PTPlan MPLS: a Tool for MPLS Network Dimensioning

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Abstract

This paper presents a tool for MPLS network dimensioning that allows for multi-hour dimensioning of networks supporting simultaneously peer-to-peer and client-server services. The dimensioning model is able to take into account several LSP attributes: degree of survivability (link disjoint and node disjoint cases), maximum hop count, usable colours and preferred routes. The dimensioning problem is a combined capacity design and routing problem where the LSP sets are calculated in order to minimise the network operational costs. This problem is formulated as an integer programming problem, which is solved through an heuristic based on Lagrangean relaxation with sub-gradient optimisation. The network design tool, named PTPlan MPLS, includes a graphical interface for an easy introduction and edition of the network parameters. Results show that the tool can design networks of realistic size in seconds using a standard PC platform.

Key Words: Multi-Protocol Label Switching (MPLS), Network Dimensioning.

1. Introduction

Multi-Protocol Label Switching (MPLS) is an advanced forwarding scheme for IP networks supporting Quality of Service (QoS). A router that supports MPLS is known as a Label Switching Router (LSR). An MPLS path is called a Label Switched Path (LSP) and an explicit LSP has its route determined at its originating node. In MPLS, packets are inserted with labels at the ingress routers of the MPLS domain. These labels are then used to forward the packets along LSPs. All packets can be divided into subsets called Forward Equivalence Classes (FECs) [1]. The idea is that packets belonging to the same subset are forwarded in the same manner. Classification into FECs is done using packet filters that examine header fields such as source address, destination address, port numbers and type-of-service bits. The granularity of the packet forwarding mechanism may therefore vary depending on this classification. The mapping of packets to FECs is performed only once when the packets enter an MPLS domain. The purpose of classifying packets into FECs is to enable the service provider to differentiate packet flows with different QoS requirements and route each FEC in the most appropriate manner. This is done by mapping arriving packets belonging to an FEC to one of the LSPs associated with the FEC. When the packets are mapped onto an LSP, there are two possible cases. In one case, the LSP is already established and its capacity is augmented through a resource reservation signalling protocol such as RSVP-TE [2]. In the other case, the LSP is not yet established and it is set up in an explicit route either through a resource reservation signalling protocol, such as RSVP-TE, or through a Constrained Routing Label Distribution protocol (CR-LDP) [3]. The use of such protocols enables the set up of LSPs with appropriate resources to meet the required QoS for the supported FEC.

Traffic Engineering (TE) is defined as the part of Internet network engineering that deals with the performance evaluation and optimisation of operational IP networks [1]. Traffic Engineering is needed in the Internet mainly because current routing protocols forward traffic based only on destination addresses and along shortest paths computed using mostly static and traffic-insensitive link metrics. While this shortest path routing is enough to achieve connectivity, it does not always make good use of available network resources. A prime problem is that some links in the shortest path between certain origin-destination router pairs may get congested while links on possible alternate paths remain free. This shortcoming of network operation, coupled with the phenomenal growth of Internet usage, makes it very difficult to manage IP-based network performance [4]. The explicit routing feature of MPLS was introduced to address the shortcomings associated with current IP routing schemes, providing means for ingress routers to control traffic trajectory precisely. Controlling the way in which traffic flows are routed into the network is of fundamental importance for resource optimisation and it is one of the main objectives of TE.

In MPLS, explicit LSPs can be used to configure different logical networks on top of the physical network. These LSPs can be thought of as virtual trunks that carry flow aggregates generated by classifying the packets arriving at the ingress routers of an MPLS network into FECs. Therefore, a logical network composed by a set of explicit LSPs can be configured in the network to support the traffic flows of each FEC. A similar approach has been used in the past for ATM network dimensioning [5], [6], where Virtual Path Connections are used instead of LSPs.

Typically, existing services are either peer-to-peer or client-server based. In peer-to-peer services, there are traffic flows between any pair of nodes with attached users. Thus, an LSP must be configured for each user node pair. In client-server services (e.g., audio-on-demand servers, database access), there are traffic flows between a user node and one of the server nodes of the service. Thus, an LSP must be configured between each user node and a server node.

It is common sense that existing services do not have the same traffic behaviour during time. For example, business services have higher traffic flows in periods that are complementary to residential services. If the network has dynamic reconfiguration capabilities, i.e., time is partitioned in periods and the explicit LSPs can be reconfigured between time periods, a multi-hour design procedure can lead to significant savings in the overall network cost.

This paper presents a software tool for MPLS Traffic Engineering, called PTPlan MPLS. This tool is an evolution of another network dimensioning tool for ATM networks [7]. PTPlan MPLS performs multi-hour network dimensioning and considers mixed peer-to-peer and client-server services. It is assumed that all LSPs to be routed and their attributes are known. In the case of client-server services the attributes are origin node, a set of pre-defined candidate server nodes, maximum bandwidth and, optionally, preferred routes. In the case of peer-to-peer services the attributes are origin node, destination node, maximum bandwidth and, optionally, usable colours, maximum hop count, preferred routes, and survivability. Link attributes must also be defined: maximum utilisation and colour. The attributes defined for each LSP act like constraints that must be satisfied when routing each LSP. The preferred routes attribute is a set of routes from which the LSP route must be selected. The usable colours can be used to forbid a link to be used by a certain LSP, *e.g.*, red links cannot be used for a green LSP. Maximum hop count attribute can be used to limit the maximum number of LSRs crossed for a particular LSP. For the survivability, we consider two types: link disjoint and node disjoint. In both cases, when this attribute is set for a particular LSP, the tool splits the LSP in two, giving each one a bandwidth between 50% and 100% of the original LSP. When node disjoint is considered, the two routes of the LSPs must be node disjoint along the entire path between origin and destination. When link disjoint is considered, the two routes of the LSPs must be link disjoint, but in this case they can have common nodes.

In section II we present the model that defines the network dimensioning problem and describe how it is solved. In section III we show the main features of the PTPlan MPLS tool. In section IV we discuss a case study that illustrates the tool utilisation and section V presents the main conclusions.

2. MPLS network dimensioning

Let the network be represented by an undirected graph (N, A) whose nodes and arcs represent LSRs locations and available transmission facilities between LSR locations. Each element of A is defined by an undirected arc (i,j), with $i, j \in N$. The set of possible transmission facilities to install in any arc is denoted by T and α_t is the bandwidth of transmission facility $t \in T$. We also define f_{ij} as the colour of the arc (i,j) and u_{ij} as the maximum utilisation. Let Y_{ij}^{t} denote the maximum number of transmission facilities $t \in T$ that can be installed on (i,j). The operational and maintenance cost associated with the use of one transmission facility $t \in T$ in the arc (i,j) is denoted by C_{ij}^{t}. Let H be the set of time periods h. Each LSP k_h is defined by the origin node $o(k_h)$, the set of possible destination nodes $d(k_h) \in D(k_h)$, the bandwidth in the direction from origin to destination $b(k_h)$, the bandwidth in the direction from destination to origin $\underline{b}(k_h)$, the set of preferred routes $R(k_h)$, the set of usable colours $U(k_h)$, the maximum hop count $m(k_h)$ and the type of survivability $s(k_h)$ (no_survivability, link_disjoint and node_disjoint). Set $D(k_h)$ is (i) a single destination for peer-to-peer services and (ii) the set of server nodes for client-server services. The optimisation model uses the following set of variables. Integer variables y_{ij}^{t} that define the number of transmission faiclities t that are installed on arc $(i,j) \in A$. Route binary variables x_{ij}^{kh} define, when equal to one, that LSP k_h passes through arc $(i,j) \in A$ in the direction from node i to node j. Route binary variables $\underline{x}_{ij}^{kh}$ define, when equal to one, that LSP k_h passes through arc $(i,j) \in A$ in the direction from node j to node i. The following integer programming model determines the lowest cost physical network given all LSPs attributes:

Minimise $\sum_{(i,j)\in A} \sum_{t\in T} C_{ij}^{t} y_{ij}^{t}$ (1)

Subject to:

{ x_{ij}^{kh}, $\underline{x}_{ij}^{kh}$: $x_{ij}^{kh}=1 \wedge \underline{x}_{ij}^{kh}=1$} is a path subject to constraints set {$R(k_h)$, $U(k_h)$, $m(k_h)$, $s(k_h)$} from $o(k_h)$ to $d(k_h) \in D(k_h)$, $k_h \in K_h$, $h \in H$ (2)

$$\sum_{k_h\in K_h}(b(k)\cdot x_{ij}^{kh} + \underline{b}(k)\cdot \underline{x}_{ij}^{kh}) < u_{ij}\sum_{t\in T}\alpha_t y_{ij}^{t}\ ,\ (i,j)\in A\ ,\ h\in H \quad (3)$$

$$\sum_{k_h\in K_h}(b(k)\cdot \underline{x}_{ij}^{kh} + \underline{b}(k)\cdot x_{ij}^{kh}) < u_{ij}\sum_{t\in T}\alpha_t y_{ij}^{t}\ ,\ (i,j)\in A,\ h\in H \quad (4)$$

$$y_{ij}^{t} < Y_{ij}^{t}\ ,\ (i,j)\in A,\ t\in T \quad (5)$$

$$x_{ij}^{kh} \in \{1,0\};\ \underline{x}_{ij}^{kh} \in \{1,0\};\ y_{ij}^{t} > 0 \text{ and integer} \quad (6)$$

The objective function (1) represents the total cost of the network solution as a function of the number of transmission facilities of each type installed in each network arc. Constraint (2) forces the solution to be a constrained path from origin to destination for all LSPs to be supported by the network. As it will be understood later, there is no need to explicitly define constraint (2). Constraints (3) and (4) guarantee that the total bandwidth installed in each arc is enough to support the maximum bandwidth occupied by the LSPs that cross it in both directions and in all time periods. Finally, constraints (5) guarantee that the number of transmission facilities of each type in each arc is below its maximum value.

The solution to the optimisation problem is obtained using Lagrangean relaxation with sub-gradient optimisation. Departing from the original problem, a new optimisation problem is obtained by applying Lagrangean relaxation to constraints (3) and (4), which we refer to as the Lagrangean Lower Bound Problem (LLBP). To derive the LLBP, a set of Lagrangean multipliers is introduced, one for each of the relaxed constraints. For any arbitrary set of non-negative Lagrangean multipliers, the solution of LLBP is a lower bound of the original problem [8]. Using the x variables solution of LLBP, it is possible to calculate a feasible solution in the original problem using constraints (3) and (4) to find the minimum values for variables *y*. To compute different sets of Lagrangean multipliers, we use sub-gradient optimisation [9]. This technique is an iterative process that, for a given set of Lagrangean multipliers, calculates another set of multipliers that try to maximise the objective function value of the LLBP. At the end of the procedure, a final solution is obtained which is the best of all calculated feasible solutions. The solution of the LLBP for the route variables is a shortest path calculation in the case of client-server services. For the peer-to-peer services, we developed an algorithm that deals with multiple constraints. In this algorithm, we use the SPLDP (shortest pair of link disjoint paths algorithm) and the SPNDP (shortest pair of node disjoint paths algorithm) presented in [10], which gives the shortest pair of link disjoint and node disjoint paths, respectively. We also use the MDSPHL (modified Dijkstra shortest path hop-limit algorithm) presented in [11], which gives the shortest path that satisfies hop-limit constraint. The algorithm that determines the route for each LSP is briefly described below.

```
if R(k_h)<>∅
      Calculate minimum cost route from R(k_h);
else
{
      bool exist_colour_shortest_path = false;
      if U(k_h)<>∅
      {
            Calculate a new set of arcs A', where all unusable arcs
            are pruned;
            Calculate colour shortest path using Dijkstra(N,A'), if
            path exists set exist_colour_shortest_path = true;
      }
      if s(k_h)<>no_survivability and exist_colour_shortest_path
      {
            bool survivability_exist = false;
            if s(k_h) == link_disjoint
                  survivability_exist = SPLDP(o(k_h), d(k_h), N, A');
            else if s(k_h) == node_disjoint
                  survivability_exist = SPNDP(o(k_h), d(k_h), N, A');
            if survivability_exist = false
                  Use colour shortest path for both LSPs;
      }
      else if s(k_h)<>no_survivability
      {
            bool survivability_exist = false;
            if s(k_h) == link_disjoint
                  survivability_exist = SPLDP(o(k_h), d(k_h), N, A);
            else if s(k_h) == node_disjoint
                  survivability_exist = SPNDP(o(k_h), d(k_h), N, A);
            if survivability_exist = false
                  Dijkstra(o(k_h), d(k_h), N, A);
      }
      else if m(k_h)<>∞ and exist_colour_shortest_path
      {
            bool maximum_hops_path_exist = false;
            maximum_hops_path_exist = MDSPHL(o(k_h), d(k_h),
            m(k_h), N, A');
            if maximum_hops_path_exist = false
                  Use colour shortest path;
      }
      else if m(k_h)<>∞
      {
            bool maximum_hops_path_exist = false;
            maximum_hops_path_exist = MDSPHL(o(k_h), d(k_h),
            m(k_h), N, A);
            if maximum_hops_path_exist = false
                  Calculate shortest path using (N,A);
      }
      else if exist_colour_shortest_path
            Use colour shortest path;
      else
            Calculate shortest path using (N,A);
}
```

This algorithm is proposed in such a way that when it is not possible to comply with some of the constraints, a solution is selected taking into account only the remaining constraints.

The overall algorithm has polynomial complexity. The proposed algorithm is linear with respect to the number of time periods t. Regarding the number of nodes n and considering that (i) the number of LSPs grow with n^2 and (ii) the ratio between number of nodes and number of arcs is constant, then the computational time grows with n^3. Therefore, the overall algorithms is $O(t\times n^3)$.

3. The PTPlan MPLS tool

In PTPlan MPLS, the user can define the network topology, the service characteristics, the traffic scenario and (optionally) the constraints to the LSPs. Based on this information, the tool determines a physical network configuration and the LSP routes and bandwidths that can support the traffic scenario. PTPlan MPLS runs on a Windows platform and includes a graphical interface (Figure 1 and Figure 2) through which the user can enter and edit the network topology (nodes and links between nodes).

There is the possibility of creating subnets. The user can create a library of transmission facilities that can be used in the definition of network nodes. A library of nodes can also be created. After node definition, each link is automatically assigned the set of transmission facilities that are common to its adjacent nodes. In addition the user can associate a distance, a maximum utilisation and a colour to each link and define the maximum number of transmission facilities of each type that the link can support. Both a switching and a transmission cost can be assigned to each transmission facility in each link. Transmission costs can be based on link length.

The cost of each mission facility is calculated as 2 × switching cost + transmission cost × link length. In the "service characterisation" window (Figure 1), services can be selected as being peer-to-peer or client-server. In the latter case, the user must define the bandwidth per flow in each direction and, in the former case, the user only defines one bandwidth value per flow (it is assumed to be equal in both directions).

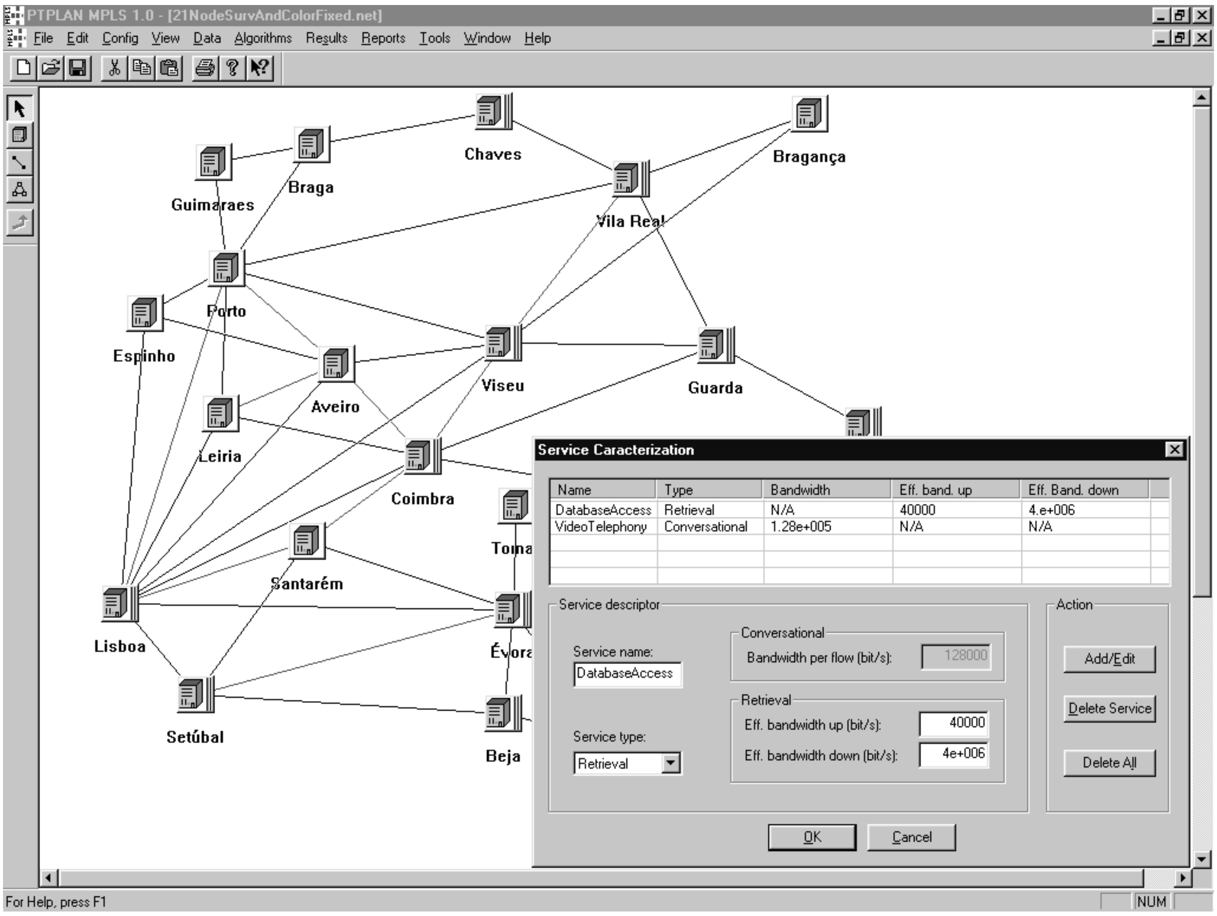

Figure 1. GUI of PTPlan MPLS – service characterisation

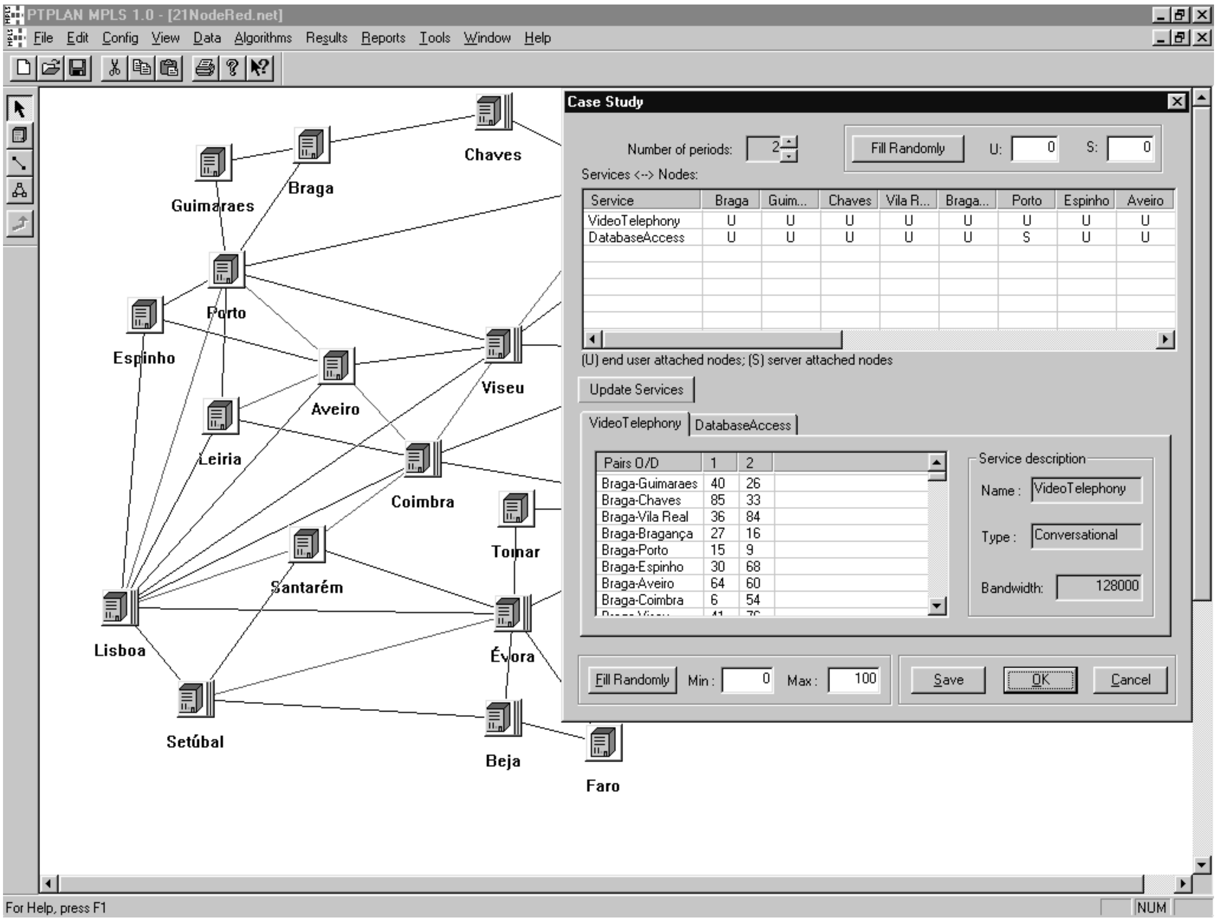

Figure 2. GUI of PTPlan MPLS – case study

In the "case study" window (Figure 2), the user defines, for each service, the number of time periods (for multi-hour designs), which nodes have attached users and, in the case of client-server services, which nodes have servers. The tool automatically generates the origin-destination pairs, in the case of peer-to-peer services, and the origin nodes in the case of client-server services. After that the user is asked to define the LSP capacity expressed in terms of the maximum number of flows that need to be supported simultaneously. Optionally, it is possible to impose constraints for each LSP. Those constraints include usable colours, maximum hop count, type of survivability (node or link disjoint) and preferred routes. After defining all network parameters, the user may perform network dimensioning and to select between using uni-hour or multi-hour design. We note that the network topology, the LSP constraints and the services characteristics can also be read from external files. The results given by the tool are the LSP routes, the number of transmission facilities of each type to install in each link and the overall network cost.

4. Case study

In order to illustrate the applicability of the PTPlan MPLS tool, we present the following case study. The network topology, shown in Figure 1, has 21 nodes and 46 links. Three transmission facilities types are considered: Channelized E1, Unchannelized E3 and OC3c/STM-1, with the following costs:

	Bandwidth (Mbps)	Switching Cost	Transmission Cost
Channelized E1	2	100	1
Unchannelized E3	34	1000	10
OC3c/STM-1	155	3000	40

We have considered two services, *Video-telephony (VT)* and *Database Access (DA)*, and two time periods. Service *VT* is a peer-to-peer service, with flow bit rate of

128 kbps. Service DA is a client-server based service, with flow bit rates of 40 kbps in the client-server direction and 4000 kbps in the server-client direction.

Both services have end users at all nodes. There are two servers for the *DA* service located at Porto and Lisboa nodes. The number of flows in each connection was randomly assigned using a uniform distribution between 0 and 100.

We tested this network in two cases: (i) without constraints and (ii) imposing only link survivability (85% on all LSPs), for uni-hour and multi-hour design. For the client-server service, we considered two cases: (i) fixed server (each user is attached to the closest server) and (ii) selected server (the tool is allowed to select the best server for each node).

The results were as follows:

			Uni-hour		Multi-hour	
			Cost	Time (sec)*	Cost	Time (sec)*
No Constraints		Fixed Server	941,344	11.08	842,589	16.35
		Selected Server	934,849	11.05	836,679	16.55
Survivability	Node Disjoint	Fixed Server	1,128,400	24.47	975,690	42.55
		Selected Server	1,117,280	24.25	973,934	41.96
	Link Disjoint	Fixed Server	1,114,240	23.39	949,513	40.99
		Selected Server	1,107,680	23.00	947,125	41.11

* Using an AMD Athlon 800Mhz with 128 MB RAM

As expected, gains are obtained when adopting a multi-hour approach and a selected server strategy. For example, the cost difference between fixed server/uni-hour and selected server/multi-hour is between 11.1% (no constraints) and 15.0% (imposing a link disjoint survivability). We note that, although the results can vary significantly with the network and traffic scenario, in general considerable gains are obtained by resorting to a multi-hour approach and selected server strategy.

Imposing survivability significantly increased the cost of the achieved solution, and the safest option (node disjoint) is the most expensive. This is because we have considered an 85% level of survivability in the considered cases and, therefore, the network has to accommodate 70% more bandwidth for the peer-to-peer service.

Finally, we have considered a more complex scenario combining different constraints and setting all links *Black*, except Porto-Lisboa, Porto-Aveiro, Aveiro-Leiria, Aveiro-Coimbra, Lisboa-Santarém, Santarém-Coimbra, Viseu-Coimbra, Viseu-Vila Real and Setúbal-Évora, which were set to *Red*.

We have imposed on some of the LSPs a maximum of 6 hops, a node disjoint survivability of 85% and used the colour constraint to forbid them from using red links. The results were as follows:

	Uni-hour		Multi-hour	
	Cost	Time (sec)*	Cost	Time (sec)*
Fixed Server	1,195,890	25.31	1,029,070	43.98
Selected Server	1,095,510	24.66	973,172	44.25

* Using an AMD Athlon 800Mhz with 128 MB RAM

In this case, the costs of the solutions are equivalent to the ones presented previously with survivability constraints. This result illustrates that, among all LSP attributes, the survivability is the one that influences more the cost of the obtained solutions. Comparing the computational times, a similar conclusion can be drawn: the colour and maximum hop count attributes do not impose significant computing time penalties.

5. Conclusions

In this paper we described a tool that performs MPLS network dimensioning. The dimensioning procedure calculates the routes of explicit LSPs and the transmission facilities that need to be installed in the network, that achieve the lowest cost. The solution method allows the consideration of several LSP attributes: degree of survivability (link disjoint and node disjoint cases), maximum hop count, usable colours and preferred routes. Computational results show that the tool can find solutions in low computing times.

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