

Common-View LORAN-C for Precision Time and Frequency Transfer

Tom Celano, Timing Solutions Corporation
LT Kevin Carroll, USCG Loran Support Unit
Casey Biggs, Timing Solutions Corporation
Michael Lombardi, NIST

In order for LORAN-C to serve as a viable backup to GPS for precision time and frequency transfer, a performance improvement of at least an order of magnitude is required. LORAN-C time recovery performance is limited to the microsecond level by seasonal ASF (additional secondary factor) effects. By employing common-view techniques long used in the GPS community, it may be possible to significantly improve performance.

Common-view LORAN-C involves differencing the LORAN-C data collected at one site with the data collected at a calibrated site. This differential mode of LORAN-C time and frequency recovery will result in better time recovery, better long-term frequency recovery, and more robust performance.

This paper presents data collected from an experimental three node common-view LORAN-C network. The network includes time recovery systems at Timing Solutions Corporation (TSC) in Boulder, Colorado, the National Institution of Standards and Technology (NIST) in Boulder, and LORAN-C station (LORSTA) Gillette in Gillette, Wyoming. Results will include projections of time recovery performance and predicted averaging times for Stratum I frequency recovery using Enhanced (differential) LORAN.

1.0 Introduction

The LORAN Accuracy Performance Panel (LORAPP) has begun to investigate methods to improve the performance of LORAN-C timing and to establish Enhanced LORAN-C as a viable backup to GPS for time and frequency users. Historically, LORAN-C timing performance has been limited by the seasonal propagation changes that cause the time-of-arrival (TOA) of the LORAN-C signal to vary by more than a microsecond over the course of weeks or months. By implementing a differential approach, it may be possible to cancel a significant percentage of the change in propagation delay between two sites. A successful implementation of differential techniques would result in a network of monitor sites that would collect TOA data and distribute corrections in the Enhanced LORAN-C era.

This paper reintroduces the concept of common-view LORAN-C timing. The concept is not new; prior to 1981 common-view LORAN-C and television measurements were the primary links used for the computation of International Atomic Time (TAI) [1]. Furthermore, as early as 1963 NIST and the United States Naval Observatory (USNO) made common-view LORAN-C comparisons using signals from Cape Fear [2]. However, the technique was largely replaced by common-view GPS in the early 1980s [3]. To investigate the use of LORAN-C as a backup timing source to

GPS, the LORAPP has initiated a study to determine the advantage of common-view techniques to the LORAN-C and timing communities, with the following goals:

- Assemble hardware to collect TOA data at three locations: NIST (Boulder, Colorado), Timing Solutions Corporation (Boulder, Colorado) and LORSTA Gillette (Gillette, Wyoming).
- Determine the best case common-view LORAN-C performance using a short baseline (between NIST and TSC).
- Determine expected performance over a realistic baseline (between TSC and Gillette).
- Develop candidate architecture for Enhanced LORAN implementation.

This paper presents some preliminary results based on the initial data collected from an experimental common-view LORAN-C network. Section 2 describes the common-view technique for both GPS and LORAN-C application. Section 3 details the experimental set-up and hardware configuration. Section 4 presents initial data collected during the first month of the experiment. Section 5 includes initial conclusions and a summary of continuing work.

2.0 Common-View Techniques

Common-view time transfer techniques have been used in the GPS community for over 20 years [3]. The approach involves subtracting data collected at different sites but from a common source in order to cancel errors that are common to each user. The common-view calculation is a simple subtraction of data collected at two sites from a common source. GPS common-view involves collecting time offset data from individual space vehicles (SVs) at two or more receiving sites over the same time period (preferably by using the same type of receiver and processing algorithms at all sites). The data collected at the sites are then subtracted (pair wise) on an SV-by-SV basis. The result of the common-view calculation is a series of time offsets that show the difference between the two clocks. This technique has been used for many years in the timing community, and GPS common-view time transfer is routinely performed at the 5 to 10 ns level [4]. It should be noted that common-view processing results in a relative measurement between the two clocks. That is, unless one of the clocks has a known relationship to UTC, absolute time knowledge is lost in the common-view calculation.

For LORAN-C, common-view techniques can be used to reduce the seasonal effect that limits time recovery performance to the microsecond level. The seasonal effect is the change in propagation from a LORAN transmitter that results from changes in ground conductivity (due primarily to temperature and weather). The effectiveness of the common-view technique will be related to how well seasonal effects correlate over paths traversing different terrain and distances. Previous papers have shown a significant correlation of the propagation delays from a LORAN transmitter as received by stations in Boulder, CO and Flagstaff, AZ [5]. This correlation over a baseline of > 600 km prompted the LORAPP to initiate a common-view LORAN-C timing experiment.

3.0 Common-View LORAN-C Experiment

In order to evaluate the performance of common-view LORAN-C for timing applications, an experimental common-view baseline has been installed between Colorado and Wyoming. Figure 1 shows the high level hardware configuration of the three experimental sites. At each site (NIST, TSC, and LORSTA Gillette), a clock is measured using a GPS receiver and a LORAN-C receiver. The output of the clock represents the local estimate of Coordinated Universal Time (UTC). For NIST, this is UTC(NIST), and for the other two locations it is the output of a cesium oscillator steered using GPS. The detailed hardware configuration for each site is depicted in Figure 2. The clock provides a 1 pulse per second (pps) output to both a standard GPS receiver and a custom LORAN-C TOA receiver. The GPS receiver at NIST and TSC is an AOA TTR5† (part of the NIST common-view service) and the GPS receiver at Gillette is a Motorola Oncore†. There is also a Motorola Oncore† operated at TSC used for common-view comparisons with Gillette.

The LORAN-C receiver is a combination of a standard LOCUS Satmate 1020† and external hardware and processing software. The external hardware and processing software are used to compute the ASF of the signal from each transmitter. The ASF is calculated in the processing software by computing the difference between the received TOA (the value reported by the LOCUS receiver) and the expected time difference (TD), computed using the coordinates of the receiver, the coordinates of the transmitter, and an assumed all-seawater path. A time interval counter is used to measure the group repetition interval (GRI) output of the LOCUS receiver against the 1 pps from the local clock (this provides the ability to refine the TOA data output from the LOCUS receiver based on a precise 1 pps). Peterson Integrated Geopositioning (PIG) software† is used to process the standard output of the LOCUS receiver with the time interval counter measurements, and to adjust the LOCUS data so that it actually represents the TOA.

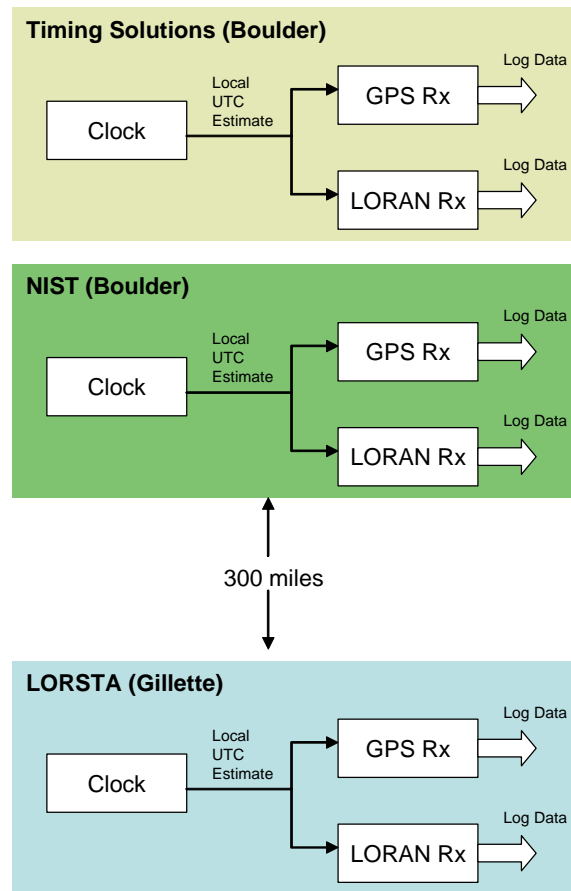


Figure 1: Experimental set-up for Common-View LORAN-C Experiment

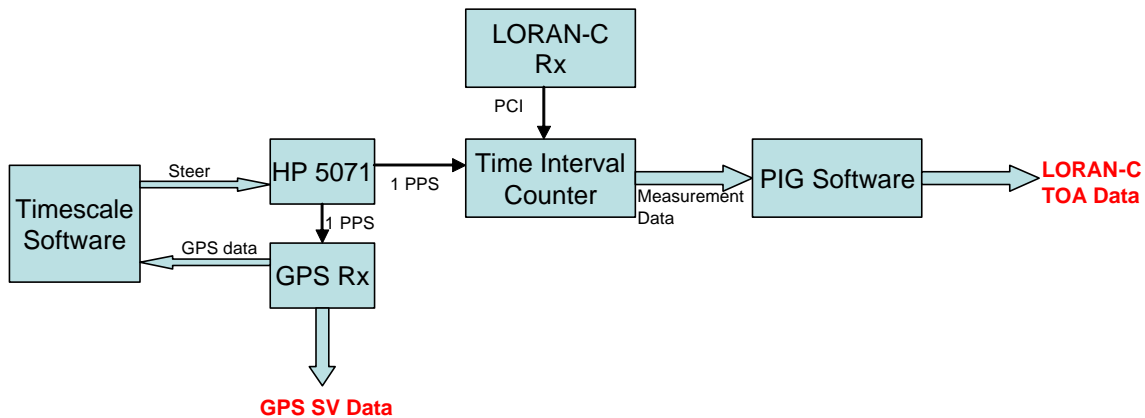


Figure 2: Hardware Configuration at each site

LORAN-C data are averaged for six minutes by the PIG software at each site. GPS data are stored every five minutes (for ONCORE data) or using the BIPM standard common-view schedule [4] (for the data from the NIST Global Time service). GPS and LORAN-C data are stored locally for one day at each site. Each day, the data are transferred to TSC for common-view processing.

4.0 Initial Common-View LORAN-C Data

The common-view LORAN-C experiment began in the fall of 2003, and only a small amount of data has been collected to date. While it is not possible to make any definitive conclusions about the predicted performance of common-view LORAN-C, the initial data are still of interest since they show the potential of the method.

Data are processed using two baselines: a short baseline between NIST and TSC (5 km), and a longer baseline between TSC and Gillette (approximately 500 km). The short baseline represents the best possible performance of the technique, since it maximizes the common-view noise cancellation (the propagation path from a transmitter to the two locations is almost exactly the same). The long baseline between TSC and Gillette represents a more typical baseline that a LORAN-C user would have relative to a LORAN-C monitor station.

4.1 Short Baseline Data

The short baseline LORAN-C common-view data show excellent cancellation of propagation delay effects, and therefore, excellent common-view performance. Figure 3 shows LORAN-C data collected at TSC and NIST. The data in Figure 3 represent the time-of-arrival of a LORAN signal from a single transmitter (9610M in Boise City, Oklahoma) as received at TSC and NIST. The only processing applied to the data in this plot is an external calibration at the beginning of the data collection (via GPS). The data show a diurnal variation of approximately 40 ns as well as a trend of over 100 ns due to a combination of the clock offset at LORSTA Boise City and the seasonal propagation effect, which is well documented for LORAN-C timing data [5].

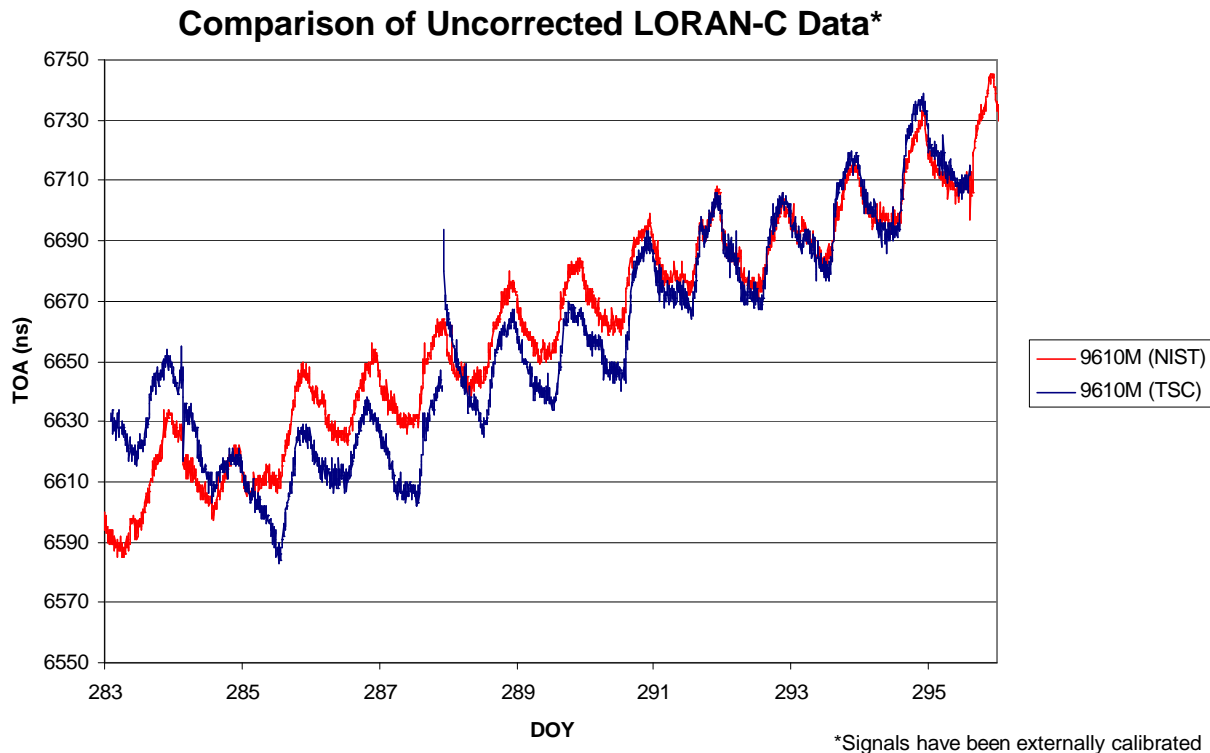


Figure 3: One-Way LORAN-C Data

By subtracting the two data sets in Figure 3, a common-view LORAN-C data record is created between TSC and NIST. The common-view LORAN-C data for a two week period is plotted with common-view GPS data in Figure 4. The common-view LORAN-C data compare favorably with the common-view GPS data collected over the same baseline. The LORAN-C data show a standard deviation of 8 ns and track the GPS data. At day 288, the timing system at TSC was moved to a new location and cold-started (meaning the Kalman filter was re-initialized and the system experienced a start-up transient). Figure 5 shows a section of data from Figure 4 with the x-axis reduced to show the timing system cold-start. The common-view LORAN data clearly show the 40 ns effect of an initial offset and filter pull-in with precision that rivals common-view GPS.

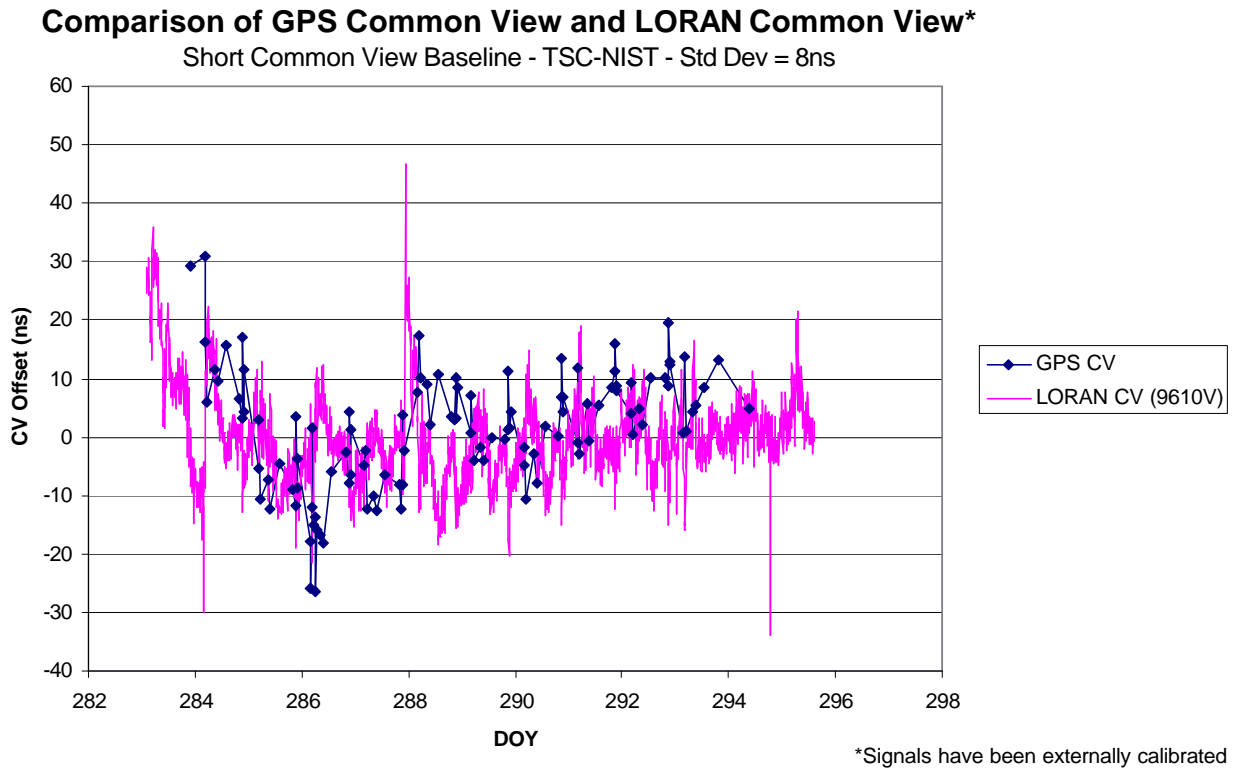


Figure 4: Common-View LORAN-C and Common-View GPS Data

Comparison of GPS Common View and LORAN Common View*

Short Common View Baseline - TSC-NIST - Std Dev = 8ns

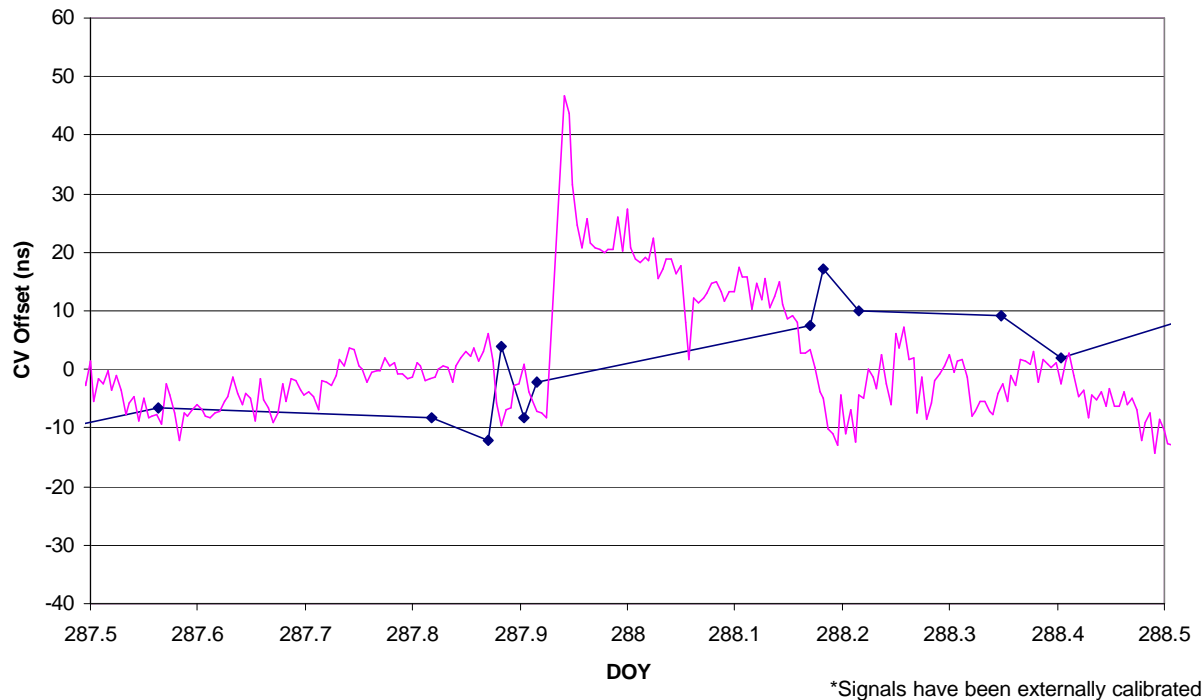


Figure 5: Common-View LORAN-C and Common-View GPS Data (zoom of Fig. 4)

While the common-view LORAN-C results are encouraging over the short baseline, they are not representative of the performance that users could expect with a realistic monitor network providing the corrections. Most users will not be co-located with a monitor and would likely have to use correction values from monitor stations that are hundreds of kilometers away. The short baseline data provide a best case scenario of the potential of common-view LORAN-C and are useful only in bounding the performance.

4.2 Long Baseline Data

The longer baseline between Boulder and Gillette, Wyoming provides a more realistic view of the potential of common-view LORAN-C. The 500 km baseline between the two antennas provides a significant difference in the propagation paths with a lower expected correlation between the data (than the short baseline case). Figure 6 shows a comparison of GPS and LORAN-C common-view over the long baseline using data collected from the 9610M (Boise City, Oklahoma) transmitter. As expected, the data are not as good as the data in Figure 4, but still show significantly better performance than one-way LORAN-C timing data. The common-view LORAN-C timing data ranged from 20 ns RMS (seen in Figure 6) to 50 ns RMS, depending on which transmitter was the source of the common-view data. Figure 7 shows the common-view record from the 8290M transmitter in Havre, MT over the same time period as Figure 6. The data show significantly worse variations than the 9610M data with RMS of 50 ns.

Comparison of GPS Common View vs LORAN Common View*

Long Common-View Baseline - TSC (Boulder) to Gillette (WY)

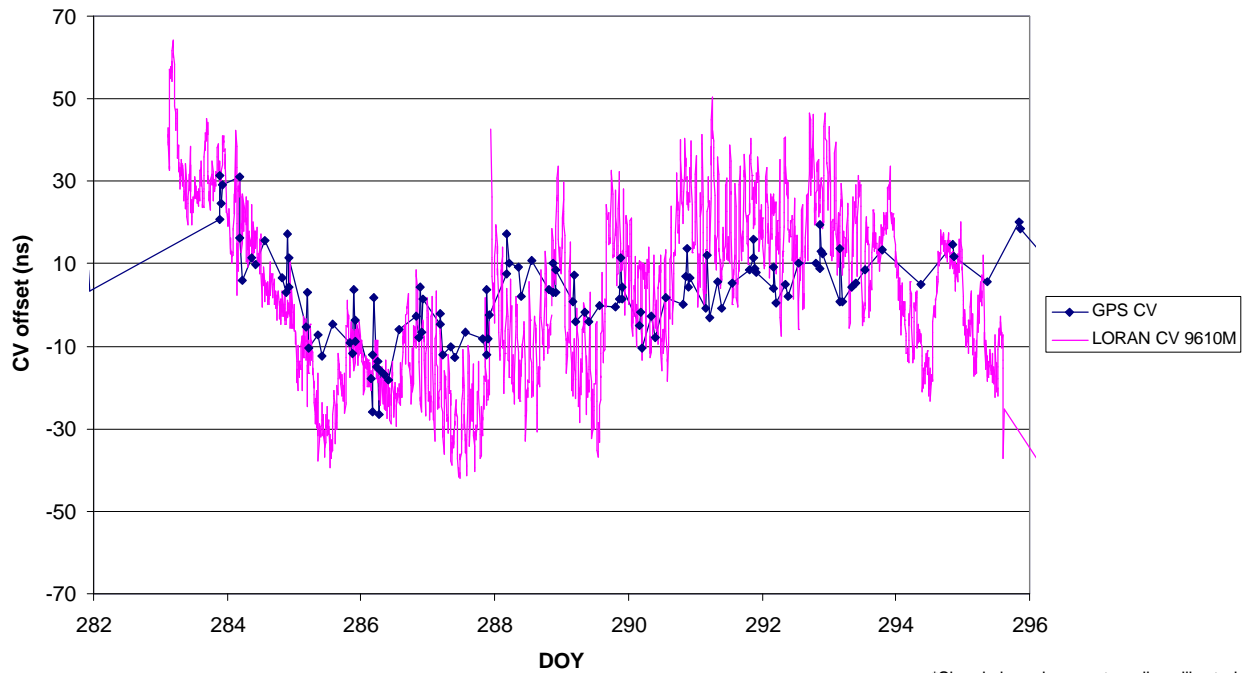


Figure 6: Common View LORAN-C and Common-View GPS over a Long Baseline

GPS Common View vs LORAN Common View*

Long Common-View Baseline - TSC (Boulder) to Gillette (WY)

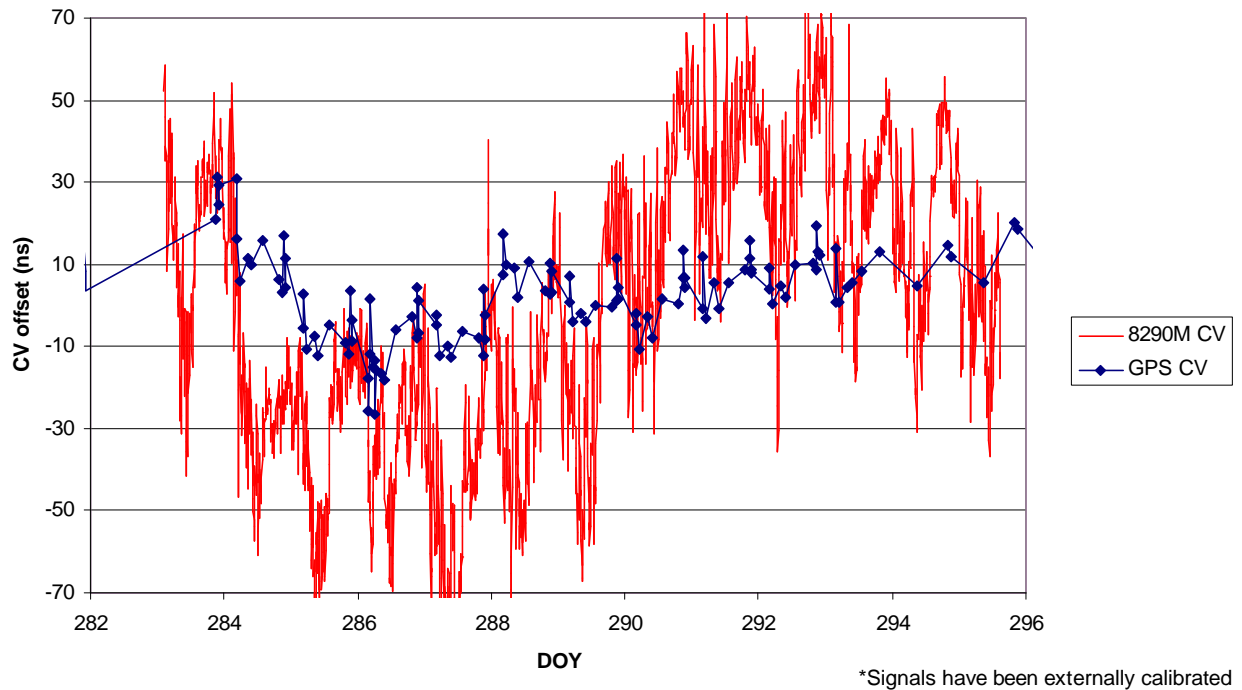


Figure 7: Common View LORAN-C and Common-View GPS over a Long Baseline

4.3 Absolute Performance

The data presented in sections 4.1 and 4.2 address the stability of common-view LORAN-C data from time recovery. In all of the plots presented, the data were externally calibrated at the beginning of the data collection using GPS. One significant disadvantage of common-view LORAN-C is the inability to easily calibrate the receiver. In common-view GPS, a receiver can be calibrated at a source of UTC (NIST or USNO) and then shipped to a user location and used with the same calibration factor. In the common-view LORAN-C case, the calibration factor is location dependent and cannot be calculated at a central site for use in the field. This means that common-view LORAN-C timing receivers will have to be calibrated in the field or be combined with GPS (at least at startup) to enable precise time transfer. We are currently researching the best way to calibrate the receivers for time transfer purposes.

4.4 Frequency Recovery

The benefits of common-view LORAN-C for frequency transfer will be evident primarily for long averaging times (many weeks and/or months). The primary benefit of common-view LORAN-C is the reduction of the seasonal component, which causes long term phase deviation on the order of a microsecond. By reducing this seasonal component, frequency users will see improved performance for long term averages. This is not evident in the initial data presented in this paper as the time periods used here are too short.

5.0 Conclusions

An investigation of common-view techniques for LORAN-C time and frequency transfer has been initiated by the LORAPP. The common-view technique can reduce the impact of the performance limiting seasonal variations that are evident in one-way LORAN-C timing measurements. An experimental network has been established to collect data and estimate the expected performance of common-view LORAN-C timing. The data collected so far show a best case performance of < 10 ns (RMS) over an extremely short baseline and < 50 ns (RMS) over a more typical common-view baseline.

We continue to collect data to improve our estimate of expected LORAN-C common-view performance. In addition, the common-view LORAN-C technique presents calibration challenges that have not yet been addressed. These issues will be documented in future papers based on the LORAPP work.

† *Products or companies named in this document are cited only in the interest of complete scientific description, and their mention neither constitutes nor implies endorsement by NIST or by the U.S. Government. Other products may be found to serve just as well.*

6.0 References

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Mr. Tom Celano
Timing Solutions Corporation
4775 Walnut St, Suite 1B
303 939 8481, FAX 303 443 5152
tpcelano@timing.com

LT Kevin Carroll
USCG LORAN Support Unit
12001 Pacific Avenue
Wildwood, NJ 08260-3232
609-523-7204, FAX 523-7264
kmcarroll@lsu.uscg.mil

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