Mid-Frequency Noise Coupling between DC-DC Converters and High-Speed Signals

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Outline

- Introduction
- Background: Problem Discovery
- Debugging a Solution
- Proof of Solution
- Understanding the Noise Source
- Conclusion
Introduction

- Mid-frequency noise (~100 MHz) associated with the fast switching of a switching regulator may couple onto nearby signal traces.
- A case of this noise coupling in a practical server system will be explored.
- → Mid-frequency noise may be difficult to contain and understand.
Problem Discovery: Compliance

- In a multi-processor server system, one downstream PCIe (Gen3) lane failed badly during compliance testing, but...
- Only occurred with one particular option card, in one particular slot
Common-Mode Noise

- When victim lane was measured on an oscilloscope, periodic common-mode noise observed during rising edge of a nearby switching regulator.

Switching Frequency ~570 kHz

Resonance Frequency ~100 MHz

Pk-Pk CM Noise ~150 mV (P+N)
Review of Layout: Problem Area

- Victim lane routed through 12V vias input to regulator
- Reasonable to think electrical coupling from 12V vias could be causing CM noise on low-swing, high-speed signal
Debugging a Solution

- Bypassing fuse and supplying 12V from another source (avoiding current circulation in vias) eliminated CM noise on victim lane
- → Proved CM noise caused by routing signal traces in close proximity to 12V vias
- Implemented on next spin of board
Follow-up Crosstalk Measurements

- Crosstalk measurements taken on next revision to validate that coupling mechanism was removed.
Follow-up Crosstalk Measurements

- Only a 10% improvement in crosstalk magnitude
- Coupling mechanism was not removed with layout changes!!!
3D Field Solver Simulation

- Coupling is not capacitive (trace-to-via) but must be magnetic (loop-to-loop)
Larger Plane Simulation

- Hybrid solver set up to simulate current induced in victim vias
  - AC source with constant amplitude (17A) setup at 12V input vias of switching regulator and swept from 10 MHz – 500 MHz
Larger Plane Simulation

- Simulation run with number of layout changes
- Results (taken at 100 MHz)
- **CAPACITORS ON THE BOTTOM**
Placing Input Capacitors on Bottom

- Caps are on the bottom
- This creates loop that is the aggressor noise source

- Size of aggressor loop ($r_1$)
- Size of victim loop ($r_2$)
- Distance between the loops (d)
- Relative loop orientation ($\theta$)
Final Revision of Board

- On final board revision, added ground shielding vias and moved decoupling capacitors to the top of the board
- We threw everything at it!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
Proof is in the Pudding: Crosstalk Measurements

- Crosstalk measurements of final board shows significant improvement in crosstalk!!!

Case closed

But wait, why 100MHz???
Understanding the Noise Source

- SPICE model created to simulate ringing on the rising switching waveform
- Ringing frequency (100 MHz) is a result of resonance between inductance of power path, package inductances and parasitic capacitance of low-side FET
Understanding the Noise Source

- SPICE simulation correlated to measurement taken at switch node
- Values:

![SPICE simulation correlated to measurement taken at switch node diagram]

Measurement-Simulation Switch Node Waveform
Conclusion

- The source of noise in this layout was fast slew rate associated with high $\text{di/dt}$ of switch node waveform.
- On the rising edge of the switch node voltage, the resonance frequency (100 MHz) was set by the capacitance of the low-side FET, the parasitic inductance of the FETs packages, and the inductance of the supply rail feeding the DC-DC converter input.
- Placing the input decoupling capacitors and the converter on opposite sides of the board creates an aggressor magnetic loop for high $\text{di/dt}$.
- To mitigate inductive noise coupling at mid-frequencies, place decoupling capacitors and the switching devices on the same side of the board (reduce aggressor loop).
- If this can’t be done, place ground vias nearby the victim vias (reduce the victim loop)!!!
- →Be careful placing signal vias near switching regulators – mid-frequency noise may travel farther than you think!!!
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QUESTIONS?