

Attenuation and Dispersion in Fiber-Optic Cable on M Series, MX Series, and T Series Routers

Correct functioning of an optical data link depends on modulated light reaching the receiver with enough power to be demodulated correctly. Attenuation is the reduction in power of the light signal as it is transmitted. Attenuation is caused by passive media components, such as cables, cable splices, and connectors. While attenuation is significantly lower for optical fiber than for other media, it still occurs in both multimode and single-mode transmission. An efficient optical data link must have enough light available to overcome attenuation.

Dispersion is the spreading of the signal in time. The following two types of dispersion can affect an optical data link:

- Chromatic dispersion—Spreading of the signal in time resulting from the different speeds of light rays.
- Modal dispersion—Spreading of the signal in time resulting from the different propagation modes in the fiber.

For multimode transmission, modal dispersion, rather than chromatic dispersion or attenuation, usually limits the maximum bit rate and link length. For single-mode transmission, modal dispersion is not a factor. However, at higher bit rates and over longer distances, chromatic dispersion rather than modal dispersion limits maximum link length.

An efficient optical data link must have enough light to exceed the minimum power that the receiver requires to operate within its specifications. In addition, the total dispersion must be less than the limits specified for the type of link in Telcordia Technologies document GR-253-CORE (Section 4.3) and International Telecommunications Union (ITU) document G.957.

When chromatic dispersion is at the maximum allowed, its effect can be considered as a power penalty in the power budget. The optical power budget must allow for the sum of component attenuation, power penalties (including those from dispersion), and a safety margin for unexpected losses.

- Related Topics**
- Calculating Power Budget for Fiber-Optic Cable for M Series, MX Series, and T Series Routers
 - Calculating Power Margin for Fiber-Optic Cable for M Series, MX Series, and T Series Routers
 - Routing Engine Interface Cable and Wire Specifications for MX Series Routers

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