A simulation study of GELS for Ethernet over WAN

Saqib M. Ilyas, Atif Nazir, Fawaz S. Bokhari, Zartash A. Uzmi
Computer Science and Engineering
Lahore University of Management Sciences, Lahore, Pakistan
Email: {saqibm,nazir,fawazs,zartash}@lums.edu.pk

Adrian Farrel
Old Dog Consulting
United Kingdom
adrian@olddog.co.uk

Fahad R. Dogar
Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA
fdogar@cs.cmu.edu

Abstract—**Ethernet is a low-cost, flexible and high-speed transport technology, which has traditionally seen success in local area networks and is rapidly gaining popularity in metro networks. However, its control plane, primarily based on spanning tree protocol, is not well-suited for the metro and core networks. For such networks, the IETF is evaluating a proposed framework called GELS which uses GMPLS as the control plane for Ethernet data plane. In this paper, we provide a quantitative assessment of GELS for service provider networks. In particular, we perform simulations using COST239 and COST266 networks to evaluate the performance of GELS under normal network conditions, as well as under failure conditions.**

Under normal network conditions, we find that the use of GELS results in placement of up to 46.4% more bandwidth when compared with native Ethernet control such as RSTP. In terms of LSP acceptance, GELS shows a 45.5% improvement over RSTP. Similarly, average link utilization using GELS is significantly better than the average link utilization when the native Ethernet control plane is used.

When considering single element failures, RSTP recovers by converging to a potentially new spanning tree, which may take unacceptably long. In contrast, well-known restoration and protection mechanisms of GMPLS control plane result in much faster recovery. We find that the convergence times exhibited by GELS after single element failures are orders of magnitude better than those obtained when RSTP is used.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ethernet remained the dominant technology as Local Area Networks (LAN) evolved from shared Ethernet to collapsed backbone architecture. The success of Ethernet in LAN is because of its flexibility, ubiquity and cost-effectiveness. These characteristics of the Ethernet together with its continually increasing support for high data rates have been a major driving factor for the deployment of point-to-point Ethernet links in Wide Area Networks (WAN).

Penetration of Ethernet into service provider core and metro networks [1], [2] also enables services such as enterprise LANs and Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to be offered. In addition to these traditional services, new Ethernet-based services such as metro-Ethernet and Ethernet transport over WAN are gaining significant popularity. These services present excellent business opportunities and at the same time, they pose new technical challenges to the service providers.

While Ethernet provides a low-cost and flexible alternative to traditional transport technologies such as ATM and SONET/SDH in the data plane, its control plane presents several limitations. First, the native Ethernet control plane prunes the topology into a spanning tree, immensely reducing average network utilization. Second, the native Ethernet control plane does not offer a virtual circuit-based service model which would enable provisioning of fast, reliable services with good resilience schemes as offered by SONET/SDH. Although improved versions of native Ethernet control plane protocols, such as the Rapid Spanning Tree Protocol (RSTP), provide quicker failure recovery, their resilience mechanisms still do not compare with the elaborate restoration and protection mechanisms of ATM and SONET/SDH. Furthermore, the native Ethernet control plane does not allow placement of traffic engineered paths and is unable to provide QoS support, which is essential for the control plane of today's core networks. These challenges provided an impetus in the search for new frameworks that are able to meet the control plane requirements on the service provider networks based on point-to-point Ethernet links.

The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) is considering GMPLS-controlled Ethernet Label Switching (GELS) for providing wide area Ethernet services [3]. GELS promises to be an excellent framework for metro-Ethernet and Ethernet transport over WAN. It uses GMPLS as the control plane [4], which inherently provides Traffic Engineering, efficient network utilization, and high degree of resilience. Despite the significant attention to GELS in the IETF and service provider communities, a quantitative comparison of GELS and native Ethernet control has not been done previously, to the best of our knowledge. We aim to provide a simulation study for this comparison.

Our study consists of evaluating and comparing GELS and the native Ethernet control plane under normal network conditions as well as under failure conditions. During normal network operation, we monitored three different metrics: Label Switched Path (LSP) acceptance percentage, average link utilization, and total amount of bandwidth placed in the network. For failure scenarios, our primary comparison metric was convergence time. For native control plane, convergence to a potentially new spanning tree was considered and for GELS, evaluation was done using two well-known GMPLS resilience techniques, i.e., restoration and protection [5]. The overall finding is that GELS outperforms the native control plane under normal as well as failure conditions, using the metrics considered in this study.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section II provides a background on the evolution of GMPLS control plane and GELS framework. Section III describes the criteria and methodology used for the performance evaluation of GELS. Section IV describes the simulation environment we used in our study whose results are reported in Section V. We finally conclude in Section VI.

II. EVOLUTION OF GELS

In the mid 1990s, core networks saw a wide scale deployment of ATM switches owing to their high throughput compared to IP routers at that time. To enable the widely used IP standards to work with a high performing ATM core, an overlay model was envisioned for the service provider networks using these two different technologies. However, the control planes for IP and ATM are completely different and their cooperation posed a significant technical challenge. The proposals to address this problem evolved into Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS), designed to control devices with packet switch capable interfaces. Later on, MPLS was extended to GMPLS in order to control newer data planes such as optical cross connects and devices with fiber switch capable interfaces [4], [6]. Thus, GMPLS provides a unified control plane for data planes that may be based on a variety of transport technologies.

The IETF is presently considering a proposal to use the GMPLS control plane in Ethernet point-to-point links within the metro and core networks. This proposal presents the GELS framework, motivated not only by the capability of GMPLS to control Ethernet interfaces (also referred to as Layer-2 switch capable interfaces), but also by realizing that the use of GMPLS control plane would address all of service providers' concerns about the native Ethernet control plane.

The native Ethernet control plane relies on the establishment of spanning tree, leading to a situation where many links are pruned from the active topology and, therefore, do not carry any traffic. However, such links may not be removed from the network because they may become part of the active topology if a failure occurs in the network, which in turn may cause some other links to be pruned from the active topology. Thus, at any given time, only a subset of the network links are actively utilized. Use of GMPLS as the control plane for the Ethernet allows the traffic to traverse through any link with sufficient resources.

Another important concern, when native Ethernet control plane such as RSTP is used for core networks, is the existence of the possibility that RSTP will take a long time to recover from a network element failure. In contrast, well-known restoration and protection mechanisms of GMPLS control plane result in much faster recovery.

Besides addressing these important shortcomings of native Ethernet control plane, GELS framework provides support for traffic engineering which is a feature highly desirable for service providers. This support is possible because GELS uses the label switching mechanism inherently offered by the GMPLS control plane.

III. PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

In this section, we describe the criteria and methodology for the performance evaluation of GELS framework, in comparison with the native Ethernet control plane.

A. Evaluation Criteria

During normal network operation, a service provider expects the control plane to provide efficient utilization of network resources while meeting as much customer traffic demand as possible. In addition to this, the network should also be able to recover from failures quickly and gracefully. To conduct a study for normal and failure network states, we used a performance criteria that gives consideration to both these states.

1) LSP Acceptance: As most service provider networks use label switched technology, we consider traffic demand matrix as a collection of Label Switched Path (LSP) requests. Depending upon the availability of network resources, a control plane may or may not be able to serve all LSP requests in a traffic matrix. A higher percentage of served LSP requests indicates a better control plane.

2) Bandwidth Placement: Two control planes, which may have served the same number of LSPs, may be compared in terms of the total bandwidth placed on the network.

3) Link Utilization: This metric is a measure of average utilization of all the network links. If the network consists of n links, and each link i with capacity l_i is loaded with traffic t_i, we define link utilization U as:

$$U = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^{n} \frac{t_i}{l_i} \tag{1}$$

4) Convergence Time: This is the time taken by the control plane to recover from a failure condition. We only consider single element (link or node) failures in this paper. For Ethernet networks, we only consider RSTP (as opposed to regular STP) in our simulations since it provides lower convergence delays after single element failure, while for GELS networks, we use the well-known GMPLS restoration and protection schemes [7].

B. Evaluation Methodology

We now present our simulation methodology that is effective and fair to both control planes we evaluated.

1) LSP Placement: Ethernet networks with native control plane such as RSTP are contention based, and are inherently different from GELS networks, which use virtual circuits. For a fair comparison of GELS and native Ethernet control plane, a common ground needs to be established. To this end, we devised a variation of constrained shortest path first (CSPF) algorithm called Compromised CSPF (C-CSPF). Whereas the CSPF algorithm rejects an LSP request if the network resources are unavailable, C-CSFP is flexible enough to serve the fraction of requested bandwidth as much as afforded by the network. Thus, the C-CSPF chooses a path, from ingress to egress, along which the maximum of the requested bandwidth can be reserved. From an implementation perspective, C-CSPF uses a binary search mechanism to find this maximum value of bandwidth which can be placed on the network. In summary, C-CSPF allows an LSP request to be partially accepted.

2) Resilience Mechanism: The GMPLS control plane offers two resilience mechanisms: restoration and protection. Restoration attempts to compute and reserve an alternate path only after a primary LSP fails. In protection, on the other hand, a backup path is computed and reserved, if possible, simultaneously with the placement of primary LSP. In this paper, we used a 1:1 protection scheme in which placement of one unique backup LSP is attempted for every primary LSP.

For RSTP, we consider the convergence time averaged over all possible root bridge assignments and over all possible single element failures. To this end, we designate each bridge as the root bridge one by one, and for each root bridge assignment, we simulate failure of every link and calculate the average convergence time for that root bridge. Finally, we take the average of results for all the root bridge assignments. Thus, in a topology consisting of m bridges and n links, if t_{ij} is the convergence time when bridge i is the root and network element j fails, then average convergence time for RSTP is:

$$t_{\text{conv}} = \frac{1}{m}\sum_{i=1}^{m}\left(\frac{1}{n}\sum_{j=1}^{n} t_{ij}\right) \tag{2}$$

On the other hand, when GELS is used, failure of an element is signaled from the nearest upstream node of the failed element to either the ingress node or the Point of Local Repair (PLR) [8], which then reroutes the LSPs affected by this failure event. In this paper, we consider rerouting at the ingress node, which can be done using restoration or protection schemes. The convergence time to recover from a failure condition is dependent upon the following parameters:

1) Signaling delay (t_{sig}): the time needed to signal a network element failure from the nearest upstream node of the failed element to the ingress node. We use a value of $1ms/200km$ propagation delay in our simulations.
2) Processing delay (t_{proc}): time taken by the ingress node to compute an alternate path (only applicable in case of restoration). A value of $5ms$ is assumed in our simulations.
3) Reservation delay (t_{res}): the time required to reserve an LSP on the newly computed path (applicable in case of restoration only).
4) Switching delay (t_{sw}): the time required to switch the incoming traffic from affected LSP to the newly established LSP. A value of $1ms$ is assumed in our simulations.

In case of restoration, switching of affected LSPs is carried out after the backup paths are computed and reserved following the receipt of failure notification. Thus, in restoration, the time t_{rest} to recover a single LSP is given by:

$$t_{\text{rest}} = t_{\text{sig}} + t_{\text{proc}} + t_{\text{res}} + t_{\text{sw}} \tag{3}$$

Furthermore, when there are multiple LSPs to be restored after a failure event, we consider two possibilities for reservation of rerouted LSPs: 1) each ingress node is capable of carrying out simultaneous reservation of multiple LSPs, and 2) the reservation of multiple LSPs at an ingress node takes place in a sequential manner, such that the reservation process of an LSP may not start until the reservation of a previous LSP is completed. We denote the time taken to recover all the LSPs at an ingress node i as $t_{\min,i}$ in the former case and as $t_{\max,i}$ in the latter case. The convergence time for this failure scenario is then computed as:

$$t_{\min} = \max_i \; t_{\min,i} \tag{4}$$

$$t_{\max} = \max_i \; t_{\max,i} \tag{5}$$

However, in case of protection, the affected LSPs are simply switched onto the pre-established backup LSPs, after a failure notification is received. Therefore, the average convergence time for protection is calculated by using only the signaling and the switching delays.

IV. SIMULATION TESTBED

In this section, we describe our simulation setup including the network topologies and traffic matrices.

A. Network Topologies

We use the COST239 and COST266 (Tier 1) topologies to obtain results on different network scales: COST239 [9] is an 11-node network whereas COST266 [10] is a 50-node network. Individual link capacities on both topologies are 10 Gb/s.

B. Traffic Matrices

LSP requests arrive one by one, whereas the LSP ingress and egress nodes are chosen randomly from amongst all ingress-egress pairs. The bandwidth demand for an LSP request is uniformly distributed between 1 and 3 Gb/s, while the call holding time for each LSP request is infinite. This is because we are considering networks deployed by large service providers where, typically, long duration LSPs are established between large enterprises or other service providers. We use two different types of traffic matrices for both topologies. One type of traffic matrices consists of fully meshed LSPs, i.e., LSPs for all combinations of source-destination node pairs. The other type of traffic matrices is partially meshed, i.e., LSPs between only some source-destination node pairs. The partially meshed traffic matrices consist of 10 and 100 LSPs for COST239 and COST266 networks, respectively. Five randomly generated traffic matrices of each type are used for averaging the simulation results.

C. Simulation Environment

For evaluating GELS performance, we used the TOTEM simulator[1], chosen for its popularity and acceptance in the service provider community. Our implementation of C-CSPF was based on the existing CSPF support in TOTEM. For RSTP, the spanning tree was found using the open-source simulator BridgeSim[2]. The pruned topology represented by this spanning tree was then used in TOTEM for the placement

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[1] Available at: http://totem.run.montefiore.ulg.ac.be

[2] Available at: http://www.cs.cmu.edu/ acm/bridgesim/index.html

of LSPs, under normal network conditions. The LSPs from the randomly generated traffic matrices were placed using C-CSPF and the results for LSP acceptance, average link utilization and bandwidth placement were observed. These performance metrics for GELS were obtained in a similar manner, except that the pruning step was omitted.

For failure convergence experiments in RSTP, BridgeSim was used to compute the convergence times, which were then extracted from simulation traces using UNIX shell scripts. Convergence times for GELS were obtained using TOTEM's built-in functionality of GMPLS restoration and protection.

V. SIMULATION RESULTS

In both normal and failure network conditions, we found the results for partially meshed traffic matrices to be a subset of the results for the fully meshed traffic matrices. Therefore, in this section we present the results only for fully meshed traffic matrices.

A. Normal Network Conditions

Under normal network conditions, when there is no failure, three metrics were considered as mentioned in Section III-A. We noticed similar trends exhibited by these metrics for both the topologies, and here we report results for the COST266 topology.

1) LSP Acceptance: Figure 1 shows the number of fully or partially placed LSPs (using C-CSPF) as a function of the total number of LSP requests that arrive sequentially for the COST266 network using a fully meshed traffic matrix. It is seen that when the number of LSP requests is less than 10, GELS with restoration, GELS with protection and RSTP are able to place all LSPs on the network. However, as more LSP requests arrive, RSTP is unable to place some of the LSPs because of the pruned topology. In contrast, GELS with restoration and protection keep placing all the LSPs. This trend continues until about 35 LSPs are requested. At this point, GELS with protection, which reserves backup LSPs consuming extra network bandwidth, faces a severe bottleneck and its curve levels off quickly. Subsequently, after about 140 LSP requests, RSTP is able to reserve more LSPs than GELS with protection.

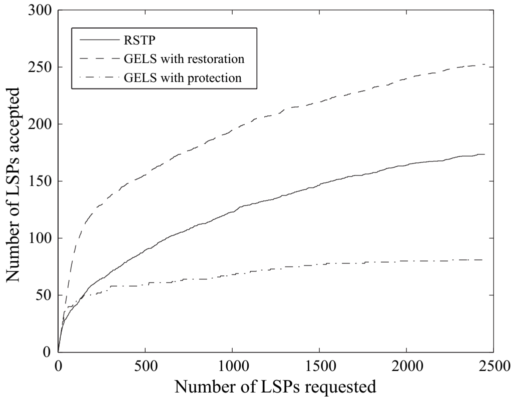

Fig. 1. LSPs Accepted: COST266 with full mesh traffic matrix.

By using C-CSPF over the entire set of 2450 LSPs for the COST266 network, GELS with restoration, GELS with protection and RSTP were able to place 10.3%, 3.31% and 7.08% of the requested LSPs, respectively, either fully or partially. Therefore, GELS with restoration provided up to 45.5% improvement in LSP placement over RSTP. GELS with protection, however, handled approximately 53% fewer LSPs when compared with RSTP due to consumption of network capacity by backup LSPs.

2) Bandwidth Placement: We notice from Figure 2 that for the first few LSP requests, all three control mechanisms (GELS with restoration, GELS with protection, and RSTP) were able to place the same amount of bandwidth. This is expected since the network is lightly loaded and none of the control mechanisms has hit the bottleneck. However, the limitation of RSTP due to pruned topology takes effect as more LSP requests arrive and RSTP performance starts falling below that of GELS. With more and more LSP requests, GELS with protection consumes network link bandwidth more quickly than GELS with restoration, resulting in the GELS with protection curve tapering off, too. After about 110 requested LSPs, GELS with protection causes high saturation of links in the network, thus making the reservation for additional LSPs (primary and backup) difficult. In contrast, the spanning tree based pruned topology is still able to service some LSP requests.

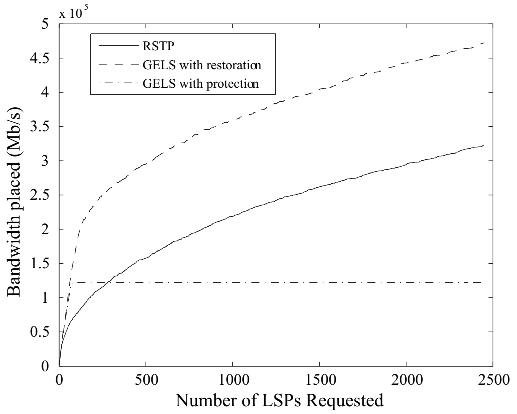

Fig. 2. Bandwidth Placed: COST266 with full mesh traffic matrix.

Overall, from Figure 2, it is obvious that for the COST266 network topology with a fully meshed traffic matrix, GELS with restoration, RSTP and GELS with protection place 96.37%, 65.82% and 24.88% of the requested bandwidth, respectively, i.e., GELS with restoration places 46.4% more bandwidth, while GELS with protection places approximately 62% less bandwidth than that placed by RSTP.

3) Link Utilization: Figure 3 provides the link utilization characteristics for GELS and RSTP in the COST266 network with a fully meshed traffic matrix. It shows that as LSP requests start arriving, the network link utilization grows for RSTP as well as GELS. Due to placement of backup LSPs (which are both link- and node-disjoint to ensure protection of primary LSPs), GELS with protection quickly approaches the maximum utilization (about 91% in Figure 3). Since RSTP has a pruned topology, most of the links in the network are not utilized and accordingly, RSTP link utilization does not grow significantly. With the arrival of more LSP requests, the average network link utilization for GELS with restoration also approaches the maximum utilization (about 92% in Figure 3). When link utilization is high, GELS with restoration is able to partially service an LSP request. However, GELS with protection cannot service any more requests if the full bandwidth for the primary LSP cannot be reserved. This is why GELS with restoration offers greater average link utilization than GELS with protection.

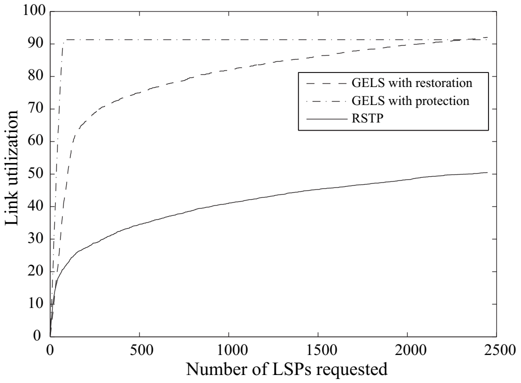

Fig. 3. Link Utilization: COST266 with full mesh traffic matrix.

In summary, from Figure 3, GELS with restoration provides 92.04% link utilization, GELS with protection provides 91.29% link utilization, while RSTP provides 50.44% link utilization. Thus, GELS with restoration provides 82.47% more link utilization, while GELS with protection provides 80.99% more link utilization, when compared with RSTP.

B. Network with Failure Conditions

1) Link Failure Convergence Time: Table I shows the simulation results for convergence time in case of single link failure scenario. For the COST239 network, RSTP converges faster than both GELS with restoration and GELS with protection, on average. However, for the COST266 network, GELS with restoration converges 62.76% faster, while GELS with protection converges 93.96% faster when compared with RSTP. This is because RSTP convergence time after link failure decreases as the distance from the failing link to the root bridge increases, and in COST239 network, there are fewer links closer to the root bridge than in COST266 network.

For GELS, the average convergence time depends on the number of LSPs to be rerouted and the number of LSPs that are restored after the failure. An interesting observation from Table I is that the GELS with restoration scheme has a higher value of $t_{\max}$ with the COST239 (smaller) network than with the COST266 (larger) network. This is because more LSPs are restored in the former, also indicated in the same table. Similarly, when GELS with protection is used in COST266 network, a higher number of LSPs are rerouted and consequently a higher convergence time is observed as compared to the case of COST239 network.

2) Node Failure Convergence Time: Table II depicts that the convergence times for GELS are orders of magnitude lower than the convergence times for RSTP, under single node failure scenario. It is also seen that GELS with protection gives smaller convergence time as compared to GELS with restoration, as expected.

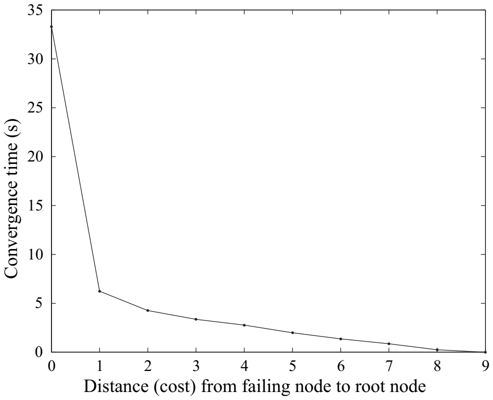

Fig. 4. COST266: RSTP convergence time after node failure.

An apparent anomaly exists in that the average convergence time for RSTP is smaller for the larger COST266 topology than the smaller COST239 topology. To understand the reason for this behavior, refer to Figure 4, which indicates that the convergence time after failure of root bridges is high (of the order of several tens of seconds). Also, note that the farther the failing bridge is from the root bridge in the active topology, the smaller the convergence time. This is because when RSTP recovers from root bridge failure, it falls back to the STP behavior. For failure of a non-root bridge, several protocol enhancements enable RSTP to recover within a few milliseconds. Simulating all possible node failures in a topology of 50 nodes results in a single large convergence time value (for the root bridge failure) and 49 smaller values. Similarly, on the 11-node COST239 topology, we observed a single large value and 10 smaller values of convergence times. The averaging out of convergence times pulls the average value down further for the 50 node COST266 topology than for the COST239 topology which consists of only 11 nodes.

Moreover, as in the case of link failures, the convergence times of GELS with protection are higher in case of COST266 network. Table II also shows that GELS with restoration is able to restore fewer LSPs for the COST239 network, and hence exhibits a smaller convergence time when compared with the COST266 network.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

We conducted extensive simulation experiments to evaluate GELS as a control plane for metro and core networks consisting of point-to-point Ethernet links. We evaluated the performance of GELS under normal network operation as well

TABLE I

AVERAGE CONVERGENCE TIME (SINGLE LINK FAILURE)

Network	RSTP Convergence time (ms)	Restoration				Protection		
		LSPs		Convergence time (ms)		LSPs		Convergence time (ms)
		Affected	Rerouted	$t_{\min}$	$t_{\max}$	Affected	Rerouted	
COST239	0.7	905	746	32.67	41.61	596	451	3.89
COST266	102.4	3942	618	38.13	39.61	2513	993	6.18

TABLE II

AVERAGE CONVERGENCE TIME (SINGLE NODE FAILURE)

Network	RSTP Convergence time (ms)	Restoration				Protection		
		LSPs		Convergence time (ms)		LSPs		Convergence time (ms)
		Affected	Rerouted	$t_{\min}$	$t_{\max}$	Affected	Rerouted	
COST239	4850	1454	306	30.07	39.34	953	166	2.56
COST266	3365	5227	651	42.25	44.24	3430	598	6.1

as under single element failure scenarios, and compared the metrics with those of native Ethernet control plane under the same set of conditions.

Under normal network operation, we observed that using GELS on our reference networks and traffic matrices results in up to 45.5% improvement in LSP acceptance, up to 46.4% improvement in bandwidth placement, and substantial improvement in link utilization over native Ethernet control plane.

Under single link failure conditions, using GELS with protection results in up to 94% improvement in convergence time over native Ethernet control plane. We did see smaller convergence time values for RSTP compared to GELS in the COST239 network topology for single link failure, but that result is only valid for a small network. For large network, under single node failure conditions, we see several orders of magnitude improvement in convergence time with both GELS with restoration and GELS with protection over native Ethernet control plane.

This study suggests that GELS is a viable solution as an efficient control plane for metro and core networks based on Ethernet point-to-point links. Within GELS, the choice between protection and restoration for resilience is based on service provider preferences.

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