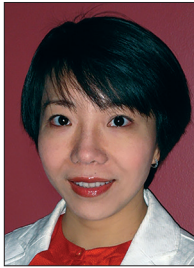


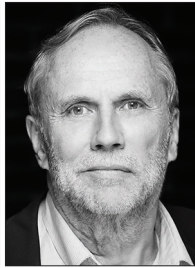
ENHANCED FRONTHAUL FOR 5G AND BEYOND



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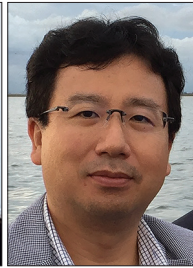
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In the radio access network (RAN) infrastructure, fronthaul links territorially disperse remote units (RUs) to distributed units (DUs) in regular or open RAN. With the fifth generation (5G) rollout worldwide and the active research on technologies beyond 5G, fronthaul has become a critical part of RAN to balance throughput, delay, reliability, and security. Based on a group of Tier 1 operators' insights on 5G deployment, a recent technology analysis report expects the 5G fronthaul transmission market to reach more than US\$2 billion in revenue by 2024, almost triple the current rollout.

Advanced applications of 5G and beyond require the fronthaul connection to support features such as high speed, ultra-low latency, traffic protection, and secure data privacy. Fronthaul plays an important role in network operations for macro and small cells, distributed antenna systems with RAN sharing, and evolution toward openness and virtualization of RAN. Network controller coordination of fronthaul access networks (FANs) and RAN is also an open topic.

This Special Issue (SI) promotes enhanced fronthaul technologies as an essential building block of the 5G and beyond RAN infrastructure. It presents the latest research endeavors, industry implementations, as well as standards development in the field of fronthaul. This SI also investigates the theoretical and practical challenges to encourage a joint effort from both academia and industry. After a rigorous review process, four articles have been accepted. They cover different aspects within this field.

Optical fiber is the primary solution of fronthaul. Advanced optical technologies are being actively developed in this direction. The first article, "WDM-PON for 5G Wireless Fronthaul" by Effenberger *et al.*, introduces China Telecom's trial of using wavelength-division multiplex passive optical network (WDM-PON) for 5G fronthaul. The trial demonstrates that the WDM-PON system can meet the 25 Gb/s rate required for 5G fronthaul. With 10 km fronthaul transport, the one-way system delay is around 56.2 μ s, and the power budget reaches 24.97 dB. Typical fronthaul scenarios in the North America and Asia markets are further analyzed to resemble the 5G deployment diversity. The latest progress of WDM-PON standards in the International Telecommunication Union - Telecommunication Sector (ITU-T) is reviewed as a key industry effort of promoting the WDM-PON solution for 5G fronthaul.

The second article, "Point-to-Multipoint Coherent Architecture with Joint Resource Allocation for B5G/6G Fronthaul" by Fan *et al.*, proposes a flexible point-to-multipoint fiber architecture for 5G fronthaul based on optical coherent technologies. Coherent transceivers along with DSP are employed to facilitate subcarrier signal transmission between RUs and their associated DUs. A joint resource allocation algorithm is introduced to

adjust wireless network resources such as modulation format, bandwidth, as well as launch power for the purpose of improving resource utilization efficiency. Simulation results illustrate that the proposal provides power saving with high bandwidth efficiency at increased transmission rate.

When fiber connection is neither feasible nor economically available, the wireless solutions for fronthaul come into play. The third article, "Wireless Fronthaul for 5G and Future Radio Access Networks: Challenges and Enabling Technologies" by Jiang *et al.*, investigates using millimeter-wave (mmWave) or higher bands for the 5G fronthaul transport. Challenges are overviewed based on the interfaces and requirements defined by industry groups such as the 3rd Generation Partnership Project (3GPP), Open RAN Alliance (O-RAN), and Small Cell Forum (SCF). Enabling technologies include fronthaul signal compression and optimizing line-of-sight multiple-input multiple-output (LOS-MIMO) transmission. Moreover, a deployment scenario using LOS-MIMO at 80 GHz is analyzed in detail. Experiments demonstrate robust and reliable performance to meet the high data rate demand of fronthaul.

The 5G network features a user-centric design with an open fronthaul interface between the RU and the DU. Some of the core and RAN functionalities are moved closer to the edge network. Fronthaul security is thus a critical issue. The last article, "Security Aspect of 5G Fronthaul" by Wong *et al.*, provides a thorough analysis of the fronthaul security vulnerabilities and threats. An overview of incremental improvements in the CPRI and eCPRI standards is provided with major security gaps being identified. Furthermore, necessary security enhancements are explored in multifold. First, the certificate enrollment procedure should consider signing the public key for RUs and DUs from different vendors. Second, the secure environment of a single 5G entity should be maintained in cases where the entity functions are split, virtualized, or implemented in different architectures. Third, the overall end-to-end security should be improved to fill the gaps of system vulnerability.

The Guest Editors thank all the authors for submitting their work, the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments, and the Editor-in-Chief and *IEEE Wireless Communications* staff members for their strong support. Due to space limitations, many papers could not be published in this SI. We anticipate reading them in other publications. We hope that the readers enjoy this SI.

BIOGRAPHIES

YUANQIU LUO [SM] (yuanqiu.luo@futurewei.com) received her Ph.D. degree in electrical engineering from the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Newark. She is currently a director of Optical Access Standards in Futurewei Technologies, USA. She has been heavily involved in the R&D effort of access networks for over 15 years. She is the Editor of IEEE Standard 802.3cp (Highspeed BiDi). She was a Clause Editor of IEEE

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