Characteristics of Transphorm GaN Power Switches

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This document describes the characteristics of Transphorm GaN Power Switches, including the cascode structure and the operation space. The ability of the GaN Power Switch to operate in three quadrants with a low reverse recovery charge allows superior performance in comparison to existing Silicon technology.
# CHARACTERISTICS OF TRANSPHORM GaN POWER SWITCHES

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CHARACTERISTICS OF TRANSPHORM GaN POWER SWITCHES

1 INTRODUCTION

Transphorm Gallium Nitride (GaN) Power Switches comprise a normally-off low voltage (LV) Silicon (Si) MOSFET and a normally-on high voltage GaN High Electron Mobility Transistor (HEMT) in cascode configuration (Figure 1).

Packaged in this configuration, the Si MOSFET and the GaN HEMT together behave as a single transistor - the GaN switch. The gate and the source of the GaN switch are given by the gate and the source of the Si MOSFET, while the drain of the GaN switch is given by the drain of the GaN HEMT. In Transphorm’s standard packages, the drain of the Si MOSFET, the Source of the GaN HEMT, and the gate of the GaN HEMT are not accessible from the outside of the package.

In applications, Transphorm GaN switches behave like ultra-fast FETs with low-charge body diodes.

The “body diode” is a p-n junction that is inherent to MOSFETs and is in parallel to the MOSFET channel. The body diode can conduct current from the source to the drain (the MOSFETs’ reverse direction) when the MOSFET is turned off, and can act as a freewheeling diode in applications.

However, as a bi-polar device, the body diode stores minority carriers in its forward conduction mode. Especially in high voltage MOSFETs, where a large amount of minority carriers is stored during forward conduction, this leads to poor reverse characteristics of the MOSFET such as high reverse recovery current and long reverse recovery time.

In contrast, Transphorm GaN switches consist of a HV GaN HEMT, which is a majority carrier device, and a LV MOSFET, which inherently has only little stored minority carriers during forward conduction. Therefore, Transphorm GaN switches store only a small amount of minority carriers during reverse conduction while providing the same reverse conductance as MOSFETs. Without the losses of a high voltage body diode, Transphorm GaN switches demonstrate great

Figure 1: Transphorm GaN Switch
performance advantages with low recovery charge and short recovery time. In addition, Transphorm GaN switches operate extremely fast with fall and rise times <10 ns, therefore minimizing switching losses in applications.

2. OPERATION OF GaN SWITCHES

To better understand the operation of the GaN switch (Fig. 1), three modes of operation can be distinguished:

1. Forward Blocking ($V_{GS}=0$, $V_{DS}>0$)
   a. $0<V_{DS}<-V_{t,GaN}$
   b. $0<-V_{t,GaN}<V_{DS}$
2. Forward conduction ($V_{GS}>V_{t,Si}$, $V_{DS}>0$)
3. Reverse conduction ($V_{DS}<0$)
   a. Reverse Turn on
      i. $V_{GS}=0$
      ii. $V_{GS}>V_{t,Si}$
   b. Reverse Turn Off

where $V_{t,Si}$ is the threshold voltage of the LV Si MOSFET, the threshold voltage of the GaN HEMT $V_{t,GaN}<0$, the drain voltage $V_{DS}$, the drain current $I_D$, and $V_{GS,GaN}+V_{DS,si}=0$.

2.1 Forward Blocking

2.1.1 $V_{GS}=0$, $0 < V_{DS} < -V_{t,GaN}$

At $V_{GS}=0$, the Si MOSFET is switched off, and no current flows either through the channel of the Si MOSFET or through the channel of the GaN HEMT ($I_D=0$). As $V_{DS} < -V_{t,GaN}$ and $I_D \approx 0$, the drain potential of the Si MOSFET is equal to the drain potential of the GaN switch, $V_{DS,si} = V_{DS}$. In this operating area, the entire drain voltage $V_{DS}$ of the switch is blocked by the Si MOSFET.

2.1.2 $V_{GS}=0$, $0 < -V_{t,GaN} < V_{DS}$

As $V_{DS}$ increases, the gate voltage of the GaN HEMT becomes more negative with respect to its source voltage, gradually turning off the GaN HEMT. At $V_{DS}=-V_{t,GaN}$, the GaN HEMT is turned off. For voltages $V_{DS}>-V_{t,GaN}$, the voltage drop across the GaN HEMT is $V_{DS}+V_{t,GaN}$ with $V_{t,GaN}<0$.

2.2 Forward Conduction

$V_{GS}>V_{t,Si}$, $I_D$, $V_{DS} > 0$

With the Si MOSFET turned on ($V_{GS}>V_{t,si}$), the voltage drop across the GaN switch in the linear region is

$$V_{DS}=I_D (R_{DS(on),Si} + R_{DS(on),GaN}) \quad (Eq. 1)$$

where $R_{DS(on),Si}$ and $R_{DS(on),GaN}$ are the on-resistance of the Si MOSFET and the GaN HEMT, respectively.
2.3 Reverse Conduction \( (V_{DS} < 0) \)

2.3.1 Reverse Turn On

2.3.1.1 \( V_{DS} < 0, \ V_{GS}=0 \)

When the GaN switch is turned off (the LV Si MOSFET is turned off) and a reverse voltage is applied to GaN switch, a current flows through the body diode of the LV Si MOSFET and the channel of the normally-on HV GaN HEMT (Fig. 2).

The reverse voltage drop \( V_{SD} \) across the GaN switch during this reverse conduction is the sum of the Si MOSFETs’ body diode voltage drop \( V_{SD-Si} \), and the conduction voltage drop across the GaN channel. The voltage drop across the GaN channel can be described as the product of the current \( I_F \), and the Drain-Source On-resistance \( R_{DS(on)-GaN} \) of the GaN HEMT. Therefore,

\[
V_{SD} = V_{SD-Si} + I_F \cdot R_{DS(on)-GaN} \tag{Eq. 2}
\]

Figure 2: Reverse turn-on of Transphorm GaN Switch, \( V_{GS} =0V \)
2.3.1.2 $\ V_{DS} < 0, \ V_{GS} > V_{t, Si}$

As (Eq.2) shows, the reverse voltage drop of the Transphorm GaN switch is a function of current, and is higher than the Si MOSFET’s body diode voltage drop. However, to improve the performance in the application, the reverse voltage drop can be reduced by turning on the low voltage Si MOSFET during reverse conduction. This is typically done after a small dead time to avoid shoot through.

By applying a gate voltage higher than the threshold voltage $V_{t, Si}$ of the GaN switch (here $V_{GS} > 4V$), the LV Si MOSFET is turned on and the reverse current $I_F$ flows through the Si channel (with its channel resistance $R_{DS(on), Si}$) and the GaN channel (with $R_{DS(on), GaN}$) (Figure 3).

Therefore, at reasonable current levels, $I_F \times R_{DS(on), Si} < V_{SD-Si}$, and the reverse voltage drop across the GaN switch reduces to

$$V_{SD} = I_F \times (R_{DS(on), GaN} + R_{DS(on), Si})$$

(Eq. 3)

Figure 3: Reverse turn-on of Transphorm GaN Switch, $V_{GS}=4V$
2.3.2 Reverse Turn Off (Reverse Recovery Behavior)

To demonstrate the smaller reverse recovery losses of the GaN switch in comparison to high voltage MOSFETs, the reverse recovery of the GaN switch can be tested. Figure 4 shows the reverse recovery test circuit that can be used for this test. It consists of the device under test (DUT), the inductor \( L_1 \) and the control switch \( Q_1 \).

![Test Circuit Diagram]

The test starts when \( Q_1 \) is turned on. Subsequently, a current establishes through \( L_1 \) and \( Q_1 \), with the reverse current of the DUT \( I_F = 0 \) (Figure 4). \( Q_1 \) is then turned off, but the current remains flowing through \( L_1 \) and creates \( I_F \neq 0 \). Therefore, modulating \( Q_1 \) allows setting the current \( I_F \) that flows from the inductor to the source then drain of the DUT. To observe the reverse recovery of the DUT after establishing \( I_F \), \( Q_1 \) is turned on again and the DUT transitions from reverse conduction to forward blocking.

To better understand the advantage of the GaN switch over existing Silicon technology, reverse recovery tests have been performed on a 600V Transphorm GaN switch and a 600V CFD2-type (low Qrr design) CoolMOS Si MOSFET with comparable on-resistances. Fig 5.2 and Fig 5.1 show the reverse turn-off waveforms of the GaN switch and the MOSFET, respectively.

Both DUTs were tested at an initial current \( I_F = 9 \text{A} \) and a reverse bias voltage \( V_{DD} = 400 \text{V} \). While the Transphorm GaN switch was tested at 450A/us with little ringing, the CoolMOS was not stable at 450A/us. Therefore, its turn off \( \text{di/dt} \) was reduced to 100A/us for stability. (Further tests showed, that the \( Q_{rr} \) of the GaN switch is unchanged with different di/dt from 100 A/us to 480 A/us, therefore allowing a comparison between the two measurements.)

The test waveforms in Fig. 5 and Fig 5.1 show the DUTs recovery charges \( Q_{rr} \) of 40 nC and 1000 nC for the GaN switch and low \( Q_{rr} \) MOSFET, respectively. The GaN switch has an impressively low \( Q_{rr} \) that is 25 times less than the \( Q_{rr} \) of the fast recovery design CoolMOS.
To further analyze the reverse recovery charge of the GaN switch, the reverse recovery charge can be split into two components: First, the capacitive charge of the GaN HEMT, and second, the reverse recovery charge of the low voltage Si MOSFET.

At \( I_f = 0 \text{A} \), the reverse recovery of the Si MOSFET is zero, therefore any observed current can only stem from discharging the switch’s capacitance \( Q_c \). Fig. 6.1 and Figure 6.2 show the measurements for \( I_f = 0 \text{A} \) at different switch speeds of \( Q_1 \). It can be observed that \( Q_c \sim 35\text{nC} \), which constitutes about 86% of total \( Q_{rr} \). In other words, the minority charge component is only 14% of the overall \( Q_{rr} \).
3 CONCLUSION

Transphorm's GaN switches are capable of three modes of operation including forward blocking, forward conduction, and reverse conduction. Their switching is very fast with remarkably superior reverse turn-off characteristic compared to Si MOSFETs. These characteristics make the GaN device especially suitable for hard-switched diode-free bridge applications, such as motor-drive inverters, PV inverters, totem-pole PFCs, and other related applications.