Lecture 14
Unlicensed LPWANs

CS397/497 – Wireless Protocols for IoT

Branden Ghena – Winter 2023

Materials in collaboration
with Pat Pannuto (UCSD)

Administrivia

- Friday (Feb 24): WiFi Lab

- Wednesday (Mar 01): Cellular Homework
  - Last homework
  - Counts as double points

- This weekend: LoRa Lab

Today’s Goals

- Overview of unlicensed-band LPWAN approaches
  - LoRaWAN
  - Sigfox
  - 802.11ah
  - TV Whitespaces

Resources

- LoRaWAN
  - LoRaWAN Specification version 1.1
  - LoRaWAN Regional Parameters version 1.0.2

- Sigfox
  - Sigfox Technical Overview
  - IETF Descriptions
    - https://www.ietf.org/proceedings/97/slides/slides-97-lpwan-25-sigfox-system-description-00.pdf
    - https://tools.ietf.org/html/draft-zuniga-lpwan-sigfox-system-description-04

Outline

- **Wide-Area Network Background**

- Unlicensed LPWANs
  - LoRaWAN
  - Sigfox
  - 802.11ah
  - TV Whitespaces

Wide area networks

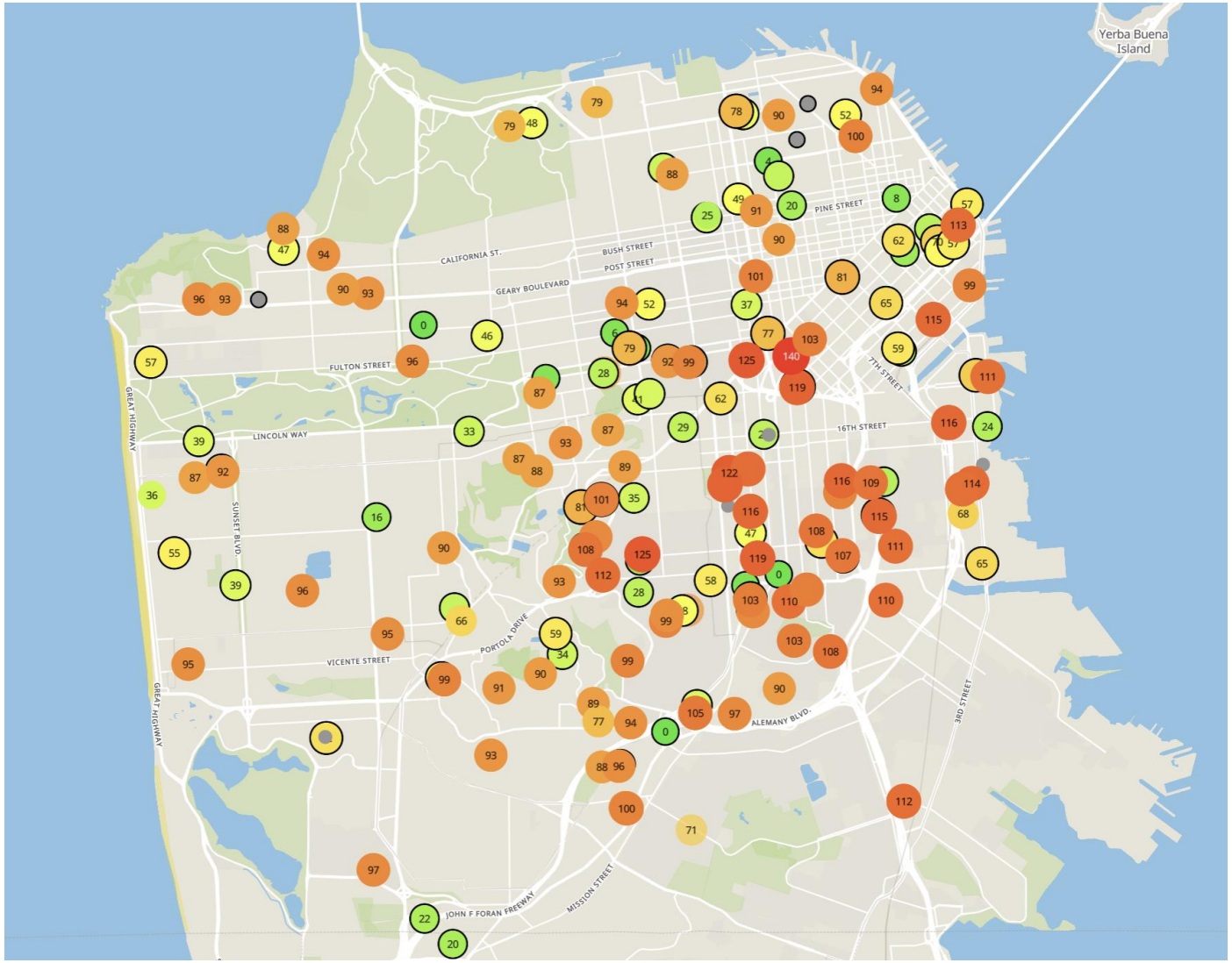
- Communication at the region/city scale rather than the building/residence scale
  - Throughout cities
  - Agricultural deployments
  - Industrial facilities

- City-scale sensing is one very popular domain
  - What might we want to sense throughout a city?

Example application: air quality monitoring

[1]

[2]



[2]

[1] Cheng et al. AirCloud: a cloud-based air-quality monitoring system for everyone. 2014.

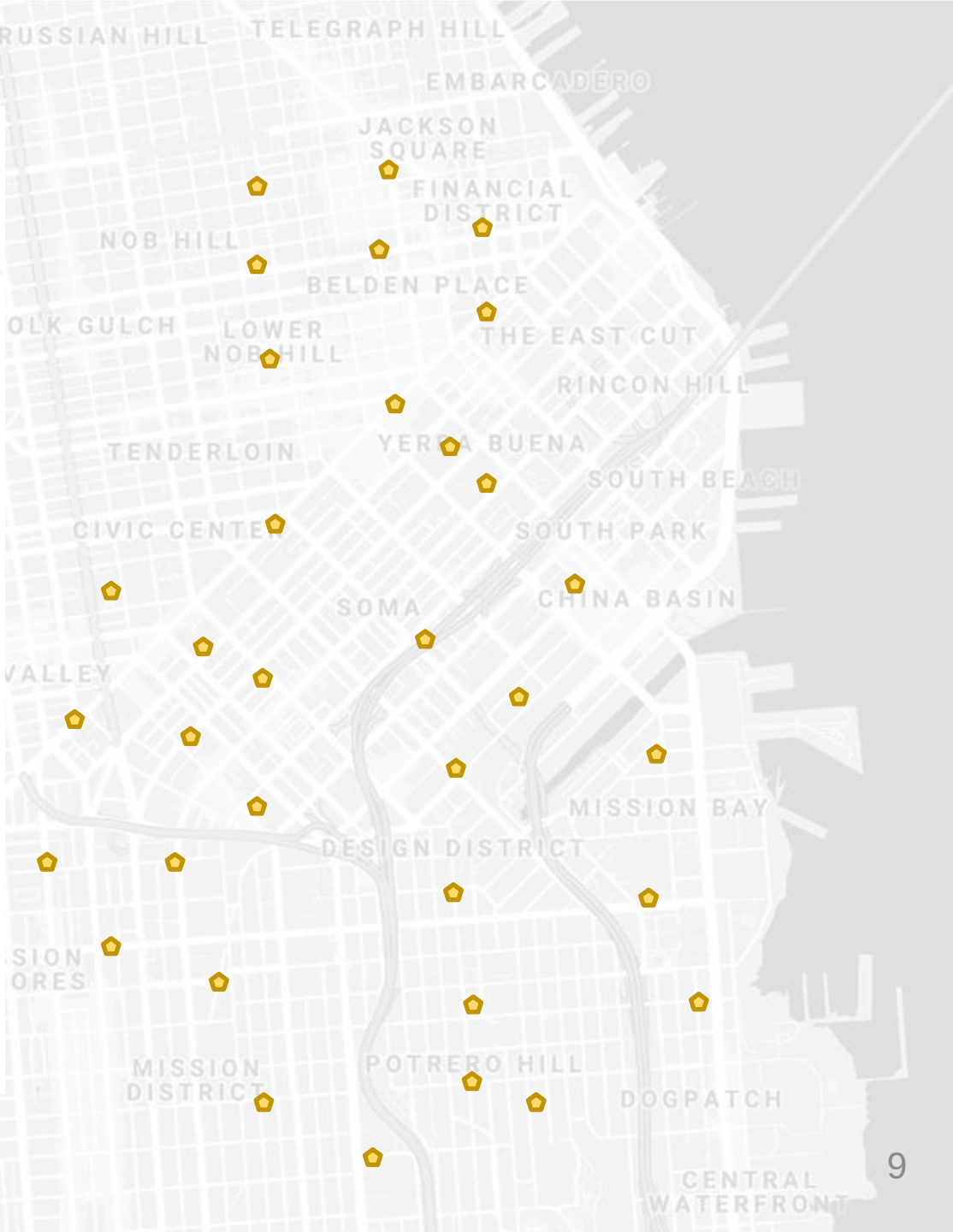
[2] Purple Air. 2019.

How do we collect data from a sensor?

- Manually collect measurements
- Connect it to WiFi (or Ethernet)
- Pay for cellular access

How do we collect data from MANY sensors?

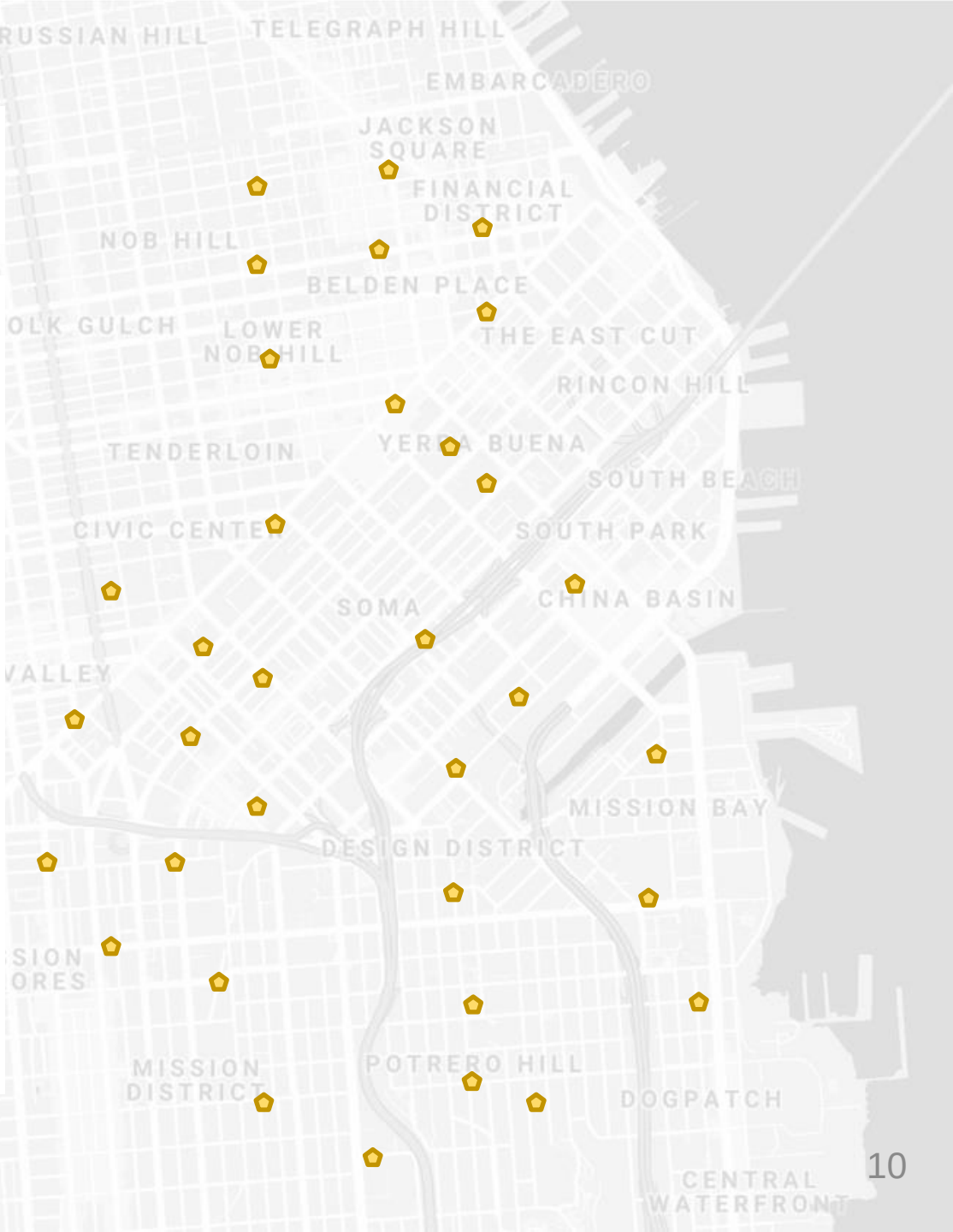
- Manually collect measurements
  - Too much work
- Connect it to WiFi (or Ethernet)
  - Too many separate networks
- Pay for cellular access
  - Too expensive for many devices



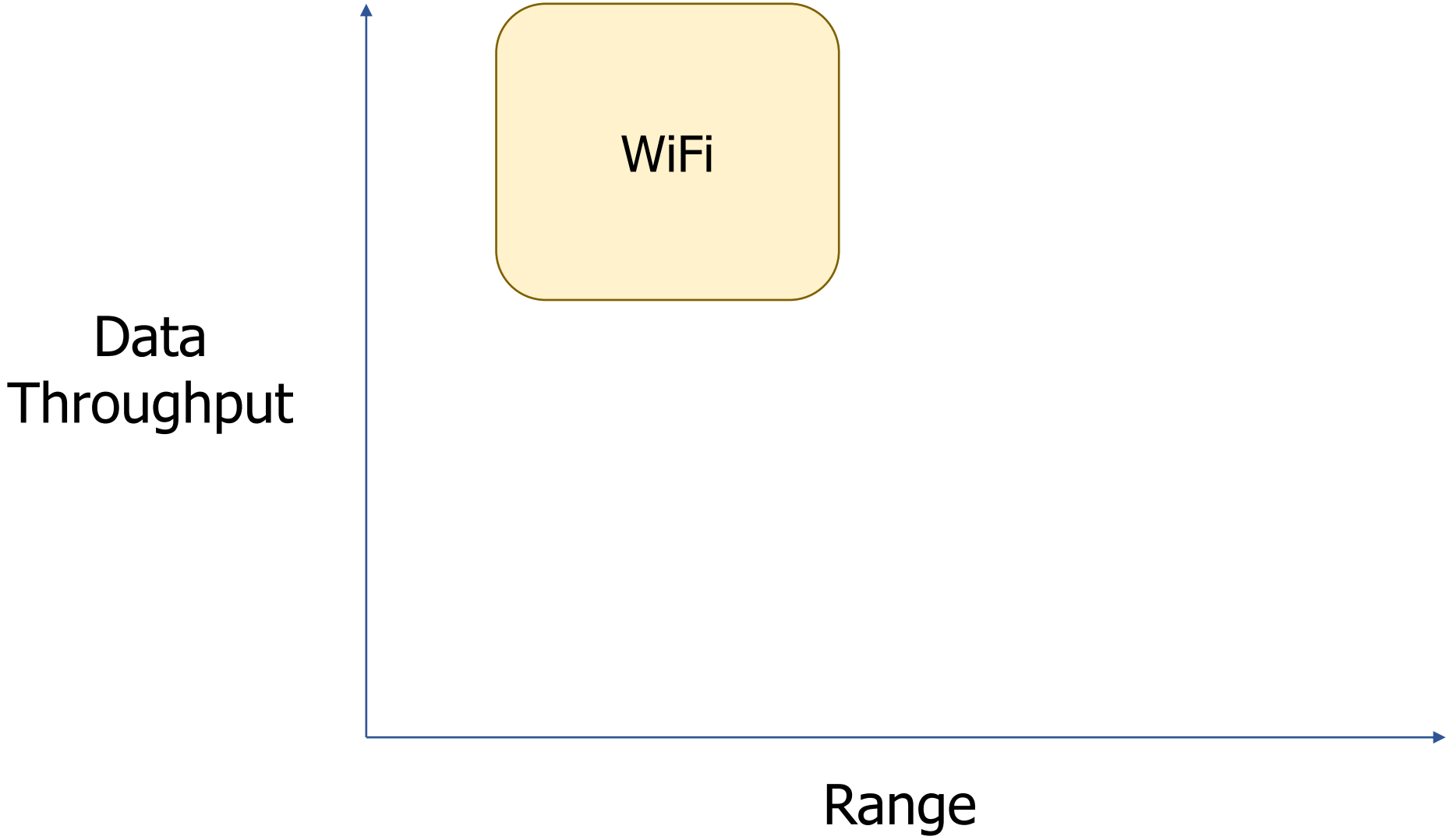
We need another network option

Requirements:

- Wide area of coverage
  - Deploy fewer gateways
- Low power
  - So we can deploy on batteries
- Doesn’t need high throughput
  - Sensor data is relatively small



Long-range, low-data needs haven’t historically been met



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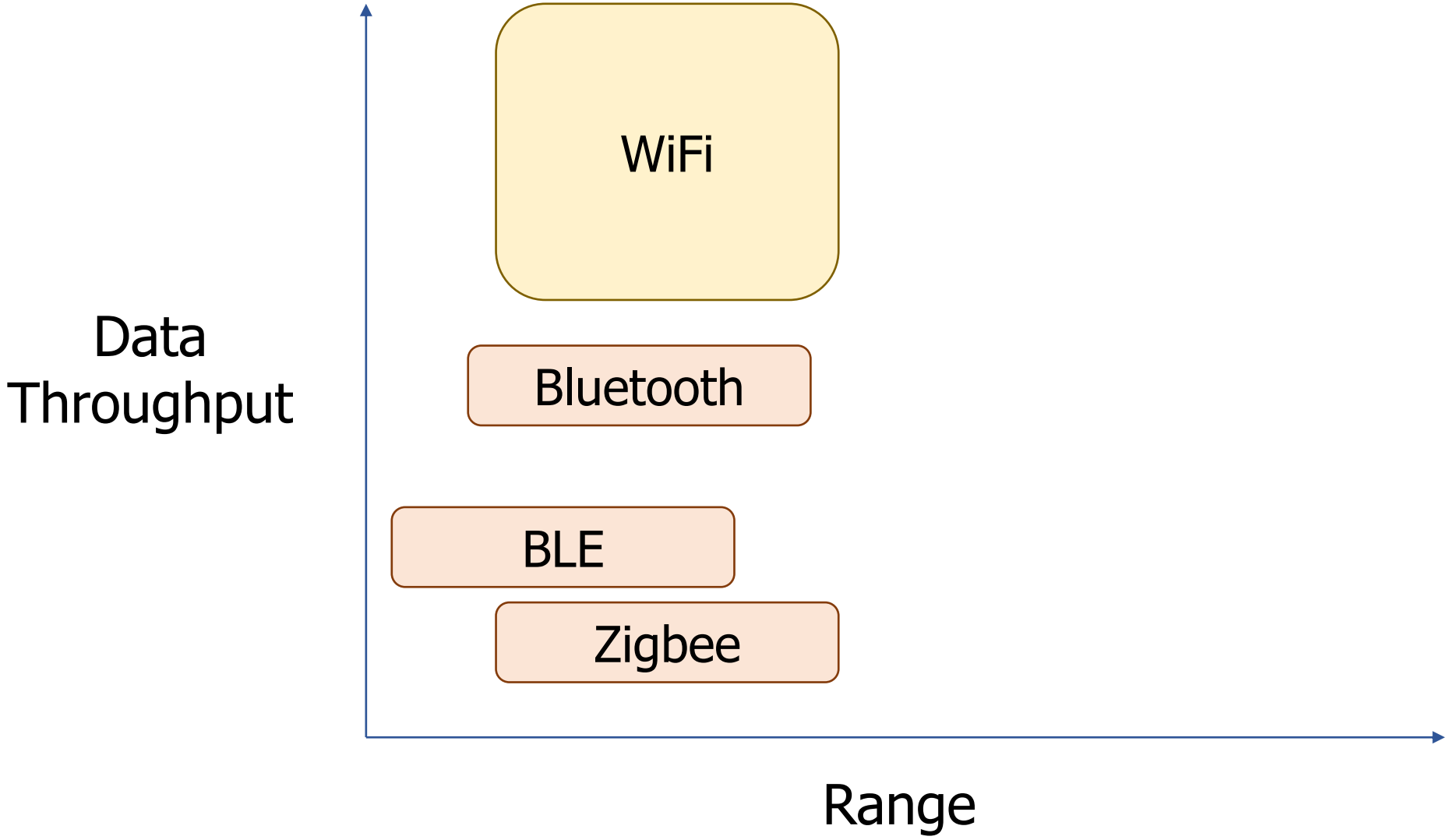

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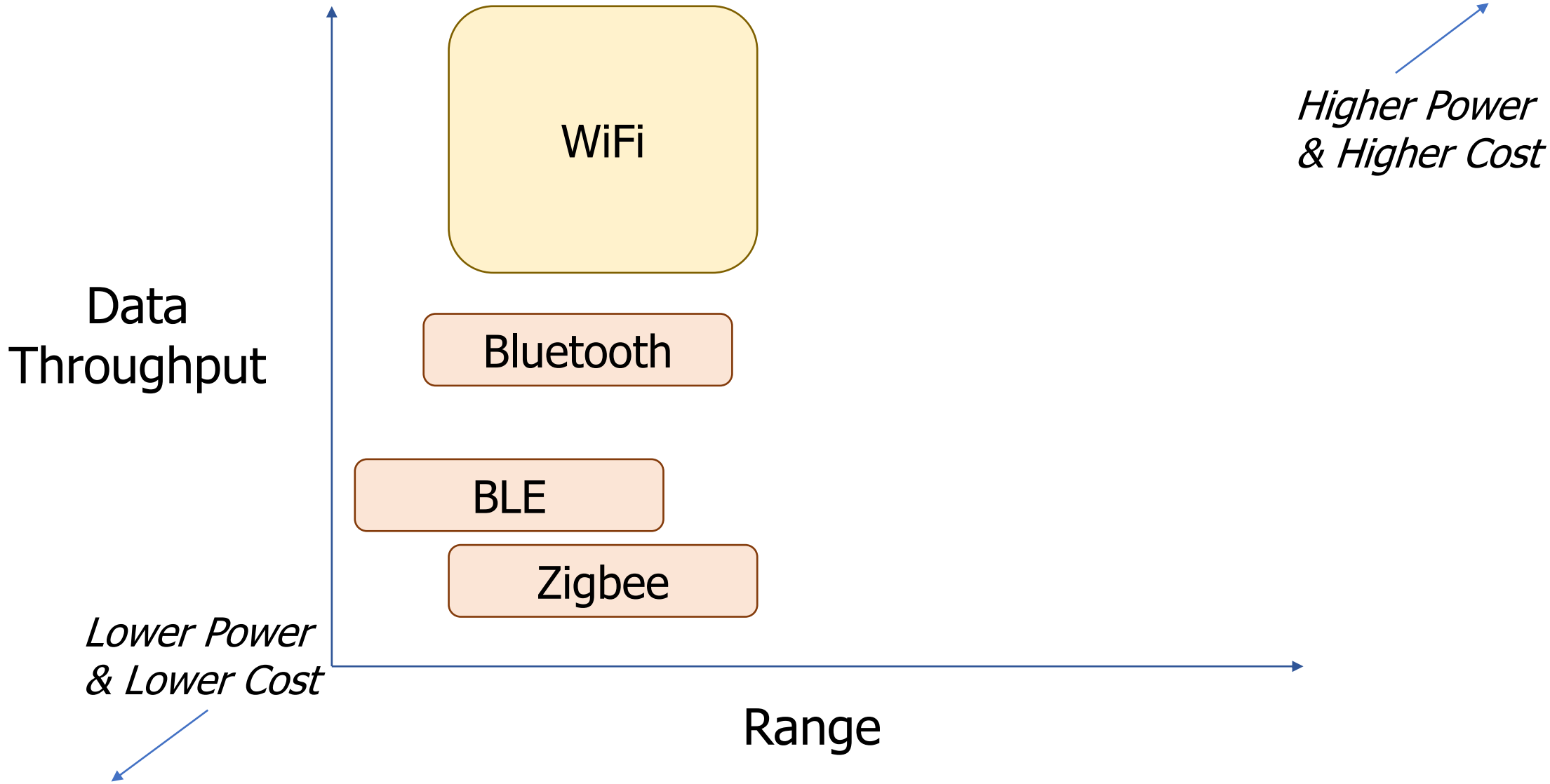

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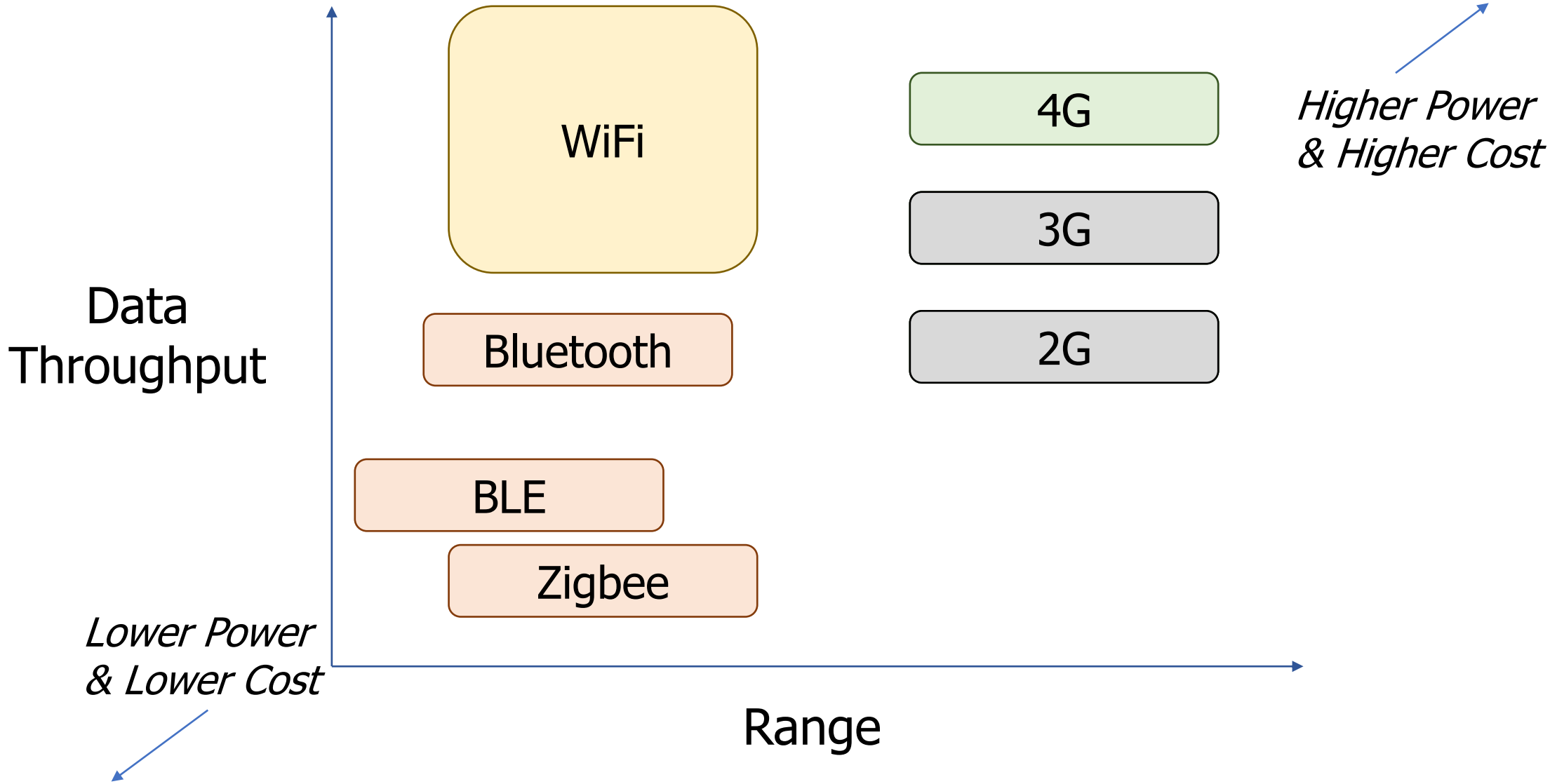

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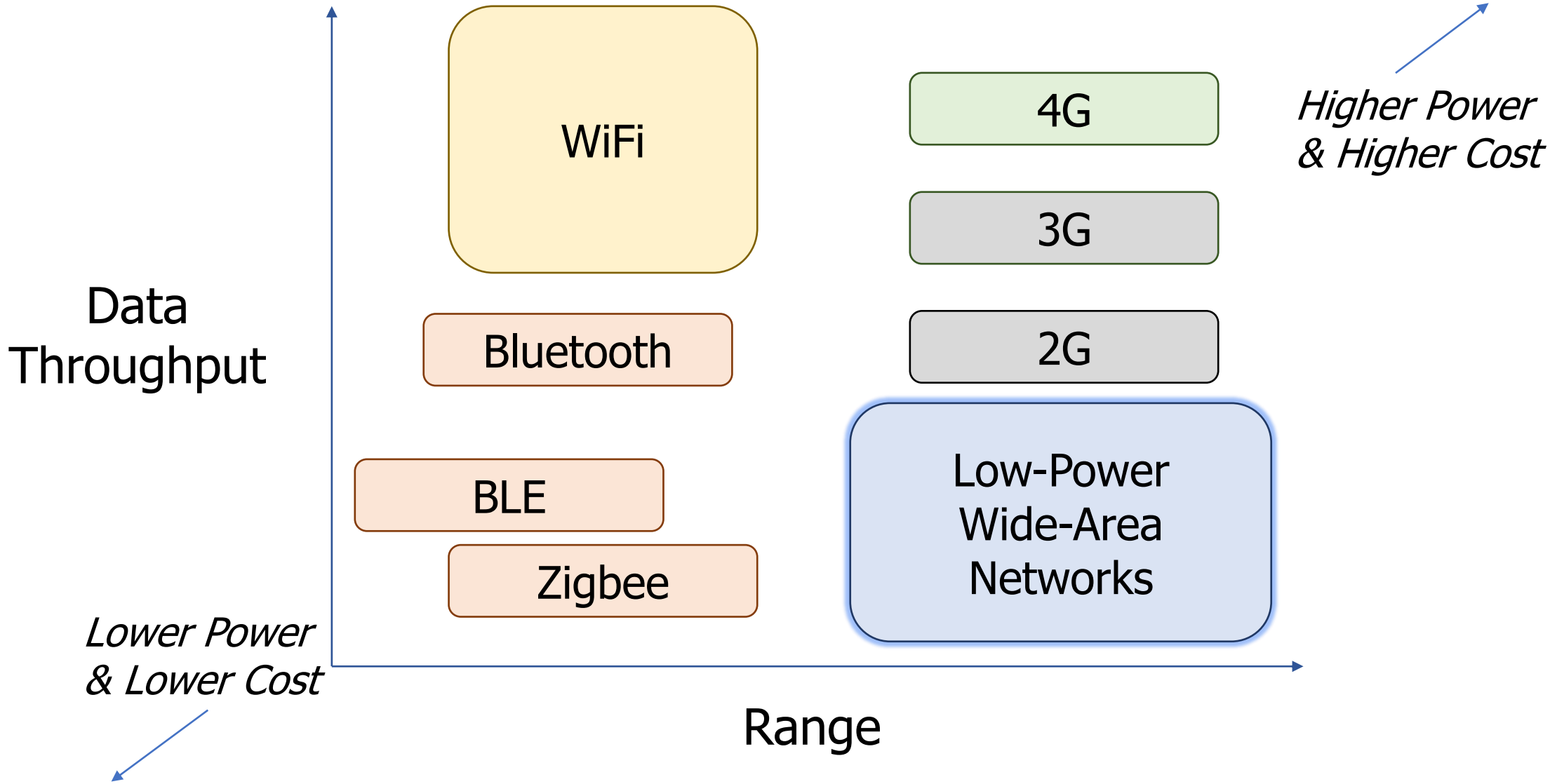


LPWANs overview (common qualities)

- Higher power transmissions: ~20 dBm (100 mW)
- Unlicensed 915 MHz band (902-928 MHz)
- Many channels to support lots of devices
- Low data rate 100 kbps or less
- Range on the order of multiple kilometers
- Simple Aloha access control

Outline

- Wide-Area Network Background

- **Unlicensed LPWANs**
  - **LoRaWAN**
  - Sigfox
  - 802.11ah
  - TV Whitespaces

LoRaWAN

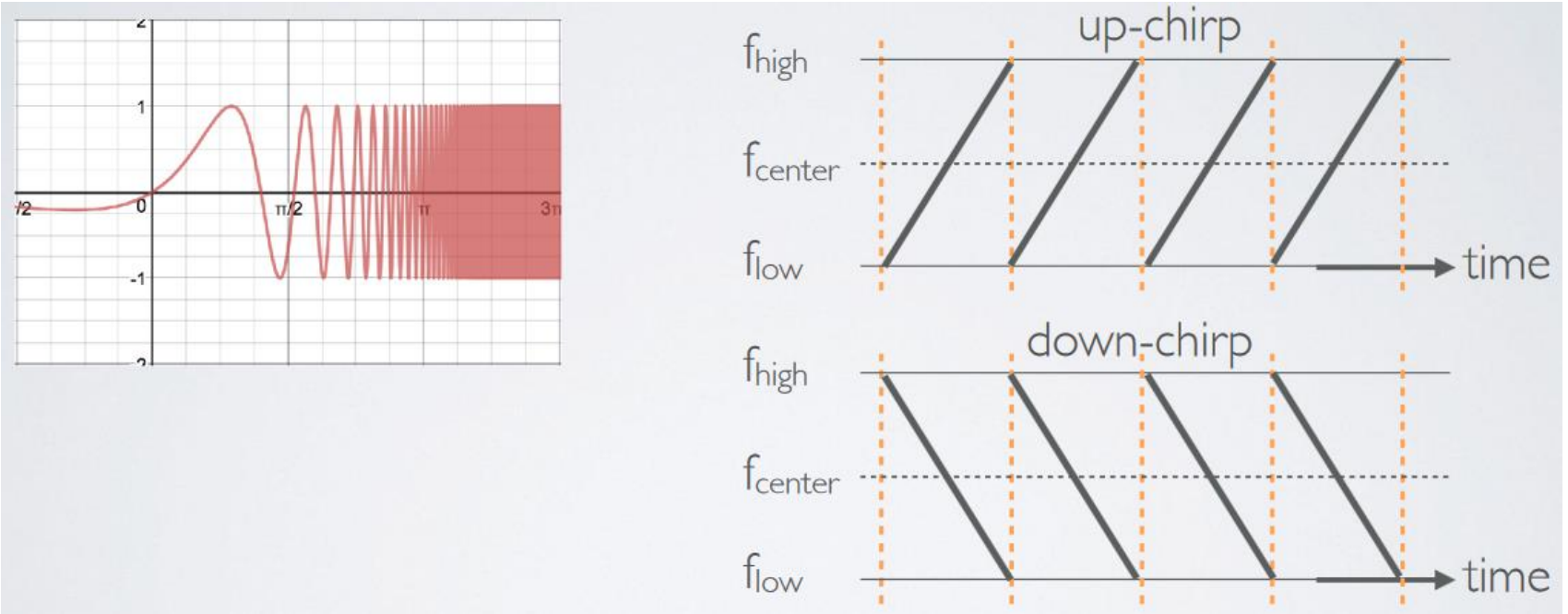
- Open communication standard built with proprietary LoRa PHY

- Low rate (1-20 kbps) and long range (~5 km)
  - Shorter range than Sigfox but much higher bit rate

- Most popular LPWAN protocol
  - Target of academic research
  - Industry involvement in hardware and deployments

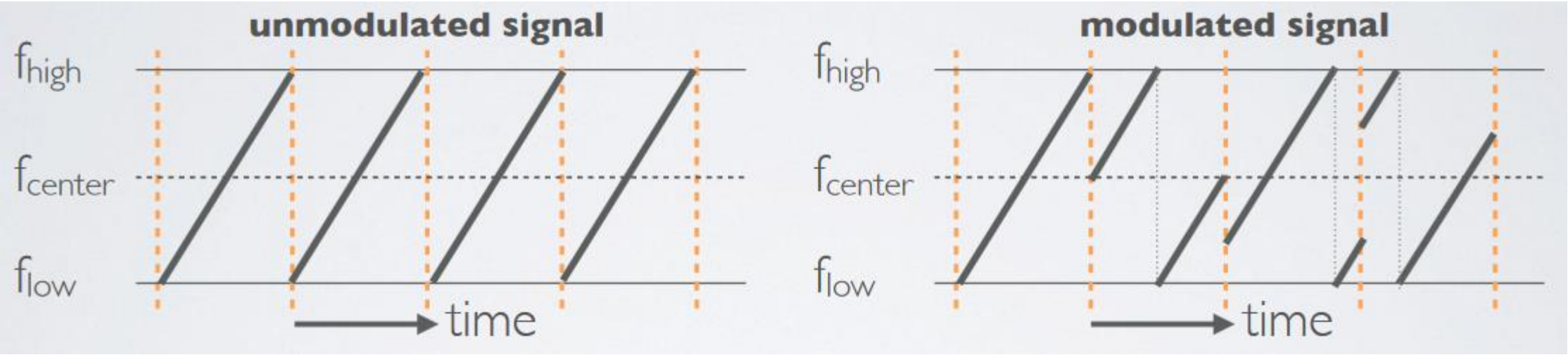
LoRa PHY uses a different modulation

- Chirp Spread Spectrum (CSS)
  - Modulation technique where frequency is varied linearly from lowest to highest within a channel



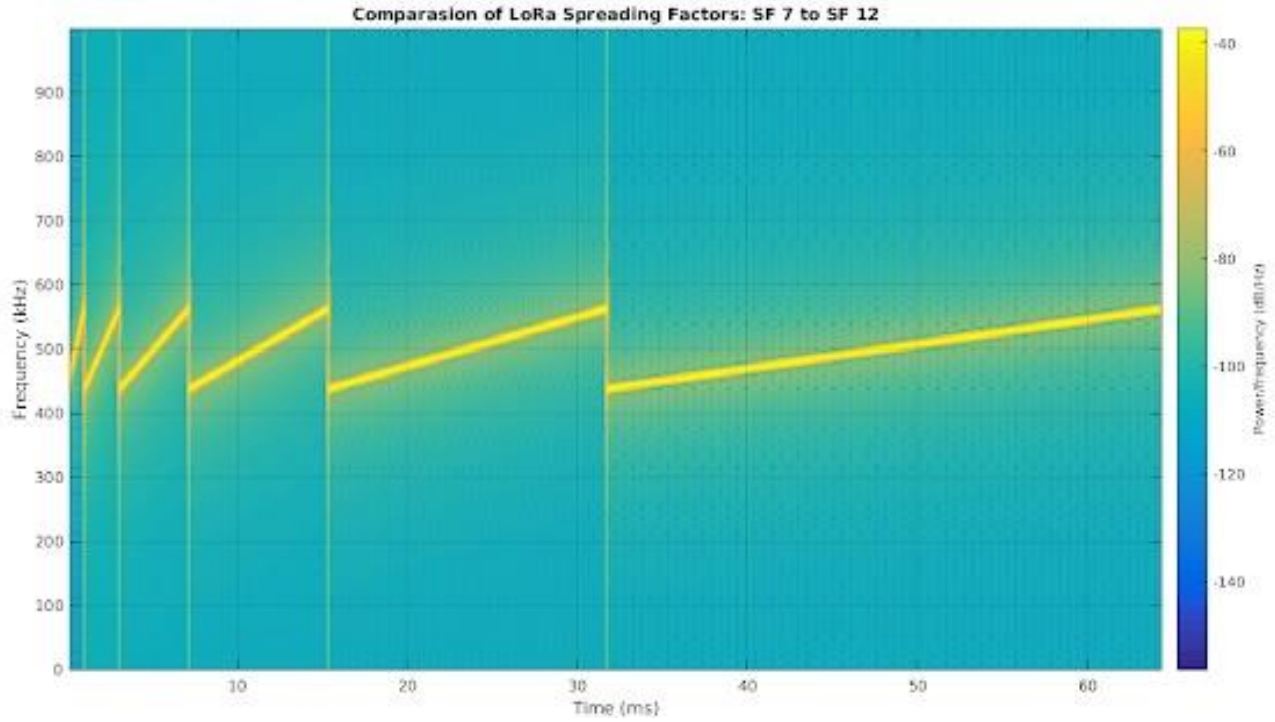
Chirp Spread Spectrum

- Data is modulated in the starting and ending points of chirp
  - Frequency increases linearly, modulo bounds of the channel

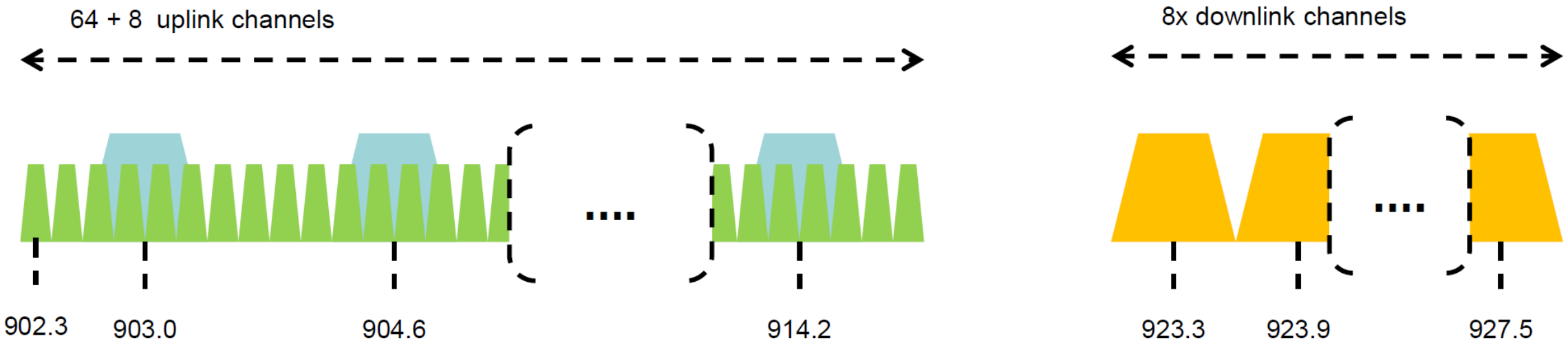


CSS has a Spreading Factor which determines bit rate

- Spreading Factor is essentially the rate-of-change of frequency
  - Slope of the line
  - Lower values of spreading factor (steeper slope) are faster data rate
- Important: different spreading factors are (mostly) orthogonal!
  - Two can overlap in time, space, and channel without a collision



LoRaWAN channels (in the US)



- Sixty-four, 125 kHz uplink channels
  - Frequency Hopping over the 64 uplink channels
  - Plus eight, 500 kHz overlapping uplink channels (not very used in practice)

- Eight, 500 kHz downlink channels

LoRaWAN data rates

- Data rate options depend on channel in use
  - Unbalanced uplink and downlink
- 64-channel uplink
  - 1-5 kbps data rate
- Allowable rates based on US dwell time restriction (400 ms)
  - Different in different regions

Data Rate Index	**Spreading Factor**	**Bit Rate**
125 kHz Uplink Rates		
0	SF10, 125 kHz	980 bps
1	SF9, 125 kHz	1760 bps
2	SF8, 125 kHz	3125 bps
3	SF7, 125 kHz	5470 bps
500 kHz Uplink Rates		
4	SF8, 500 kHz	12500 bps
500 kHz Downlink Rates		
8	SF12, 500 kHz	980 bps
9	SF11, 500 kHz	1760 bps
10	SF10, 500 kHz	3900 bps
11	SF9, 500 kHz	7000 bps
12	SF8, 500 kHz	12500 bps
13	SF7, 500 kHz	21900 bps

LoRaWAN link budget

- Typical TX power 20 dBm
  - Up to 30 dBm for 64-channel hopping
  - Up to 26 dBm for 8-channel hopping
- Receive sensitivity -119 dBm
  - Compare to -100 dBm for 802.15.4 and -95 dBm for BLE
- Resulting range is about a kilometer in urban environments

LoRaWAN gateways

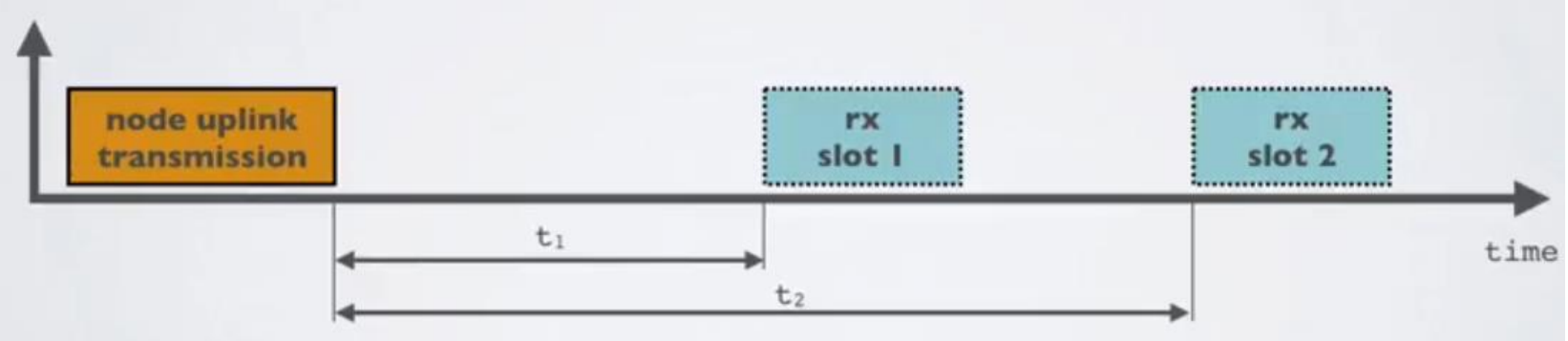
- No synchronization with end devices

- Instead listen to entire bandwidth simultaneously
  - Only 12 MHz total
  - Recognize preambles and allocate hardware to decode packet
    - Cheap gateways: 8 decoders
    - Good gateways: 64 decoders

LoRaWAN MAC

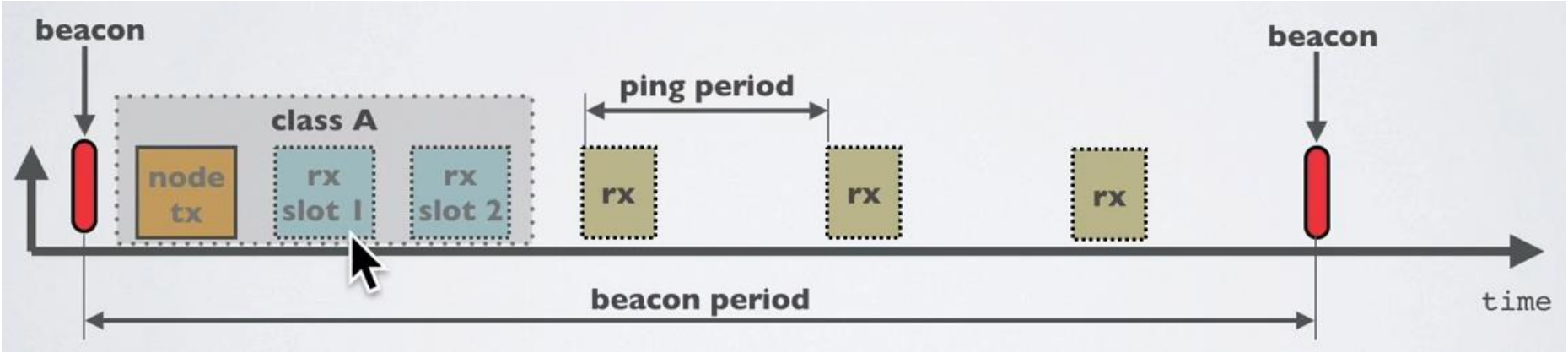
- Uplink: Aloha - transmit whenever
  - Randomly split across 64 uplink channels (reduced odds of collision)
  - Devices a different spreading factors also do not collide
  - Packets are very long though: up to 400 ms in duration

- Downlink: listen-after-send (class A device)
  - Two windows for RX on different channels



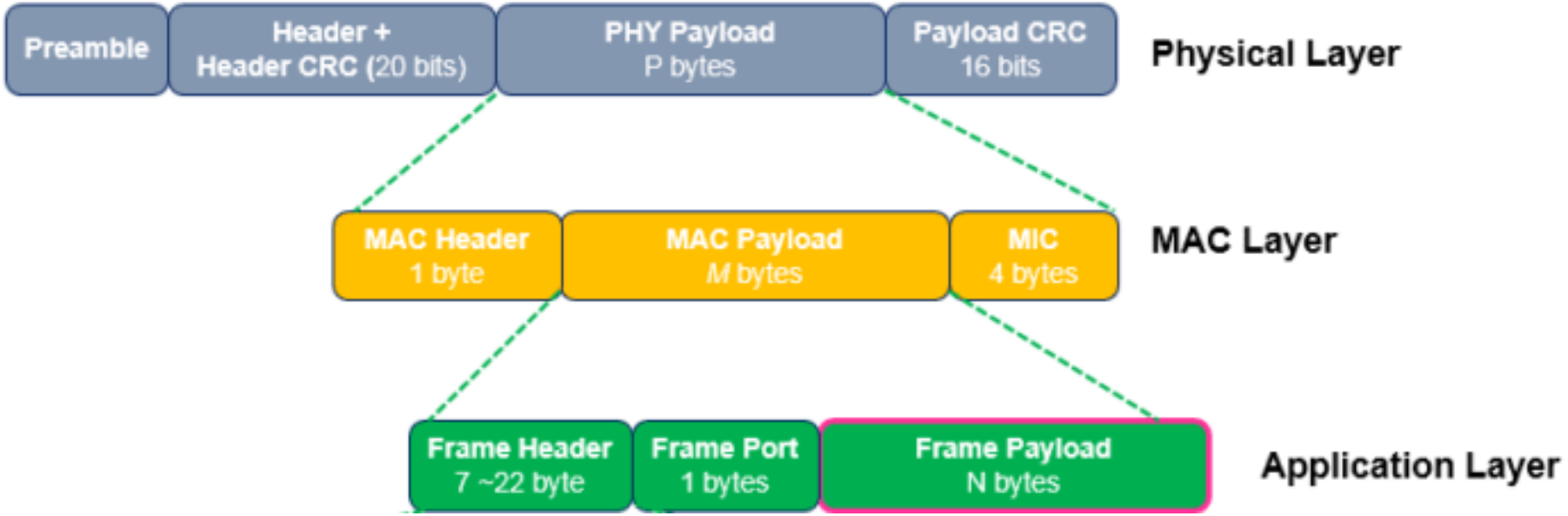
Optional downlink mechanisms

- Periodic listening (class B device)
  - Synchronized with periodic beacons
    - TX still unsynchronized Aloha
  - Mostly unused



- Continuous listening (class C device)
  - Always-on receivers

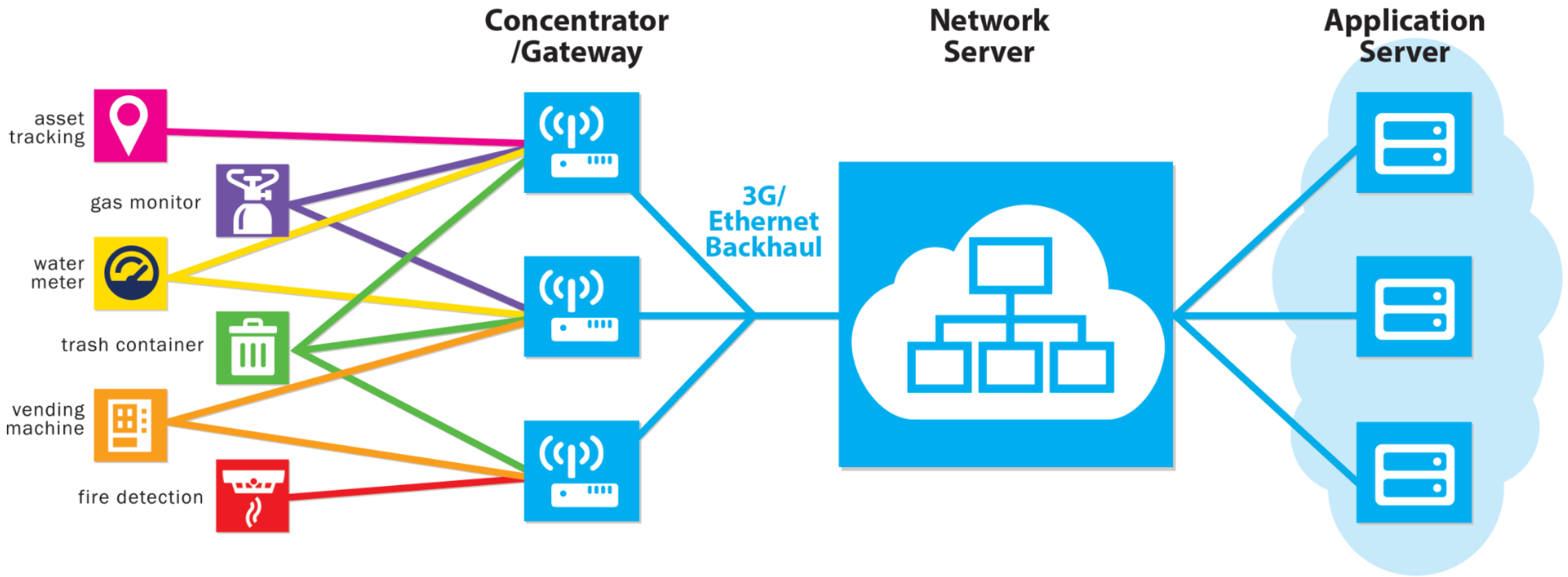
LoRaWAN packet format



- Frame header includes device address
- MAC Payload maximum size depends on data rate
  - Again based on dwell time in the US

Data Rate Index	MAC Payload Size
0	19 bytes
1	61 bytes
2	133 bytes
3	250 bytes
4	250 bytes

LoRaWAN network details



LoRaWAN hardware

- Numerous hardware modules and development kits
  - Almost all use Semtech radio chips (Semtech owns LoRa PHY)

- Recent addition: STM32WLE5 LoRa SoC
  - Cortex-M4 + LoRa radio (analogous to nRF52840)

LoRaWAN network providers

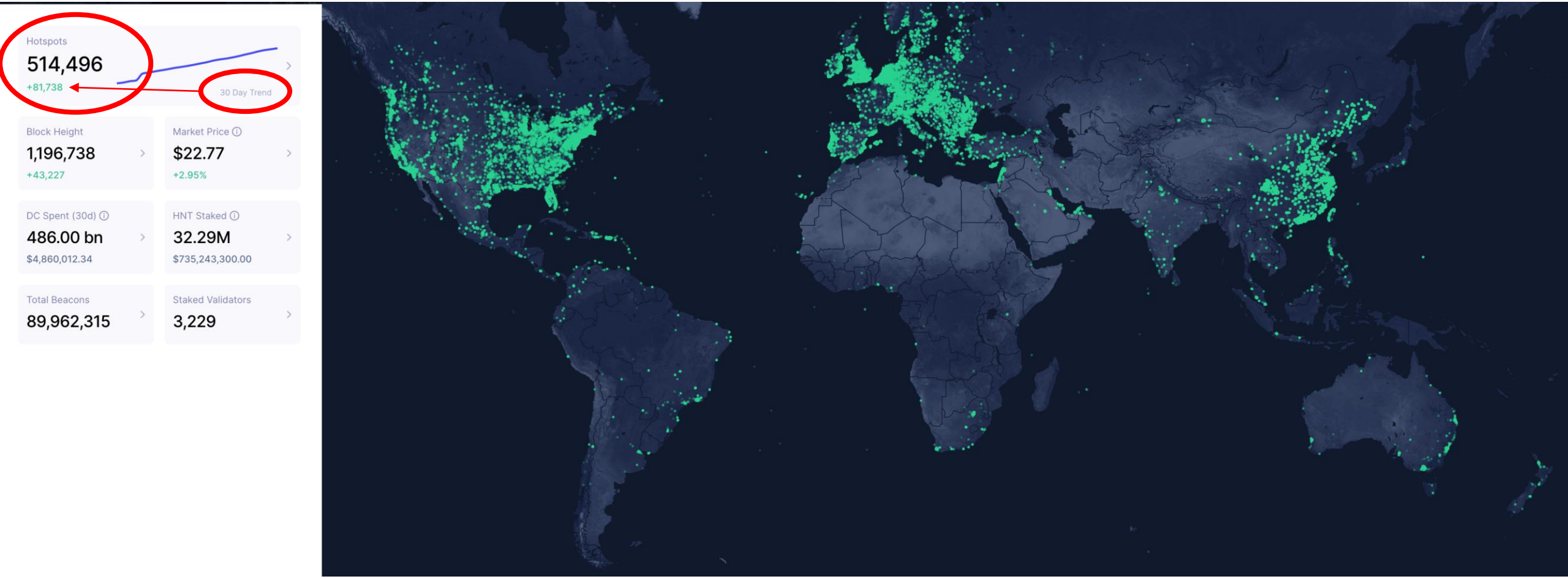
- You can always manage your own network
  - Buy a gateway and run whatever backend software you want

- Somewhat-managed network providers
  - The Things Network (predominantly in Europe)
    - But available in the US too!
  - Helium
    - Anyone can buy and install their own gateway, which serves everyone
    - Microtransactions to pay for communication

TTN Scale [Jan 2022]

- About 97000 devices in Feb 2023

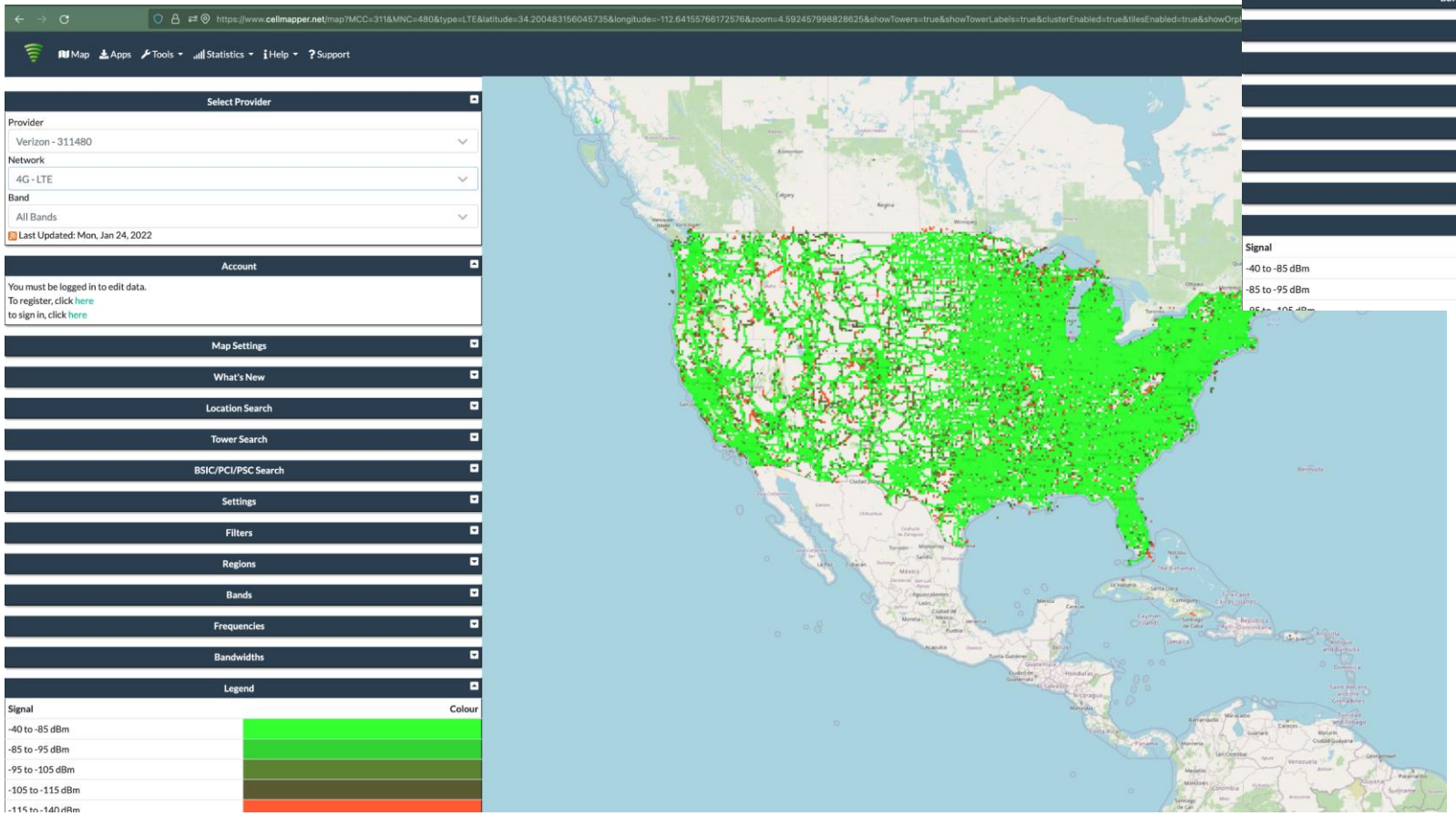
Helium Scale [Jan 2022]

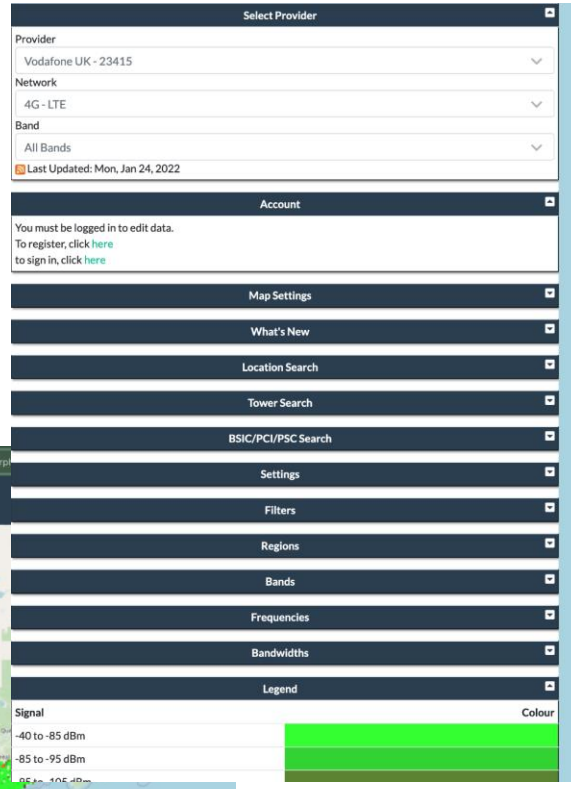


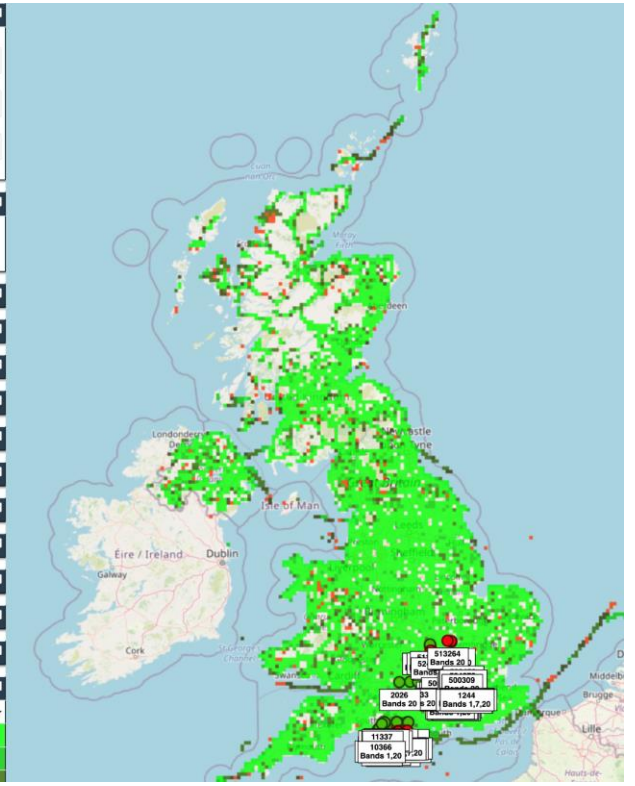
May 2022: 800,000 hotspots, with +80K in last 30 days
Feb 2023: 980,000 hotspots, with +3K in last 30 days

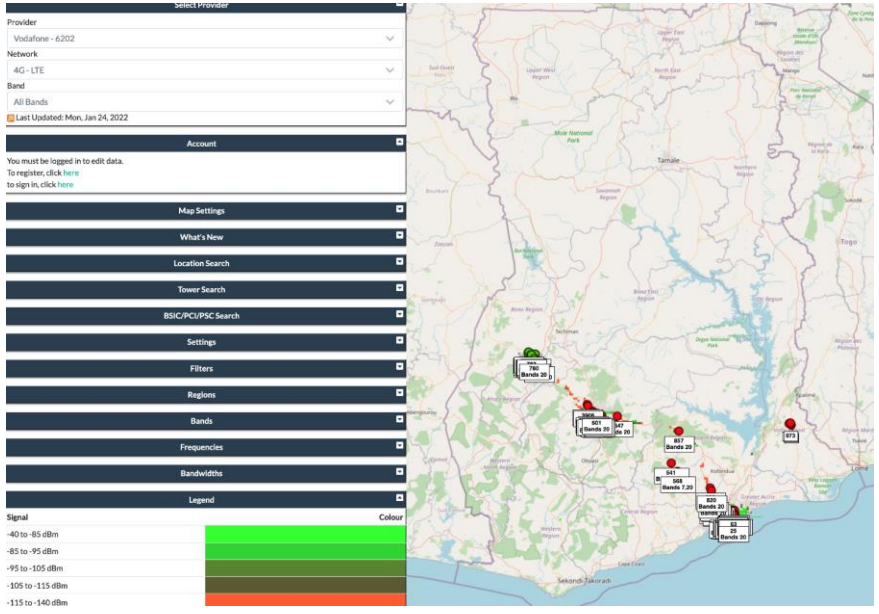
Quick reality check: Cellular?

- ~350,000 sites across ~150,000 towers
  - In the just US









LoRaWAN interested parties

- MachineQ is a subsidiary of Comcast providing LoRaWAN networks

- Long-term goal
  - Indoor-to-outdoor LoRaWAN gateways combined with WiFi/Cellular
  - Tune down power for 100-200 meter range

- Current focus: IoT Platform-as-a-service
  - Devices, network, analytics

Break + Open Question

- What kinds of use cases exist for LoRaWAN?
  - What can you do with 1-5 kbps uplink, 1-22 kbps downlink?
  - Multiplied by 64 channels uplink, 8 channels downlink

Break + Open Question

- What kinds of use cases exist for LoRaWAN?
  - What can you do with 1-5 kbps uplink, 1-22 kbps downlink?
  - Multiplied by 64 channels uplink, 8 channels downlink
- Outdoor small-sized sensing seems possibly achievable!
  - With a low enough rate, it could support **many** devices
- Code updates on devices could be tough

Outline

- Wide-Area Network Background

- **Unlicensed LPWANs**
  - LoRaWAN
  - **Sigfox**
  - 802.11ah
  - TV Whitespaces

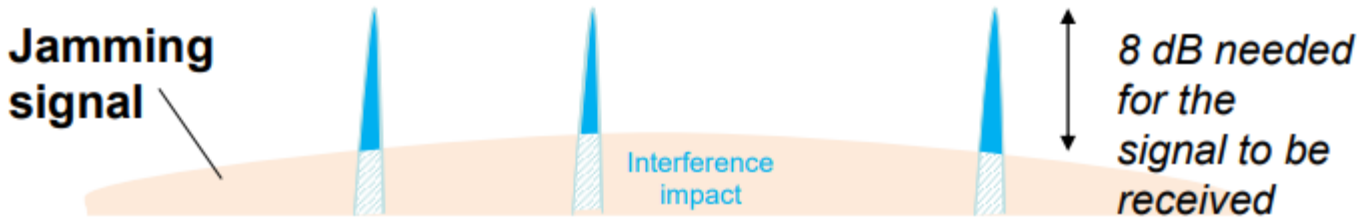
Sigfox

- Very low-rate (600 bps), very long-range (10+ km) communication
- Star-topology networks, with always-listening gateways
  - Any number of low-power end devices
- Uplink-focused communication
- Applications: very low-rate metering

Sigfox PHY

- Unlicensed-band communication
  - Europe 868 MHz. US 902-928 MHz (915 MHz band)

- Ultra-narrowband 600 Hz (100 Hz Europe) channel bandwidth
  - Detection only needs to occur at very specific frequency
  - Helps improve signal-to-noise ratio



Sigfox unbalanced uplink and downlink

- Uplink
  - 600 Hz bandwidth, 600 bps, DBPSK
- Downlink
  - 1.5 kHz bandwidth, 600 bps, GFSK

- Particularly designed for Europe
  - Uplink on 1% duty cycle channel, up to 14 dBm
  - Downlink on 10% duty cycle channel, up to 27 dBm

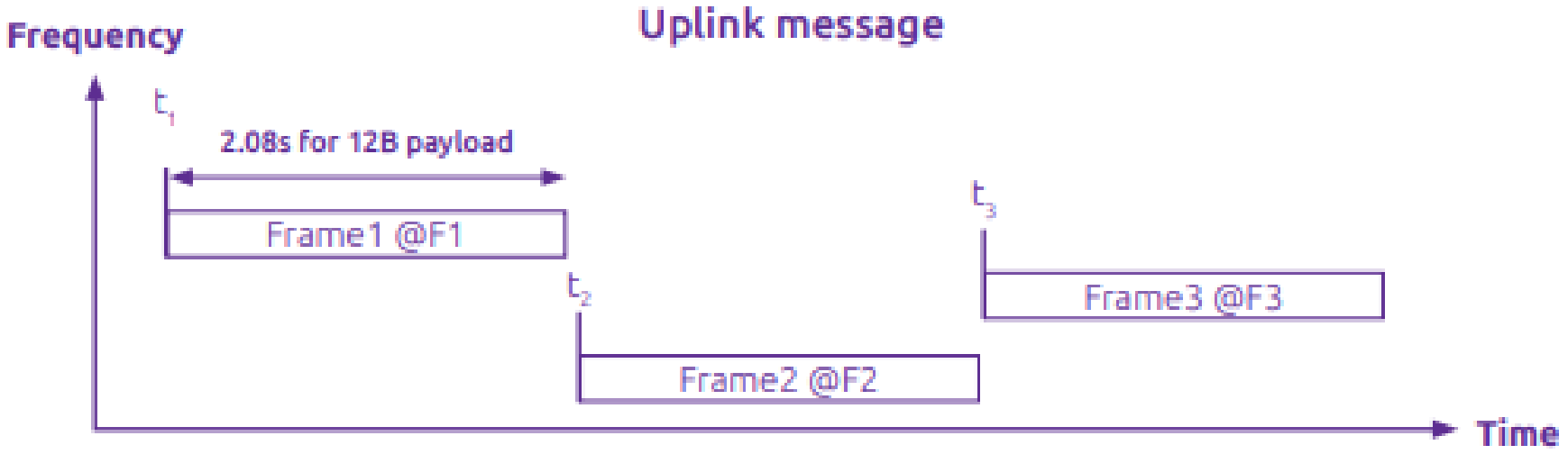
- Works fine in US too
  - Gets more power (24 dBm up is typical, up to 32 dBm down) and more range

Sigfox link budget

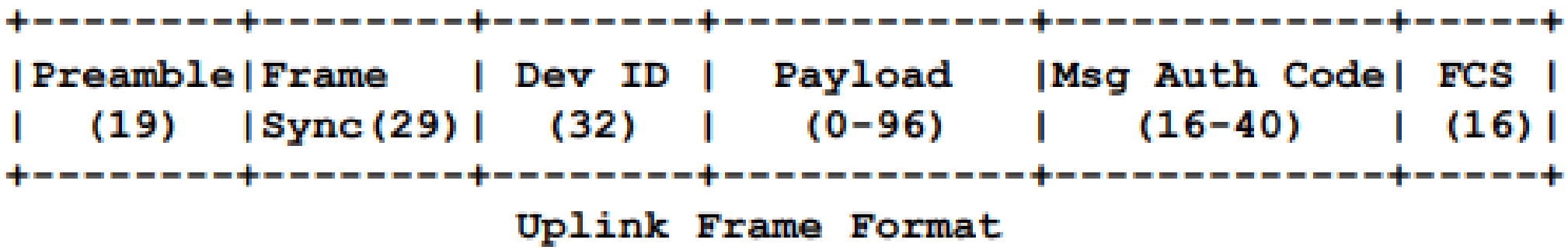
- Why transmit at 100-600 bps?
  - For greatly increased link budget
- Link budget: 150-160 dBm
  - Assuming Tx at ~20 dBm
  - Means Rx Sensitivity of -130 dBm (10 dBm better than LoRaWAN)
- Resulting range: 10-15 km in urban environments
  - Except that buildings lead to dead spots in range

Sigfox MAC

- Aloha-style access control (send whenever)
  - No acknowledgements!
- Send message three times for increased reliability
  - Then listen for downlink at a set period later on a known frequency



Sigfox uplink packet



Uplink Frame Format

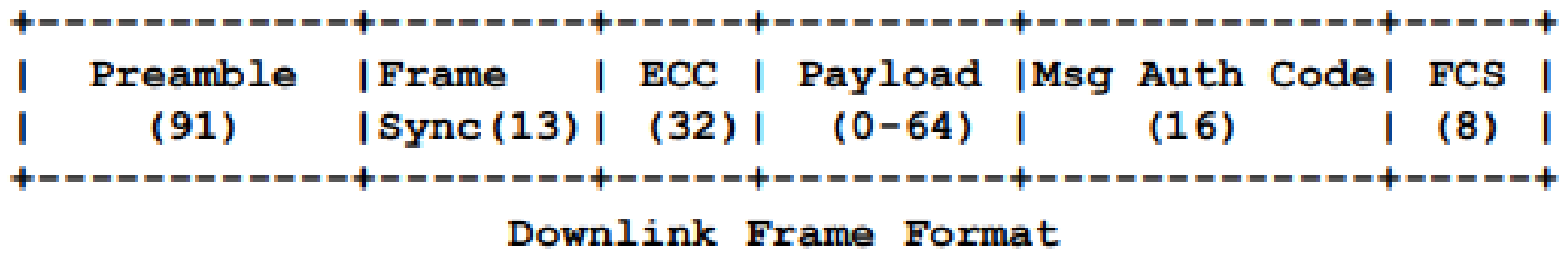
- Up to 29 bytes total per packet
  - Payload: up to **12 bytes** 😱
- Other fields
  - Preamble + Frame Sync are really a 6 byte field for radio sync
  - Authentication: 2-5 bytes
  - Frame Check Sequence: 16-bit CRC

Aside: why faster bitrate in the US?

- Packet size up to 29 bytes (232 bits)
  - At 100 bps: 2.32 seconds on air
  - At 600 bps: 0.387 seconds on air

- Maximum dwell time for 915 MHz band: 400 ms

Sigfox downlink packet



Downlink Frame Format

- Similar structure, 28 bytes total
  - Payload: up to 8 bytes
- Larger preamble + frame sync of 13 bytes
- Error Correcting Code for increased reliability

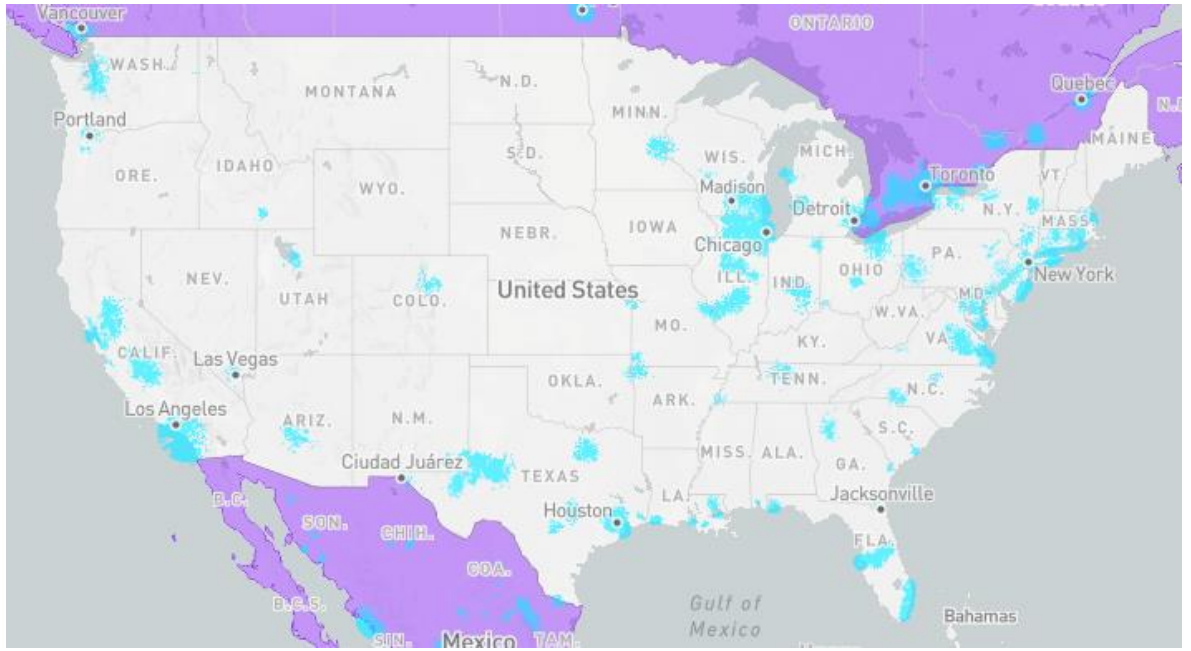
Sigfox deployments

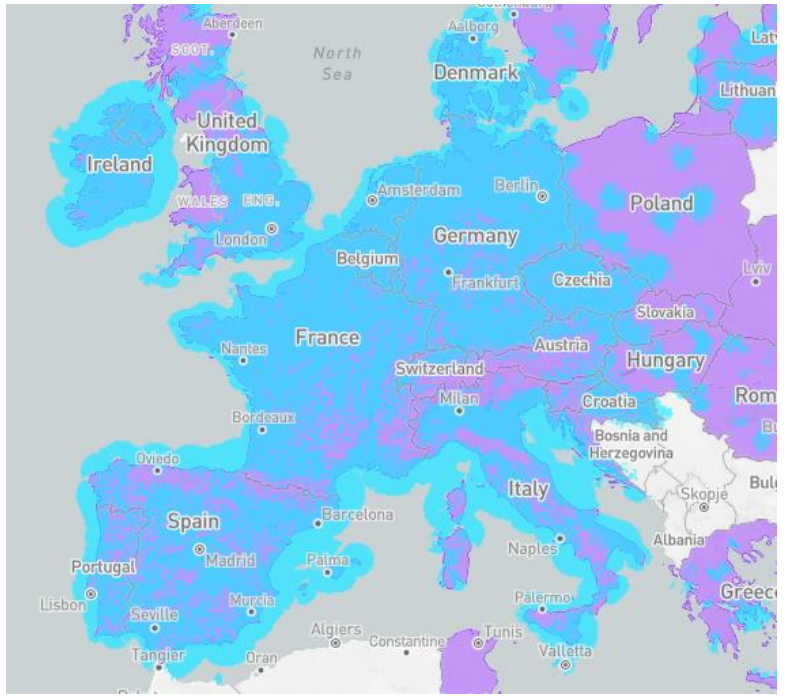
- Proprietary network with managed deployment
  - Like cellular networks
  - Sigfox deploys networks and transports data
  - 140 uplink messages plus 4 downlink message per day

- Connectionless communication
  - Devices are registered with the networks
  - Keys are provided in the software image
  - Any deployed Sigfox gateway can collect transmitted data
    - Enables mobile applications

Sigfox coverage (Spring 2022)

- Not focused on US coverage right now (coverage is blue)
  - Much higher availability in Europe
  - No longer planned rollout in US (purple)
- January 2022
  - Sigfox filed for bankruptcy
- April 2022
  - Sigfox purchased by UnaBiz





Break + Open Question

- What kinds of use cases exist for Sigfox?
  - What can you do with 600 bps uplink, 600 bps downlink?
  - Multiplied by ?hundreds? of channels (~400 in Europe)

Break + Open Question

- What kinds of use cases exist for Sigfox?
  - What can you do with 600 bps uplink, 600 bps downlink?
  - Multiplied by ?hundreds? of channels (~400 in Europe)

- **Many** devices that aren't doing very much
  - Simple status monitoring (water, electric, etc.)
    - Not metering necessarily, but activity detection
    - Did a breaker trip?, is water flowing?, etc.

- Definitely no code updates

Outline

- Wide-Area Network Background

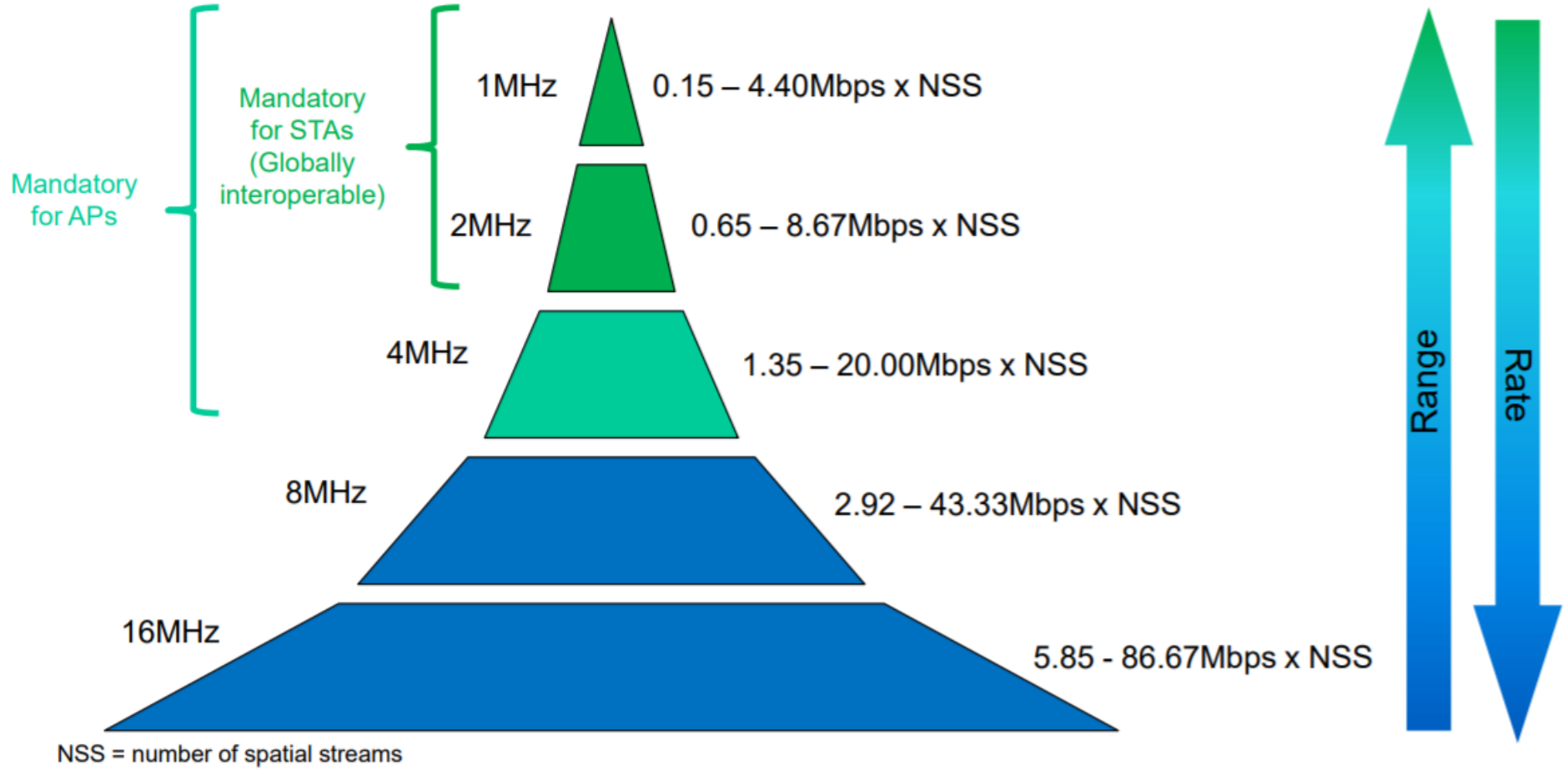
- **Unlicensed LPWANs**
  - LoRaWAN
  - Sigfox
  - **802.11ah**
  - TV Whitespaces

IEEE standard for LPWANs

- 802.11ah (HaLow) standard in 2016
  - First real hardware in 2020
  - Still not in real-world use yet
- Focus on the indoor-to-outdoor scenario
  - Medium range (maximum 1 km)
- 915 MHz communication
  - **NOT** interoperable with other 802.11 access points and devices
- Theoretically up to 356 Mbps
  - Practically, most devices are expected to implement 150 kbps to 8 Mbps

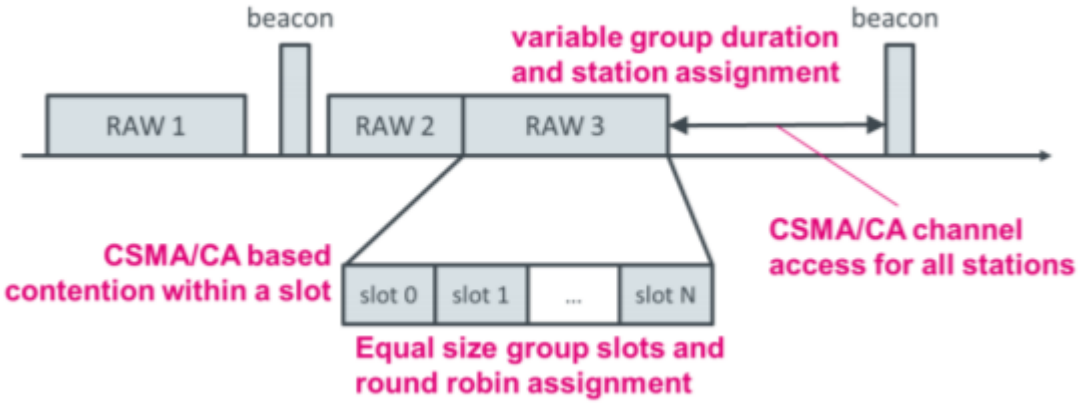
802.11ah allows multiple bandwidth allocations

- Expected throughput vs. coverage



802.11ah architecture

- Star topology
  - Up to 8191 devices per access point



- Devices are assigned to a group
  - Groups are scheduled slots with TDMA
  - Within a slot CSMA/CA is used for contention among devices
  - Devices not in the group can sleep until their slot

- Traditional IP communication on top of that
  - And traditional 802.11 security mechanisms (WPA2/TLS)

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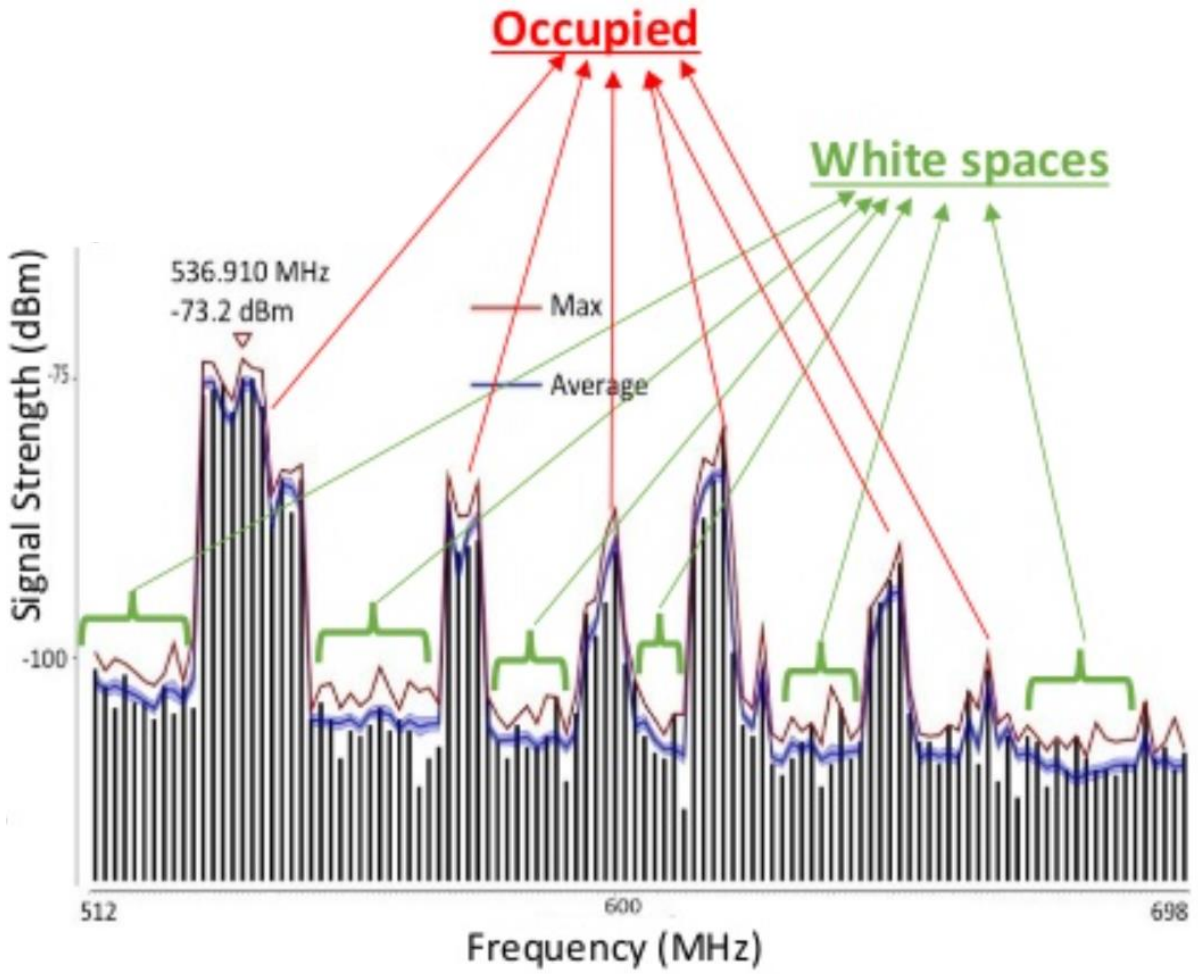
TV whitespaces

- Unused TV channels between 54 MHz and 698 MHz
  - VHF (54-216 MHz)
  - UHF (470-698 MHz)
  - 6 MHz channel width
- Allocated but unused
  - FCC allows unlicensed use
  - **IF** you do not interfere with primary users



Sensing channel use

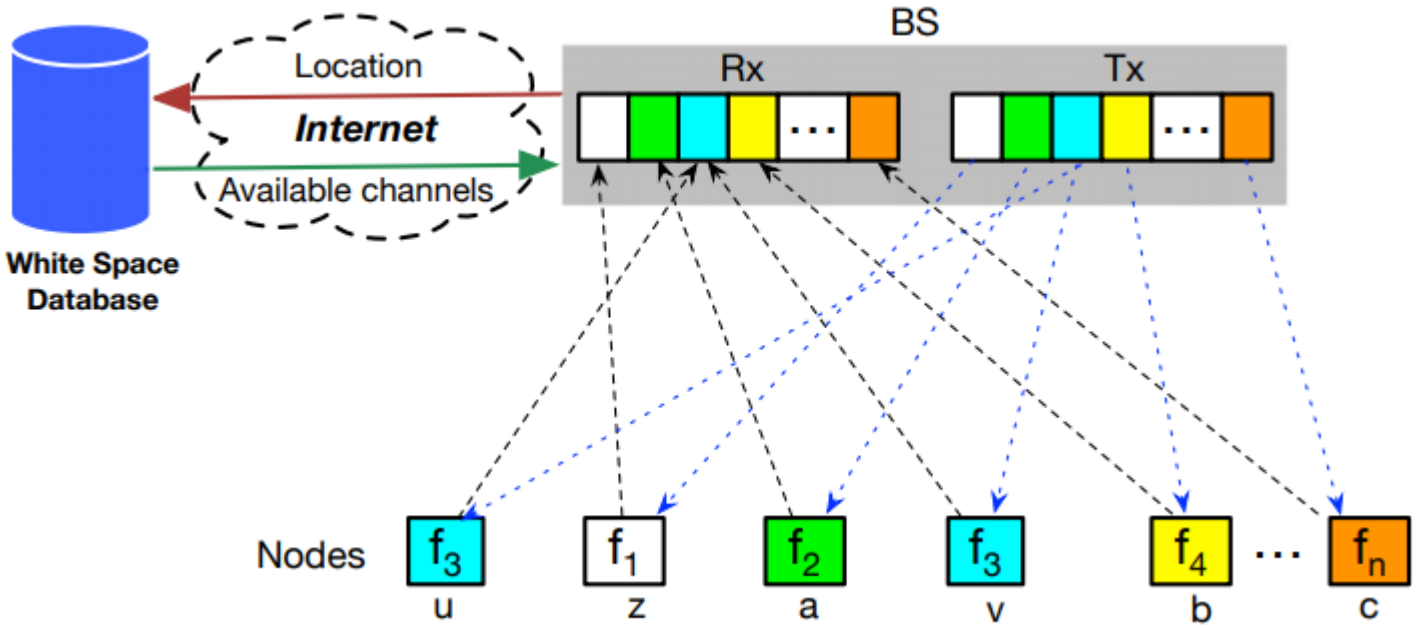
- Variation in use
  - Spatial: Cannot assume same channel will be free everywhere
  - Temporal: Cannot assume channel will be free at all times
- Cognitive radio approach
  - Dynamically identify unused portions of spectrum
- Database approach
  - Let someone else do the scanning. Consult database based on location and time

802.11af

- IEEE standard for whitespaces circa 2014
  - Not much (any?) use to date
- US/Canada-specific
  - Limits general-purpose product appeal
- Requires infrastructure about whitespace availability
  - People are figuring this out, but not really available yet
  - [n.b. very active area of research; including here]

Sensor Networks Over tv Whitespaces (SNOW)

- A design for sensor networks over whitespaces
  - Base Station manages channel for deployment
  - Frequency division for devices. Each uplinks on separate subcarrier
  - Downlink is one OFDM transmission. Each device hears its frequency



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