

Chapter 16

Neighbor Discovery Overview

Neighbor discovery is a protocol that allows different nodes on the same link to advertise their existence to their neighbors, and to learn about the existence of their neighbors.

A router periodically multicasts a router advertisement from each of its multicast interfaces, announcing its availability. Hosts listen for these advertisements for address autoconfiguration and discovery of link-local addresses of the neighboring routers. When a host starts, it multicasts a router solicitation to ask for immediate advertisements.

The router discovery messages do not constitute a routing protocol. They enable hosts to discover the existence of neighboring routers, but are not used to determine which router is best to reach a particular destination.

Neighbor discovery uses the following Internet Control Message Protocol Version 6 (ICMPv6) messages: router solicitation, router advertisement, neighbor solicitation, neighbor advertisement, and redirect.

Neighbor discovery for IPv6 replaces the following IPv4 protocols: router discovery (RDISC), Address Resolution Protocol (ARP), and ICMPv4 redirect.

This chapter discusses the following topics that provide background information about neighbor discovery:

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Neighbor Discovery Standards

Neighbor discovery is defined in the following document:

RFC 2461, *Neighbor Discovery for IP Version 6*

To access Internet Requests for Comments (RFCs) and drafts, see <http://www.ietf.org>.

Router Discovery

Router advertisements can contain a list of prefixes. These prefixes are used for address autoconfiguration, to maintain a database of onlink (on the same data link) prefixes, and for duplication address detection. If a node is onlink, the router forwards packets to that node. If the node is not onlink, the packets are sent to the next router for consideration. For IPv6, each prefix in the prefix list can contain a prefix length, valid lifetime for the prefix, preferred lifetime for the prefix, an onlink flag, and an autoconfiguration flag. This information enables address autoconfiguration and the setting of link parameters such as maximum transmission unit (MTU) size and hop limit.

Address Resolution

For IPv6, ICMPv6 neighbor discovery replaces ARP for resolving network addresses to link-level addresses. Neighbor discovery also handles changes in link-layer addresses, inbound load balancing, anycast addresses, and proxy advertisements.

Nodes requesting the link-layer address of a target node multicast a neighbor solicitation message with the target address. The target sends back a neighbor advertisement message containing its link-layer address.

Neighbor solicitation and advertisement messages are used for detecting duplicate unicast addresses on the same link. Autoconfiguration of an IP address depends on whether there is a duplicate address on that link. Duplicate address detection is a requirement for autoconfiguration.

Neighbor solicitation and advertisement messages are also used for neighbor unreachability detection. Neighbor unreachability detection involves detecting the presence of a target node on a given link.

Redirect

Redirect messages are sent to inform a host of a better next-hop router to a particular destination or an onlink neighbor. This is similar to ICMPv4 Redirect.