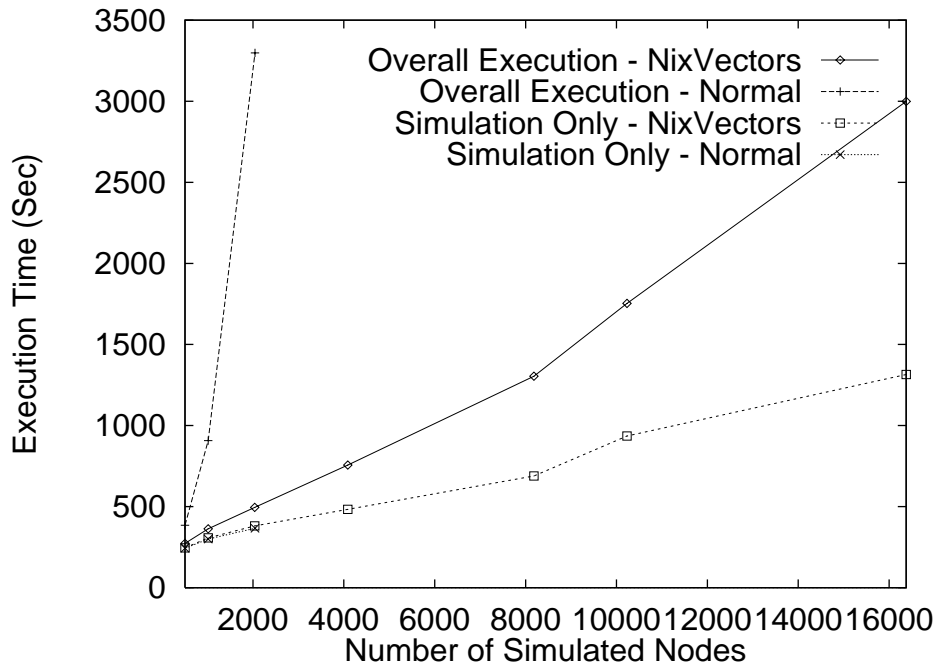


Figure 4: Execution Time, Star Topologies(Sec)

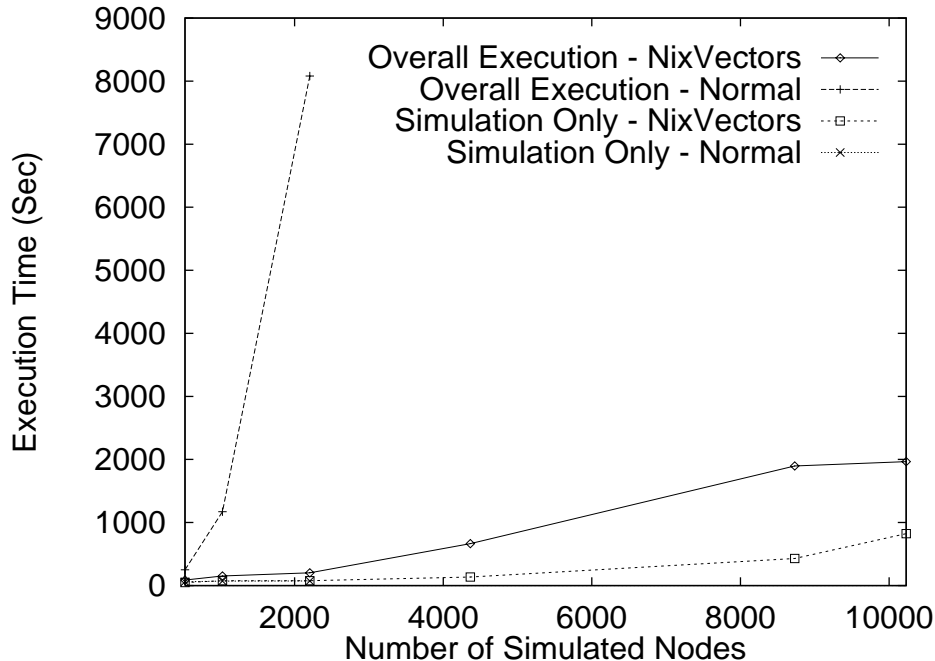


Figure 5: Execution Time, GT-ITM (Sec)

With these techniques of creating scalable topologies, we were able to easily create topologies of various sizes ranging from about 500 nodes to about 16,000 nodes. We then ran our modified *ns* on each of these topologies, and recorded the total memory used by each run, the total elapsed time for the run, and the elapsed time used for the simulation portion of the run (subtracting out the elapsed time used for setting up the topology, creating the connections, and other initialization activities). For a comparison, we ran the original, unmodified *ns* on the 500, 1000 and 2000 node topologies (the larger ones would not run on our system due to memory constraints).

The results of the memory usage measurements is shown in figure 3. The graph shows clearly an almost linear increase in total memory requirements versus the number of simulated nodes for the *Nix-Vector* routing method. The normal *ns* routing tables method shows the expected quadratic increase. For the three cases where we have comparison data, the *Nix-Vector* approach gives a factor of about 2, 4, and 8 reduction in total memory requirements respectively. The graphs also show that for an equal number of nodes, the *GT-ITM* topologies take somewhat more memory than the star topologies. This is due to the fact that *GT-ITM* creates two to three times more links than the star topologies for the same node count.

We also see improvements in the overall execution time of the simulation, as shown in figures 4 and 5. The graphs show the overall time for the simulation (in wall clock seconds) and the time for the actual simulation part of the run (also in wall clock seconds). The simulation part of the run begins after all initialization activities have been completed, such as creating the topology, defining the flows, and creating the routing tables. The improvement gained by the *Nix-Vector* approach is due primarily to the CPU time used computing routing tables in standard *ns*, which is done for every simulated node before the simulation starts. The *Nix-Vector* routing approach does not



Number Systems	Total Connections	Total Node Count
2	2,000	32,766
4	4,000	65,532
8	8,000	131,064
16	16,000	262,128

Table 2: Topology Sizes for Distributed Simulations

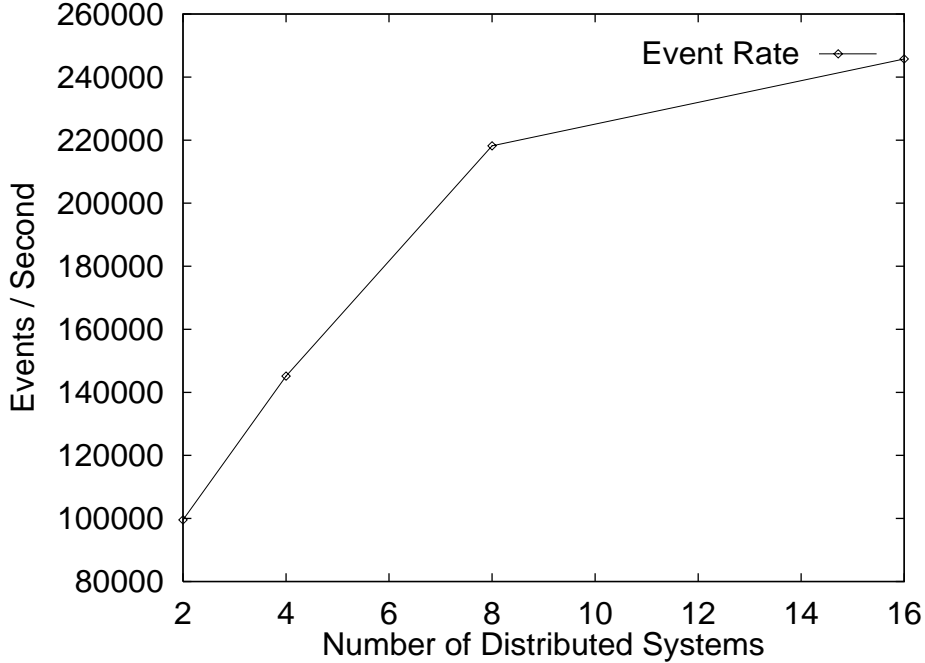


Figure 6: Aggregate Events per Second

compute routing tables. If the actual simulation portion of the run is lengthy, the overall effects of this improvement would be reduced. The elapsed CPU time for *Nix-Vector* routing simulations increases approximately linearly with the number of nodes (we increased the number of connections modeled proportionally with the number of nodes). The CPU usage graphs show no discernible difference in the simulation portion of the run.

We then created a version of parallel/distributed *ns* which uses the *Nix-Vector* routing method, and ran simulations distributed on 2, 4, 8, and 16 systems. Each system used the star topology previously discussed, and created a topology of 16,383 nodes per system. We create 1,000 connections per systems, with 90% of the connections to local nodes, and the remaining to remote nodes. The lookahead value used was 10ms. With this method, the overall topology size and number of connections increased linearly as the number of systems increased. To demonstrate that the parallel/distributed *ns* implementation scales well, we measured the overall event rate, in events per second.

Table 2 shows the overall topology size achieved with the distributed simulations. Note that with our methods, we were able to simulate a topology consisting of 262,128 nodes and 16,000 connections. In the same size simulation environment, the standard *ns* was only able to achieve a size of about 2,500 nodes. The results of the event rate measurement is shown in figure 6. The graph shows that as the number of systems participating in the distributed simulation increases, the aggregate event rate increases, but not completely linearly. This is due to the extra overhead incurred as more systems participate in distributed consensus computations for time synchronization.

## 5 Conclusions and Future Work

The overall memory requirements for a large scale network simulation are dominated by the space used for simulated routing tables. By computing routes on demand, and storing the computed route in simulated packet headers, the space used by the routing tables can be eliminated. Our experiments show a near order of magnitude increase in the maximum size of a simulated network within a given physical memory limit. By distributing the application on a network of workstations, we achieve an overall topology size increase of two orders of magnitude, from about 2500 nodes on the standard *ns*, to over 250,000 nodes when using our methods. In addition, the CPU time required to populate the routing tables can dominate the overall running time of a simulation in the case where the topology is large and the simulation time is short. The *Nix-Vector* method of routing packets does not populate routing tables and thus this computationally expensive operation can be eliminated.

Our implementation of *Nix-Vector* routing in *ns* was somewhat quick and dirty, as evident by the short three week implementation effort. We kept the effort minimal by making the restrictive assumptions given in section 3. Assumptions 1, 2 and 3 can all be relaxed with a bit more effort in the *Nix-Vector* implementation. Assumption 4 is fundamental to our approach, and thus any simulation for which this assumption does not hold cannot use *Nix-Vector* routing.

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