Performance of 20:1 multiplexer for large area charge readouts in directional dark matter TPC detectors

A. C. Ezeribe, M. Robinson, N. Robinson, A. Scarff, N. J. C. Spooner and L. Yuriev

Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, S3 7RH, U.K.

E-mail: a.ezeribe@sheffield.ac.uk

ABSTRACT: More target mass is required in current TPC based directional dark matter detectors for improved detector sensitivity. This can be achieved by scaling up the detector volumes, but this results in the need for more analogue signal channels. A possible solution to reducing the overall cost of the charge readout electronics is to multiplex the signal readout channels. Here, we present work on an expanded LMH6574 multiplexer system with a capability of reducing the number of readouts in such TPC detectors by a factor of 20. Results indicate that the important charge distribution asymmetry along an ionization track is retained after multiplexed signals are demultiplexed.

KEYWORDS: MUX, Demultiplexer, DeMUX, TPC, Charge readout

1Corresponding author.
1 Introduction

The desire to scale-up directional dark matter (DM) TPCs (time projection chambers) with low energy thresholds has been building in recent years [1–4]. A massive directional DM detector is essential to reach the required sensitivity for DM-neutrino background discrimination beyond the so-called neutrino floor [5, 6]. The neutrino floor is a parameter space where solar, atmospheric, and diffused supernovae neutrino backgrounds are expected in direct DM search experiments [5–7]. Also, in a case of a DM detection claim, a directional detector would be necessary to confirm the Galactic origin and anisotropic nature of the signal [8]. However, the cost of electronics readout required to build this massive TPC detector for directional DM detection is an issue for the technology. For instance, the proposed CYGNUS-10 detector with a fiducial volume of 10 m$^3$ could potentially result in 10$^5$ channels.

One of the possible ways of reducing the readout cost is through signal multiplexing. In this work, we test a 20:1 multiplexer (MUX) using expanded LMH6574 chips sourced from Texas Instruments [9]. Analogue multiplexers are produced mainly from field-effect transistors (FET), known as FET analogue switches which allow many signal channels to be sampled and combined into a common signal stream at a given temporal interval [10, 11]. The LM6574 chip illustrated in Figure 1 is a high performance 4:1 analogue multiplexer comprising a 14-pin device embedded in a small outline integrated circuit (SOIC) surface mount package. The four input channels of the LM6574 MUX chip are marked as IN0, IN1, IN2, and IN3 in Figure 1. During an operation, the signal in each of these input channels is selected using a unique signal address generated with a pair of A0 and A1 digital control signals at a defined frequency and passed as the output of the chip [9]. For the experiment described here, the frequency of the A0 signal was set to be a factor of 2 larger than the A1 signal so as to generate the required set of four digital addresses for enabling each of the analogue input channels. The generated A0,A1 digital addresses for IN0, IN1, IN2 and IN3 are 1,1 ; 0,1 ; 1,0 and 0,0, respectively. To recover the original signal, the multiplexed signal is demultiplexed using the reference multiplexing frequency. This was achieved by using NI 5751 digitizer adapter module [12] of 16 ADC channels, operated with a PXI-7953R NI FlexRIO field programmable gate array (FPGA) device [13] from National Instruments (NI) Corporation.
Figure 1: Illustration of the 4:1 analogue multiplexer. The IN0, IN1, IN2 and IN3 are the four analogue input signal channels while A0 and A1 are the digital signals (addresses) for selecting a channel to be sampled. The switching nature of the output stream of the chip between the input channels is illustrated with an arrow [9].

2 Design and construction of the 20:1 signal MUX

To multiplex 20 analogue signal channels, 5 LMH6574 chips were used. This was achieved by connecting together all the digital address (A0 and A1) pins of the chips using a custom-made EAGLE [14] printed circuit board (PCB). This is also true for the shutdown (SD) and the chip enable (EN, see Figure 1) signal pins to allow for centralised chip control and signal read out. This is known as expanded mode operation. The EAGLE board layout view of the MUX PCB and the manufactured 20:1 MUX board are shown in Figure 2. The SD signal is the chip switching signal used for moving controls from one chip to another while in the expanded mode. The soldering pad positions of the five LMH6574 MUX chips are marked as M-1, M-2, M-3, M-4, and M-5. The cable connectors are labelled as C-1, C-2, C-3, and C-4 in Figure 2(a). The C-1 soldering pad is for a 236-412 wire-to-board terminal connector used for powering the chips while the C-2, C-3 and C-4 pads are for a BNC analogue output, MDR-50 analogue input and SCSI-68 digital input signals from the NI module, respectively.

Each of the input signal channels was terminated with a 550 Ω resistor to reduce signal reflections and ensure that any excess currents were properly grounded. These input termination resistors are marked as R_{IN0}, R_{IN1}, R_{IN2}, R_{IN3}, R_T and R_G in Figure 1. A 575 Ω resistor was used as the R_F resistor to achieve a gain of 2, with an R_{OUT} resistor of 50 Ω on the output channel.

To achieve the required operational specification, the analogue ground was separated from the digital ground to avoid noise coupling between the analogue and digital signals. However, when this is not properly managed it can introduce crosstalk in the circuit since both planes may radiate noise or act as noise antennas. Such noise is due to return currents flowing beneath each signal line. This return current will always prefer to follow the path with lowest impedance hence disconnecting these return paths with separated grounds may result in potential current loops especially when there are signal traces over the ground breaks. A circuit with a resultant current loop can experience
Figure 2: EAGLE board layout for the 20:1 analogue signal multiplexing PCB (top panel) and the manufactured board in a shielding box (bottom panel). Positions of soldering pads for the five LMH6574 MUX chips used in the board design are labelled M-1, M-2, M-3, M-4 and M-5. Cable connectors used to power the chips, for routing the multiplexed signal from the board, the analogue signal input and digital signals from the NI module are marked as C-1, C-2, C-3 and C-4, respectively. Board dimensions are in mm.

high ground inductance which is susceptible to signal interference. In this design, the issue of crosstalk induced by separated analogue-digital grounds was avoided by not cross running traces between the grounds. The ground-signal-ground trace stack-up arrangement was adopted to reduce
electromagnetic interference (EMI) on the board. Micro-strip trace technology was used in this design due to its characteristically lower dielectric losses, easy accessibility for maintenance and their low manufacturing cost relative to strip-line technology. While operating the MUX in the expanded mode, an inter-chip switching delay of about 145 ns would be expected [9, 15]. The inter-chip switching delays are one of the major challenges of modular analogue multiplexers. For this MUX system, a total of about 0.89 \( \mu s \) delay and signal loss is expected considering the 8 ns channel switch time of the individual chips. This result in losses of <5% of signals of 20 \( \mu s \) duration from Cremat CR-200-4\( \mu s \) shaping amplifier.

3 Test system for the 20:1 MUX

A new miniature TPC detector (shown in Figure 3) was built to test the MUX electronics using analogue signals from 5.5 MeV alpha interactions. The TPC is a 2 cm \( \times \) 2 cm \( \times \) 10 cm detector with a one-plane multiwire proportional chamber (MWPC) [16, 17] readout. In this one-plane MWPC design, 10 grounded stainless steel anode wires of 20 \( \mu m \) diameter were sandwiched between parallel 100 \( \mu m \) grid wires with an anode-grid pitch of 1 mm. The alternating anode and grid wires were mounted on a customized EAGLE PCB using an automated quad wire winding robot (QWWR) to achieve uniform wire spacing. The accuracy (precision) of the QWWR is \( \pm 0.002 \) mm \( (\pm 0.015 \) mm) as determined from data obtained with a BS-6020TRF microscope. This result is consistent with the accepted range in Refs. [19, 20] for optimal performance in MWPCs. During the wire winding process, the anode and grid wires were tensioned with 20 g and 130 g masses, respectively.

![Figure 3](image)

**Figure 3:** Miniature TPC detector used to generate analogue input signals used for testing the 20:1 MUX system. The left panel is the schematics of the detector while the right panel is the detector after construction.
operation, a set high negative potential applied on each of the grid wires through a 100 MΩ power resistor was used to create electron avalanche multiplication [18] on the anode wires. Signals arising from cations created in these avalanches are decoupled using 10 nF capacitors connected to the grid wires. The decoupling capacitors serve as active vetoes against unwanted DC signals and prevent the amplifiers from discharging the grid signal wires. Each of the 10 anode and 10 of their corresponding grid channels were read out through an AC coupled Cremat CR-111 pre-amplifier and CR-200-4μs shaping amplifier, providing the required 20 analogue signal inputs to the MUX system. The sensitive aperture of the one-plane MWPC was surrounded by 4 mm thick copper field ring biased at negative potential to minimise signal loss. A centralised one-plane MWPC can potentially be used to read out two back-to-back TPC detectors in modular detector designs, thereby reducing the overall readout channels relative to conventional MWPC designs [16, 17], as used in the DRIFT-IIId detector [21].

The copper cathode plate was biased at -3.5 kV to create a uniform drift field of 354 V cm\(^{-1}\). This cathode voltage was systematically stepped down through a set of eight field rings made with 0.6 mm diameter copper wires at 1.1 cm pitch and connected via a series of 750 kΩ resistors. This field ring pitch was modelled and optimised in Garfield [22] to ensure no field leakage within the fiducial volume of the detector. The miniature TPC detector was mounted in a 96 litre stainless steel vacuum vessel and filled with 250 Torr of CF\(_4\) gas. It is expected that the ion drift velocity at these operational E/P (1.35 kV cm\(^{-1}\) atm\(^{-1}\)) and E/N (5.5 Td) values of the detector is 10 cm μs\(^{-1}\) [23]. Here E, P and N represent the operational drift field, gas pressure and density, respectively. The CF\(_4\) gas is a common target gas used in leading directional dark matter experiments for spin-dependent sensitivity [24–27]. The operational pressure of the set-up was optimised in SRIM [28] to contain the expected Bragg peak of the alpha tracks within the fiducial volume of the detector. The expected alpha range generated from SRIM is shown as a function of CF\(_4\) pressure in Figure 4.

As expected, it can be seen that the range of the alpha tracks fall exponentially at higher CF\(_4\) gas pressure. Alpha tracks from a 5.5 MeV \(^{241}\)Am source were used to calibrate the detector gain, found to be 385 for 250 Torr of CF\(_4\) gas. To measure this, the source was mounted on the tip of M6 nylon rod of 5 cm length attached to the inside wall of the vacuum vessel using a neodymium disc.

**Figure 4:** 3D range of 5.5 MeV alphas in various pressures of CF\(_4\) gas determined from SRIM.
magnet. Hence, by using another neodymium disc magnet on the outside wall of the vessel, the position of the source could be controlled. SRIM was used to determine the fraction of the alpha energy deposited in the detector fiducial volume. Before starting a new operation, the vessel was evacuated using an Edwards XDS10 scroll vacuum pump for at least 1 day. The vessel pressure was constantly monitored using a CERAVAC CTR-101 pressure gauge acquired from Oerlikon Leybold vacuum company. A picture and illustrative diagram of the experimental set-up are shown in Figure 5. High voltage cables used to power the cathode, field ring and the grid wires were fed into the stainless steel vacuum vessel through safe high voltage (SHV) connector feedthroughs. A PCB

![Diagram of the experimental set-up.](image1)

(a) Illustration of the experimental set-up.

![Picture of the vacuum set-up.](image2)

(b) Picture of the vacuum set-up.

**Figure 5:** Experimental set-up used to test the MUX electronics. The top panel shows data flow between the major components of the set-up and gas pipping while the bottom panel shows a picture of the vacuum set-up as in the laboratory. Single headed arrows in (a) show directions of data flow.
based feedthrough was constructed and mounted on a flange for analogue signals and amplifier power connections.

An example of a typical charge signal pulse obtained from the 8th anode wire with the source in place is shown in Figure 6(a) when the detector is exposed to the alpha source. The polarity of this signal pulse was inverted using the polarity switch on the Cremat CR-160-R7 board. This is to ensure that the signals on the grid and anode signal wires have common polarity. The pulse height of the signal shown in Figure 6(a) is about 2.8 V with a resolution of \( \sim 10 \) \( \mu \)s and an undershoot of \( \sim 0.15 \) V, below the baseline. The magnitude of the signal undershoot observed from each alpha event depends on the fraction of the energy that is deposited on the wire under consideration. This undershoot effect was accounted for in data analyses. For an overview of the anode channel response as a function of voltage of the grid wires, see Figure 6(b). It can be seen that the maximum gains were obtained at higher (negative) grid wire voltages \( > 0.8 \) kV. The grid wires were set to 0.85 kV during these measurements to minimise the risk of wire breakage during the avalanche process. Also, signals with more than 3 V amplitudes saturate the amplifier leading to signal losses. As expected, the signal pulse heights show an exponential increase with the grid voltage especially at voltages \( < 0.7 \) kV. The observed increase is more apparent for grid voltages \( > 0.3 \) kV. The expectation is that the signal pulse heights and gas gain will decrease at higher gas pressures. However, this is not a problem for this experiment as all the measurements were performed using constrained gas pressures (250 - 260 Torr).

Data from the miniature detector was multiplexed and demultiplexed using an NI FPGA based LabVIEW data acquisition system (DAQ). For details of the NI FPGA and digitizer module used in design of this DAQ, see Figure 5(a). Demultiplexed data were saved on disk in a desktop computer for analyses.

**Figure 6:** Detector response when exposed to alphas from \( ^{241}\text{Am} \) source. In the left panel is a sample of signal observed on an anode wire while in the right panel is recorded anode pulse heights shown as a function of grid potential. The average uncertainty on the event pulse heights in (b) is \( \pm 0.2 \) mV. Note that the polarity of the anode channels were set to be inverted using the shaping electronics.
4 MUX Results and Discussion

The 20 analogue signal inputs from the one-plane MWPC based detector were multiplexed and demultiplexed at 0.625 MHz per signal channel. A sample of reconstructed demultiplexed alpha signal track pulses is shown in Figure 7. To ensure that the Bragg peak of the alpha tracks were contained within the detector fiducial volume, 250 Torr of CF$_4$ gas was used. Signal glitches and background low frequency sinusoidal waveform noise can be seen on each of the signal channels. These glitches and low frequency noise were not present before the analogue signals were multiplexed. This shows that they were coupled to the signals during the multiplexing or demultiplexing processes or both. This type of noise can be suppressed in future design by isolating the power channel, analogue and digital channel grounds using different PCB ground layers. The quality of the signal input to the multiplexer can be improved by using coaxial cables to route signals from detector to the multiplexer board instead of the ribbon cable used in this test. Also, shorter conducting traces can reduce the MUX board’s susceptibility to radiated and other extraneous low frequency noise. Further investigations show that the observed signal-to-noise ratio (SNR) decays

![Sample of demultiplexed analogue signals showing the response of the miniature detector when exposed to an alpha from $^{241}$Am source in 250 Torr of CF$_4$. Top side of the panel is closer to the source.](image-url)
with increase in the multiplexing frequency. An exponential decay in SNR was observed when operating with multiplexing frequencies that are \( > 1 \text{ MHz} \).

To understand the effect of signal multiplexing on the expected intrinsic Bragg curve effect on alpha tracks after these signals were demultiplexed, 1000 alpha event tracks were accumulated. The observed low frequency background noise on each of the signal channels were suppressed by fitting and subtracting harmonics of low frequency waveforms on the demultiplexed signal channel. This was followed by a 30 \( \mu \text{s} \) Savitzky-Golay smoothing filter to further reduce the noise. Reconstructed pulse samples from demultiplexed alpha signals are shown for different channels of the detector in Figures 8(a) to 8(d).

![Reconstructed pulse samples from demultiplexed alpha signals from different detector channels after the low-frequency noise suppression.](image)

**Figure 8**: Reconstructed pulse samples from demultiplexed alpha signals from different detector channels after the low-frequency noise suppression.
After the noise suppression, the average signal pulse heights recorded on each of the anode wire channels were computed and shown in Figure 9(b). For comparison, the result from 10 raw detector signals (without any multiplexing and demultiplexing) is shown in Figure 9(a). The trend of the data in Figure 9 indicate the expected presence of an alpha Bragg peak before and after the multiplexer board was used. The magnitude of the observed Bragg peak is $585 \pm 0.6 \text{ mV}$ and $650 \pm 32 \text{ mV}$, obtained with and without the multiplexer, respectively. Smaller sample size in the measurement without the MUX electronics result in larger uncertainty relative to the MUX result. As expected, each of the Bragg peaks was observed on the anode wire located toward the end of the range of the event track. It can be seen that only 8 anode data points are shown in Figure 9(a). This is due to the capability of the 16 channeled ADC (8 grid and 8 anode channels) used in this measurement. The >10 SNR of the demultiplexed signals is a factor 6 lower than the SNR of raw signals. Results show that the average magnitude of the observed Bragg peak after the signals were demultiplexed is 65 mV less than the raw signal results. This is mainly due to signal loss on the multiplexer board. The dead time of the MUX system and the observed low-frequency harmonic noise are expected to contribute to the signal loss for demultiplexed signals. It can be seen that the anode wire (counting from the location closer to the source) on which the Bragg peak was observed is different in the two measurements due to the respective gas pressures used in the two measurements. The energy resolution of the detector was found to be $\sim 10\%$ worse in the demultiplexed signal case relative to the raw signals. This is due to variation in the detector gain in these operational pressures and signal losses in the MUX circuit. Future work will focus on understanding these effects.

![Figure 9](image-url)

**Figure 9:** Average event pulse height induced by 5.5 MeV alpha tracks shown as a function of anode wire separation from the PCB. Low distance values indicate wire closer to the alpha source. Raw signals in 260 Torr of CF$_4$ are shown in (a) while (b) shows the results from 250 Torr of CF$_4$ after the signals were multiplexed using the MUX board, demultiplexed and analysed. Quoted errors are 1σ statistical uncertainty.
5 Conclusion

A one-plane MWPC-based time projection chamber detector was designed, built and used to test the feasibility of a new 20:1 analogue signal multiplexer as a possible readout for a future massive directional dark matter detectors. The 20:1 multiplexer was built using expanded LMH6574 chips from Texas Instruments. Signal multiplexing is motivated and can be a possible means to reduce the cost of signal readouts in massive TPC detectors without compromising the detector sensitivity to event x-y position. Results obtained from this multiplexer system are encouraging and it has demonstrated that ionization charge distribution along alpha tracks can be reconstructed from demultiplexed signals. The precision of the detector energy resolution was found to broaden by ~10% when the multiplexer system was used. Low-frequency harmonic noise, glitches and multiplexer chip switch delays are major factors to considered in future designs.

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References


