P51: High Performance Networking

Lecture 5: Low Latency Devices

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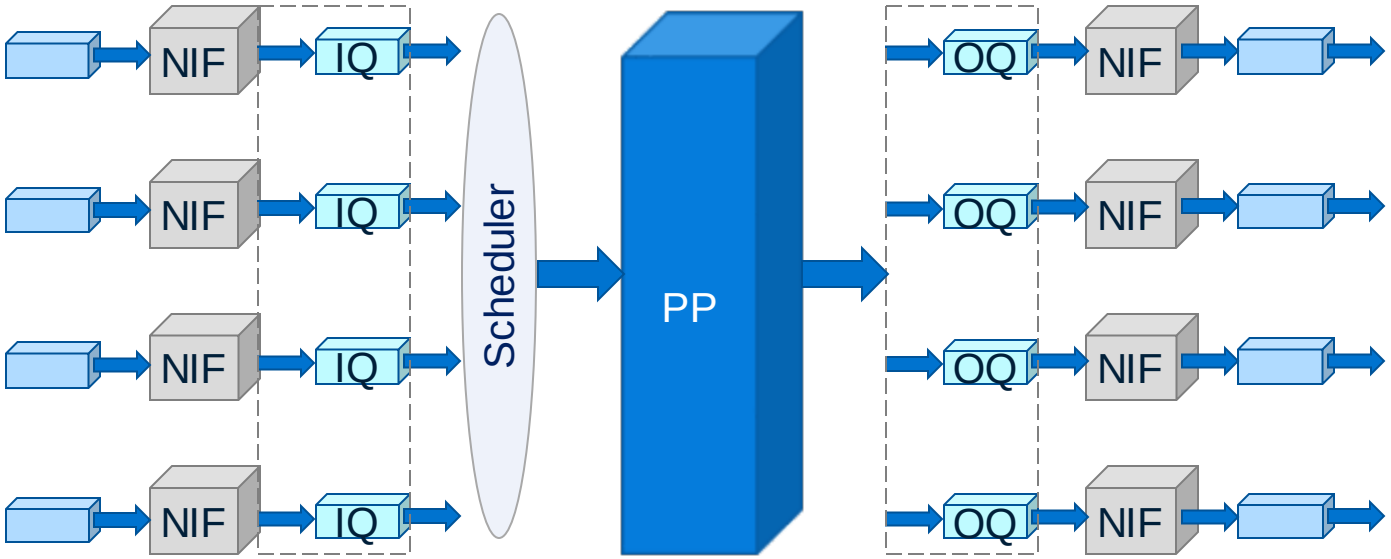
Project – Evaluation Plan

- For the next lab, you should prepare an evaluation plan for your project.
- The following evaluation tests are expected:
  - Functional testing (using the NetFPGA test infrastructure)
  - Performance testing, using synthetic traffic (using OSNT or equivalent to measure latency at low-rate and maximum throughput)
  - Performance comparison to other solutions (software, hardware)

Low Latency Switches

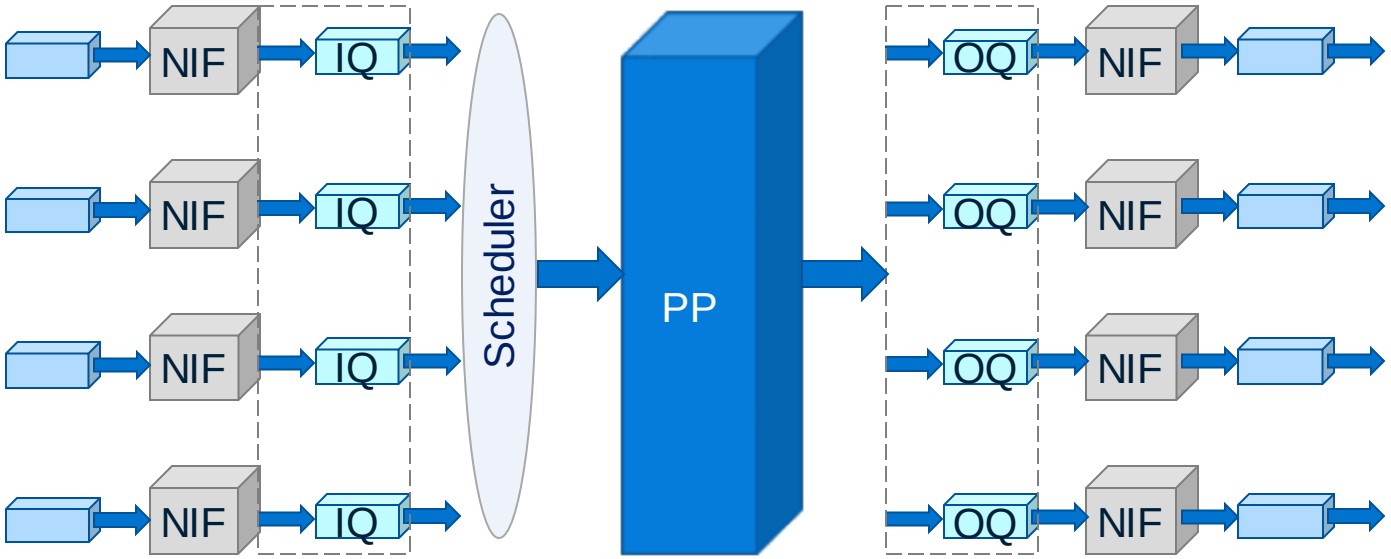
How to lower the latency of a switch?

- Obvious option 1: Increase clock frequency
  - E.g. change core clock frequency from 100MHz to 200MHz
  - Half the time through the pipeline



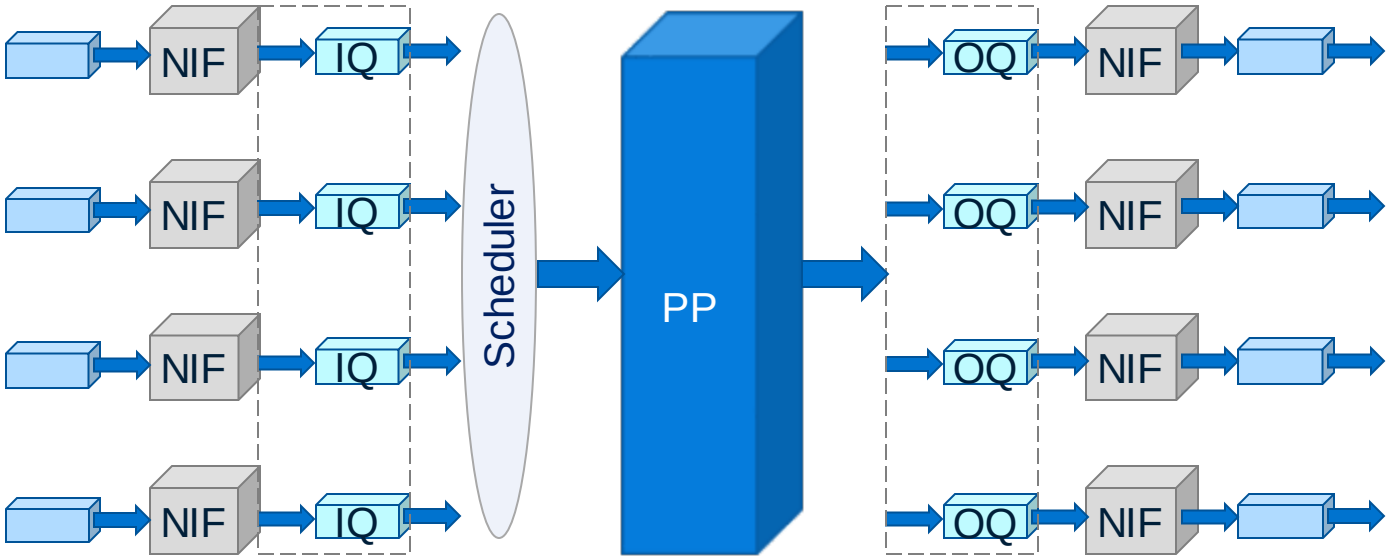
How to lower the latency of a switch?

- Obvious option 1: Increase clock frequency
- Limitations:
  - Frequency is often a property of manufacturing process
  - Some modules (e.g. PCS) must work at a specific frequency (multiplications)



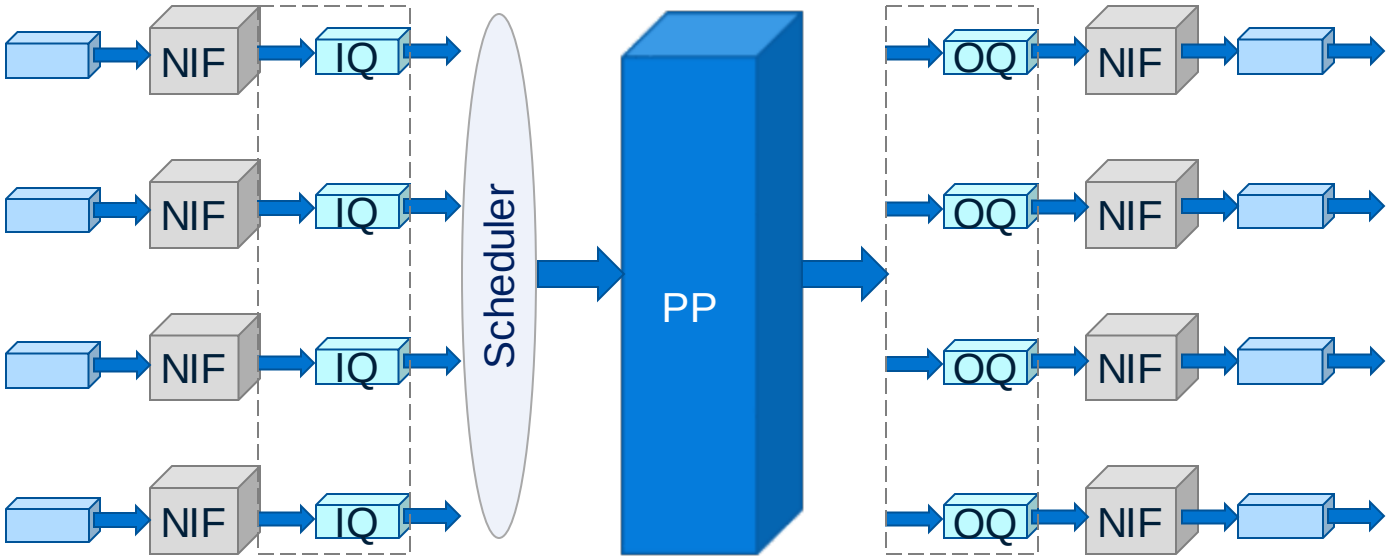
How to lower the latency of a switch?

- Obvious option 2: Reduce the number of pipeline stages
  - Can you do the same in 150 pipeline stages instead of 200?
  - Limitation: hard to achieve.



How to lower the latency of a switch?

- Can we achieve ~0 latency switch?
  - Is there a lower bound on switch latency?



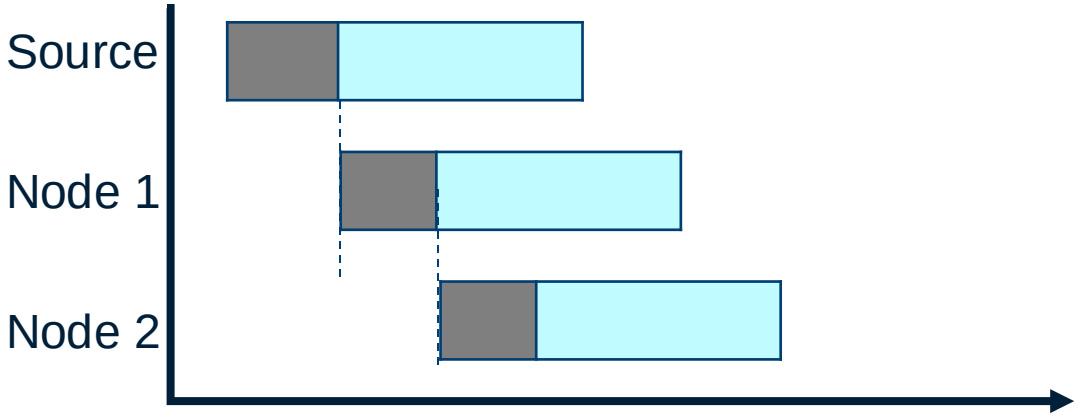
Cut Through Switching

Cut Through Switch

- Cut through switch ≠ Low latency switch
  - A cut through switch can implement a very long pipeline…
- But:
  - For the smallest packet, the latency is ~same as longest packet
  - As packet size grows, latency saving grows

What is a cut-through switch?

- Kermani & Kleinrock, “Virtual cut-through: A new computer communication switching technique”, 1976
- “when a message arrives in an intermediate node and its selected outgoing channel is free (just after the reception of the header), then, in contrast to message switching, the message is sent out to the adjacent node towards its destination before it is received completely at the node; only if the message is blocked due to a busy output channel is a message buffered in an intermediate node.”

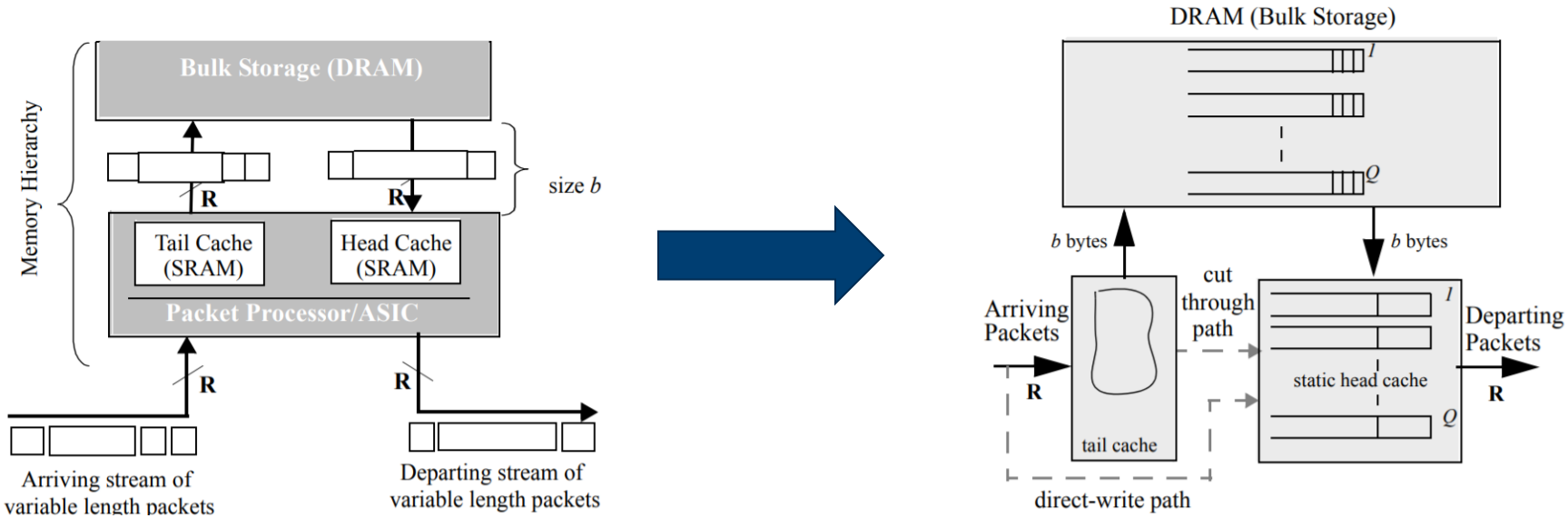


What is a cut-through switch?

- Past (far back):
  - Networks were slow
  - Memory was fast
  - Writing packets to the DRAM took “negligible” time
- With time:
  - Networks became faster
  - Memory access time is no longer “negligible”

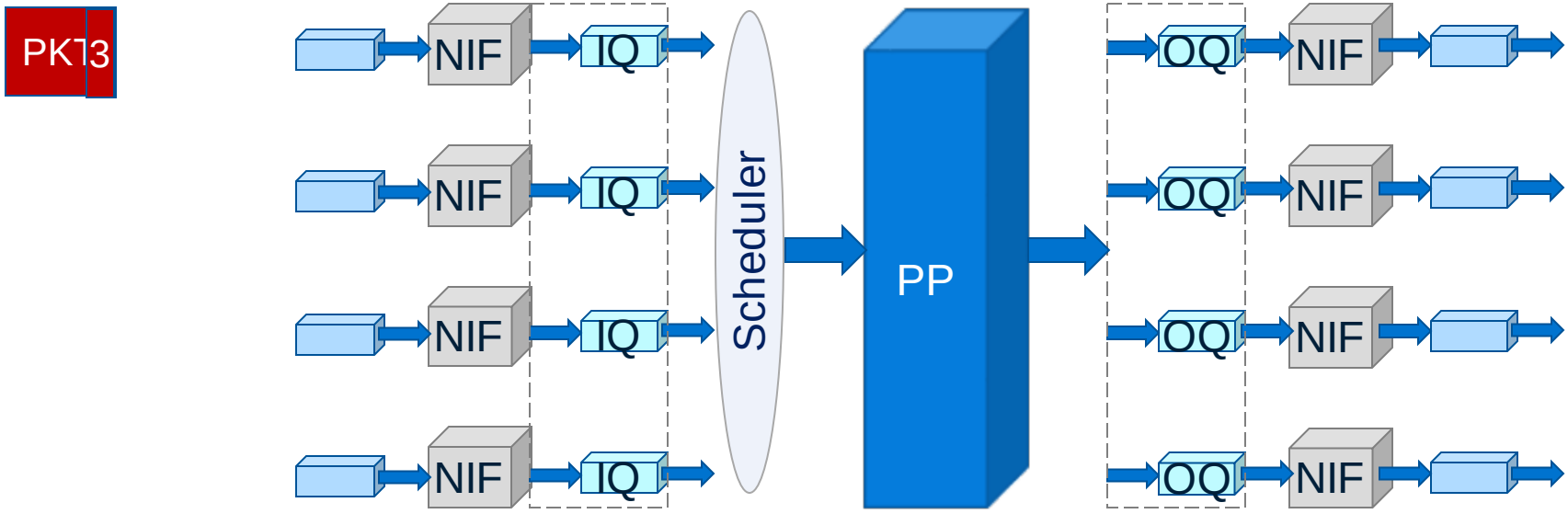
What is a cut-through switch?

- Sundar, Kompella, and McKeown. "Designing packet buffers for router line cards." *2002.*



Cut Through

- Start processing the packet as soon as the first chunk arrives
  - Does not wait for the FCS
- If FCS error is detected, the packet is dropped somewhere along the pipeline



Latency considerations within modules

Network Interfaces

- Data arrives at (up to) ~50Gbps per link.
- Let us ignore clock recovery, signal detection etc.
- Feasible clock rate is ~1GHz
- But if data rate is ×50 times faster…

- Observation: data bus width will be determined by incoming data rate and feasible device clock rate

Network Interfaces

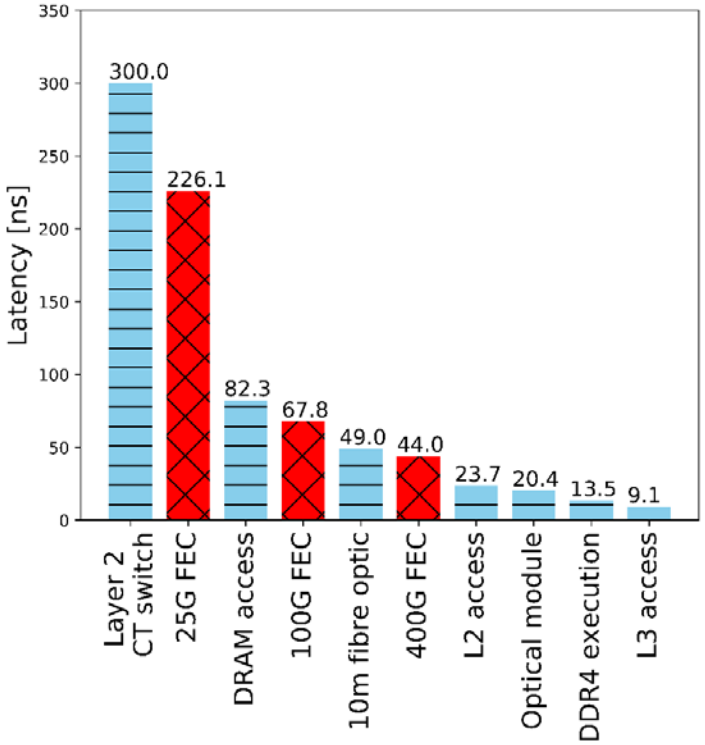
- Line coding often directs the bus widths:
  - E.g., 8b/10b coding led to bus widths of 16b (20b) or 64b (80b)
- A port is commonly an aggregation of multiple serial links
  - 10G XAUI = 4 × 3.125Gbps
  - 100G CAUI4 = 4 × 25Gbps
  - 400G PSM4 = 8 × 50Gbps
  - Need to take care of aligning the data arriving from multiple links on the same port.

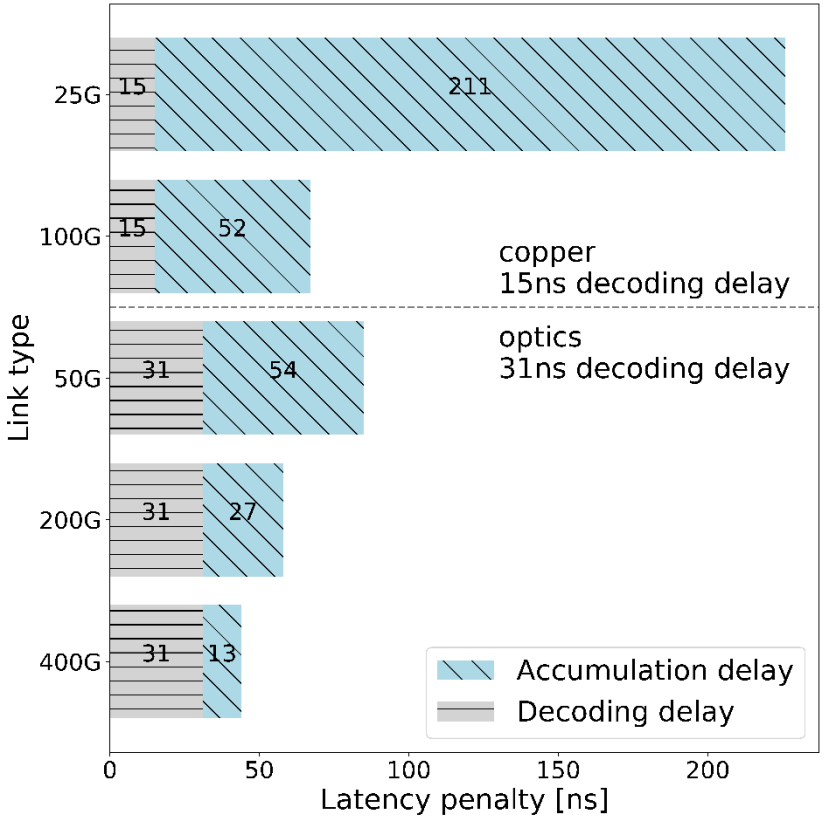
Network Interfaces

- Role: check the validity of the packet (e.g., FCS)
- What to do if an error is detected?
  - Forward an error using a “fast path”
  - Mark the last cycle of the packet
    - E.g., to cause drop in the next hop
- Other roles need to be maintained too
  - Frame delimiting and recognition, flow control, enforcing IFG, …

Network Interfaces - FEC

- FEC – Forward Error Correction
  - Current standards use Reed-Solomon block codes
- Can add significant latency penalty





Source: Sella *et al.* – FEC killed the cut through switch, 2018

Packet Processing

- A likely flow:

- Possible implementations:
  - The entire packet goes through the header processing unit
  - Just the header goes through the header processing unit
  - “Better” depends on your performance profile (what are the bottlenecks? Resource limitations?)

Packet Processing

- A likely flow:

- Challenges:
  - A field may arrive over multiple clock cycles (e.g. 32b field, 16b on clock 2 and 16b on clock 3)
  - Memory access taking more than 1 clock cycle
    - E.g. request on clock 1, reply on clock 3
    - Some memories allow multiple concurrent accesses, some don't
    - The bigger the memory, the more time it takes

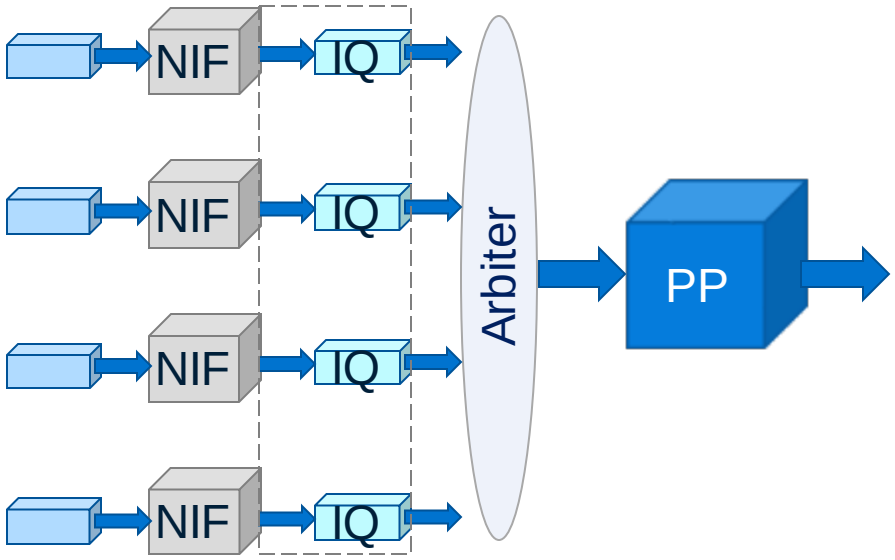
Packet Processing

- A likely flow:

- Solutions:
  - Pipelining!
    Don't stall, add NOP stages in your pipe.
  - Reorder operations (where possible)
    - E.g. Lookup 1 → Action 1 → Lookup 2 → Action 2 becomes:
      Lookup 1 → Lookup 2 → Action 1 → Action 2
    - Don't create hazards!

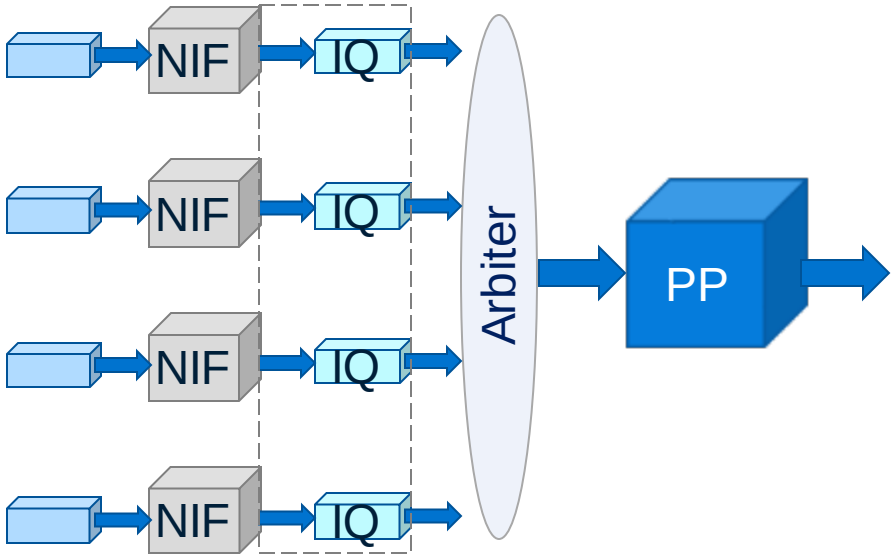
Arbitration

- Simple example:
  - Packets arriving from 4 ports
  - (approximately) same arrival time
  - Arbiter uses Round Robin
- Problem: arbitration on packet boundaries?
  - No: interleaved packets within the pipeline
    Need to track which cycle belongs to which packet
    May require multiple concurrent header lookups
    Order is not guaranteed (e.g. P1-P2-P3-P1-P2-P2-…), due to NIF timing



Arbitration

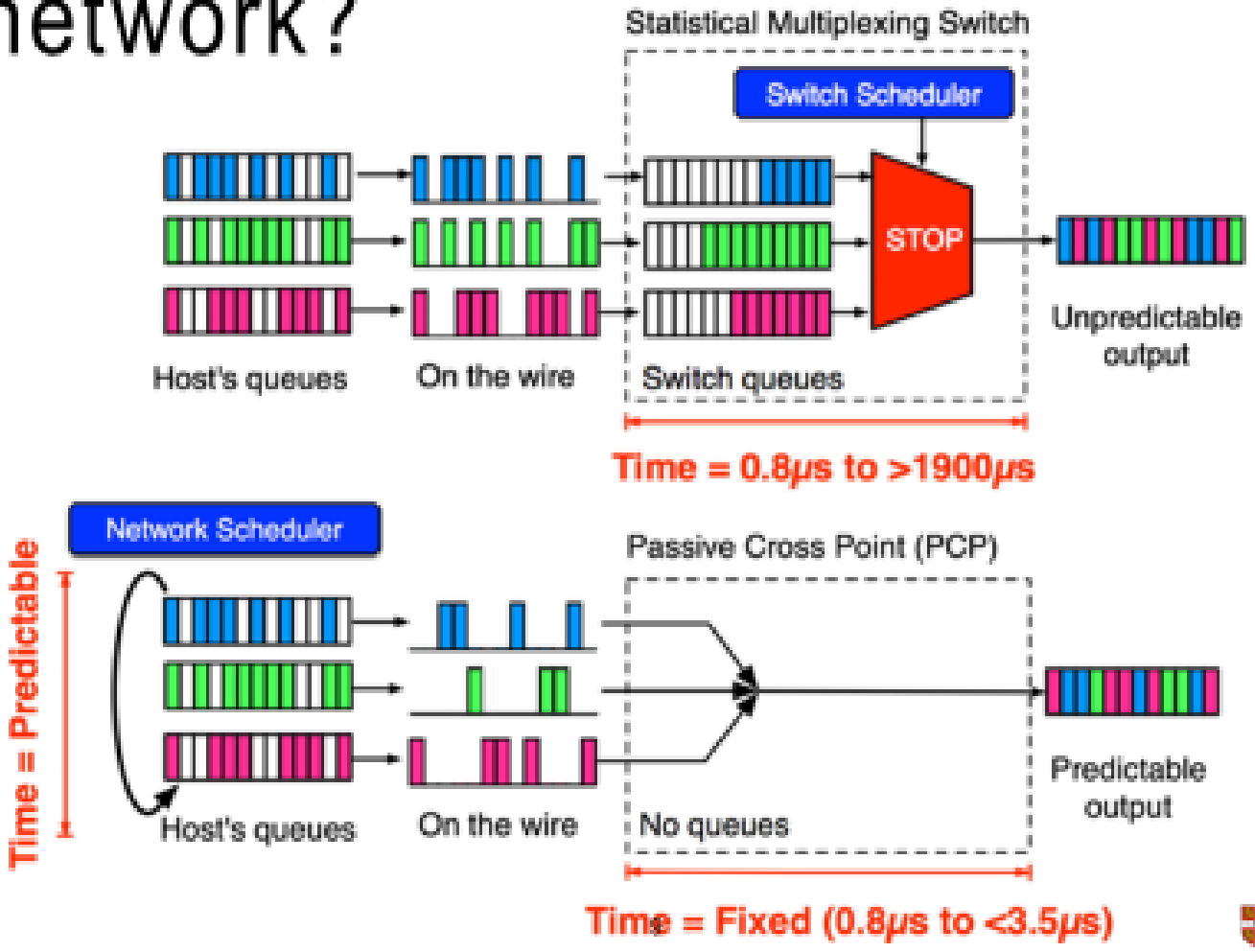
- Simple example:
  - Packets arriving from 4 ports
  - (approximately) same arrival time
  - Arbiter uses Round Robin
- Problem: arbitration on packet boundaries?
  - Yes: packets need to wait for previous packets to be handled before being admitted.
    Worst case waiting with <N> inputs is <N-1>×Packet time



Arbitration

- Solutions to the previous problem:
  - Scheduled (or slotted) traffic
  - Multiple pipelines
  - …

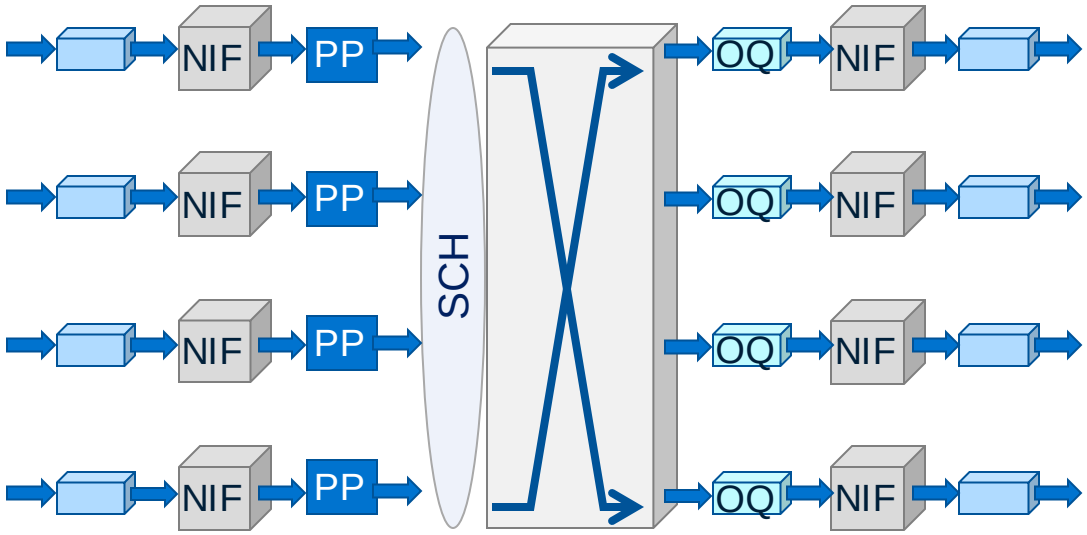
How do you build a bufferless network?



M Grosvenor *et al* "The Resilient Realtime Data Delivery Network Architecture" (R2D2) 2013

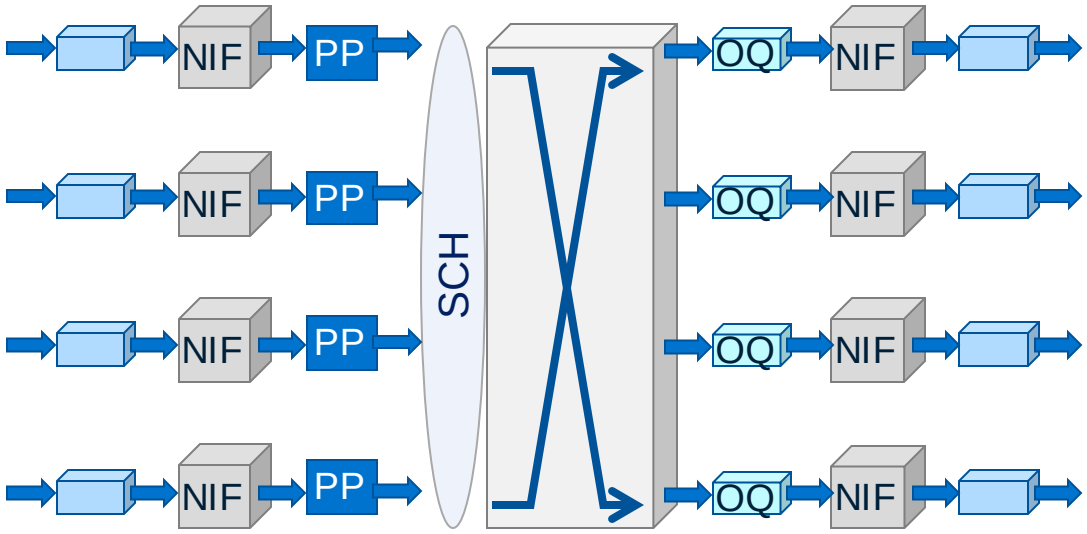
Arbitration

- This example solves the arbitration problem entering the device
- Resource inefficient:
  - Pipeline overdesign
  - Inefficient use of memories
  - Concurrency issues
- One solution:
  - Shared memories / tables
  - Highly complex

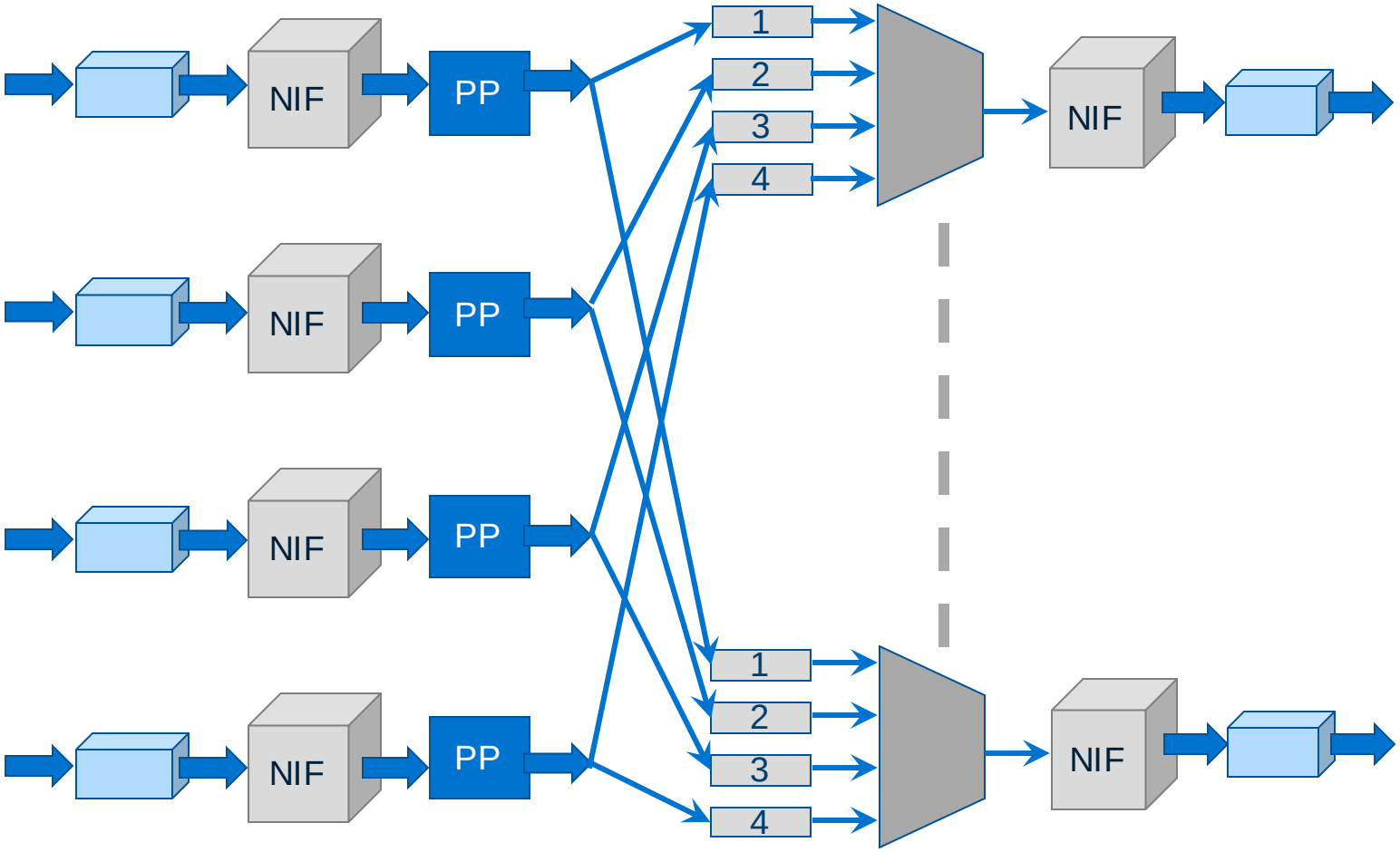


Switching

- The previous arbitration solution “pushed” the problem to the switching unit
- But now the problem is only when multiple packets compete over the same output – that’s fine!
- Assuming your switch can handle multiple packets per cycle
  - E.g. crossbar



Switching

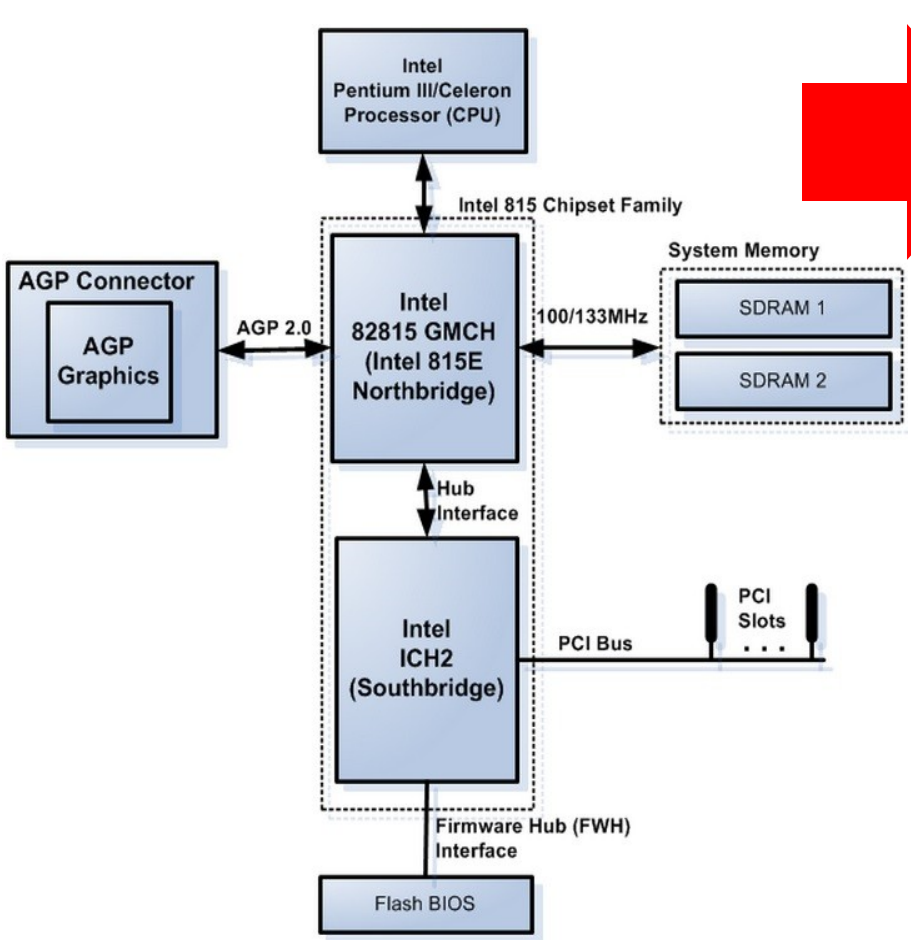


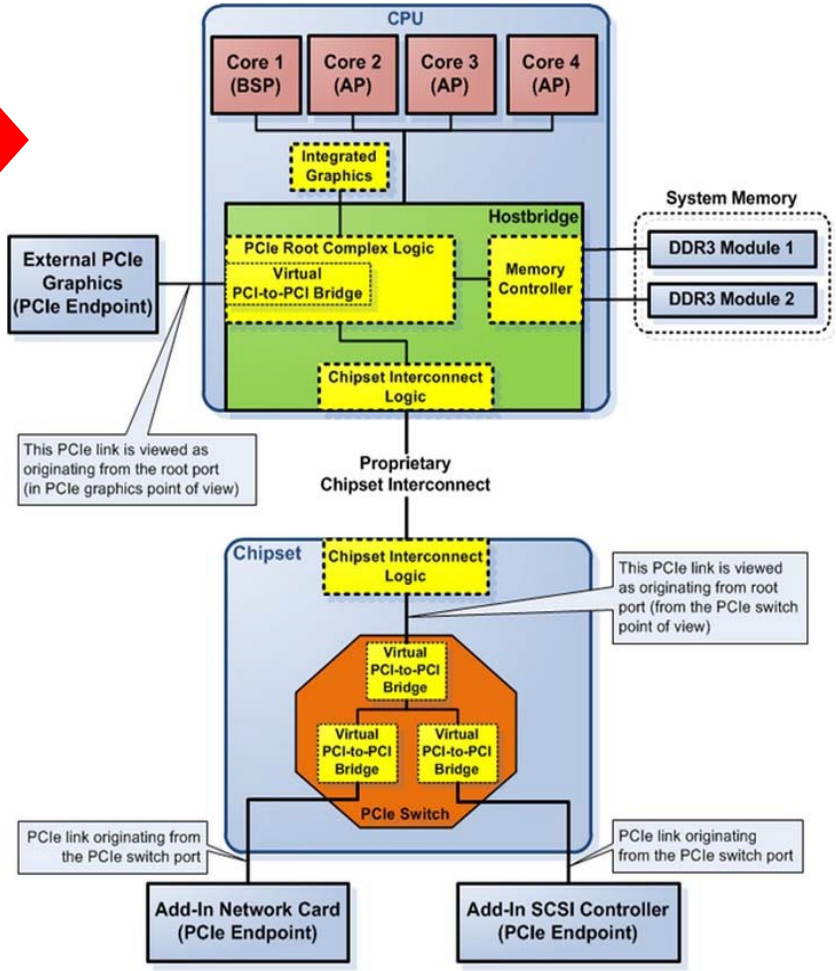
Switching

- … This is also queueing
- Challenge: SCALE
  - So you can do it with 4 ports
  - Can you do it with 32? 128? 256?
- Not just resource / area
  - Computation time – being able to examine and choose between all available inputs
- Eventually:
  Packets must be sent out on packet boundaries
  Do not interleave packets!

DMA

Host architecture

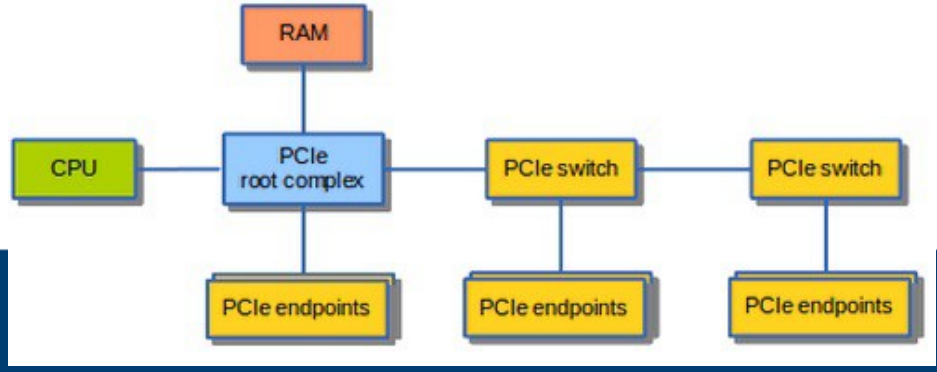




Legacy vs. Recent (courtesy of Intel)

Interconnecting components

- **Need interconnections between**
  - CPU, memory, storage, network, I/O controllers
- **Shared Bus: shared communication channel**
  - A set of parallel wires for data and synchronization of data transfer
  - Can become a bottleneck
- **Performance limited by physical factors**
  - Wire length, number of connections
- **More recent alternative: high-speed serial connections with switches**
  - Like networks



I/O System Characteristics

- **Performance measures**
  - Latency (response time)
  - Throughput (bandwidth)
  - Desktops & embedded systems
    - Mainly interested in response time & diversity of devices
  - Servers
    - Mainly interested in throughput & expandability of devices
- **Reliability**
  - Particularly for storage devices (fault avoidance, fault tolerance, fault forecasting)

I/O Management and strategies

- **I/O is mediated by the OS**
  - Multiple programs share I/O resources
    - Need protection and scheduling
  - I/O causes asynchronous interrupts
    - Same mechanism as exceptions
  - I/O programming is fiddly
    - OS provides abstractions to programs

Strategies characterize the *amount of work* done by the CPU in the I/O operation:

- **Polling**
- **Interrupt Driven**
- **Direct Memory Access**

The I/O Access Problem

- Question: how to transfer data from I/O devices to memory (RAM)?
- Trivial solution:
  - Processor individually reads or writes every word
  - Transferred to/from I/O through an internal register to memory
- Problems:
  - Extremely inefficient – can occupy a processor for 1000's of cycles
  - Pollute cache