

IEEE 802.3 Ethernet Working Group
DRAFT Liaison Communication

Source: IEEE 802.3 Working Group¹

To: Antonio Castano Chair, SDM4 MCF MSA
[REDACTED]

CC: Alpesh Shah Secretary, IEEE-SA Standards Board
Secretary, IEEE-SA Board of Governors
[REDACTED]

James Gilb Chair, IEEE 802 LMSC
[REDACTED]

Adam Healey Vice-chair, IEEE 802.3 Ethernet Working Group
[REDACTED]

Jon Lewis Secretary, IEEE 802.3 Ethernet Working Group
Chair, IEEE 802.3 NEA Ad hoc
[REDACTED]

John D'Ambrosia Chair, IEEE 802.3 NEA "E4AI" Assessment
[REDACTED]

From: David Law Chair, IEEE 802.3 Ethernet Working Group
[REDACTED]

Subject: Request for Information related to Multi-Core Fiber (MCF)

Approval Agreed at IEEE 802.3 Interim meeting, Lisbon, Portugal, 17 Sept 2026

Dear Antonio and members of the SDM4 MCF MSA,

Over the past two years, the IEEE 802.3 Ethernet Working Group has been assessing back-end AI networks to understand what potential future Ethernet solutions may be required. This work has been undertaken in the IEEE 802.3 NEA "Ethernet for AI" Assessment (E4AI). See https://www.ieee802.org/3/ad_hoc/E4AI/index.html.

During the course of these discussions, potential use cases for multi-core fiber have been discussed. Conversations have focused on the fiber specifications, connector requirements, and the need for the development of a normative optical channel model, which would be the basis for the development of any optical Ethernet Physical Layer device (PHY). Currently, IEEE 802.3 is not aware of the availability of any of these items, but we are aware of relevant standardization activities underway in ITU-T SG 15 and IEC addressing fiber and connector specifications.

To facilitate increased broader industry discussion in these general areas, the IEEE 802.3 NEA E4AI Assessment has announced it will be holding two workshops that will be open to all with no registration fees:

¹ This document solely represents the views of the IEEE 802.3 Working Group, and does not necessarily represent a position of the IEEE, the IEEE Standards Association, or IEEE 802.

- “Next Generation Fiber Optic Connector” Workshop

03 Dec 2026, 10am to 2pm, ET

Announcement - https://www.ieee802.org/3/ad_hoc/E4AI/email/msg00136.html

Agenda - explore next-generation fiber optic connector issues. The workshop will be limited to presentations and contributions submitted by SDOs and industry organizations regarding –

- Generic/basic information about polarity and connector
 - New connector interface types, such as: 2-row Multi-fiber Push-On (MPO); Very Small Form Factor (VSFF); or connectors targeting Multi-core Fiber (MCF)
 - Standardization of the MCF connector with the MPO interface and polarity
 - Next generation connector performance assumptions used for optical channel development.
 - Other issues
- 2nd "Fiber for AI" Workshop
- 09 Feb 2027 (9am to 1pm ET)
- Announcement - https://www.ieee802.org/3/ad_hoc/E4AI/email/msg00146.html
- Agenda - explore the future of fiber, with an emphasis on 400 Gb/s signaling and beyond. Potential topics include future SMF and MMF developments, multicore fiber, hollow core fiber, etc.



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We would like to encourage your organization and its members to consider participation in these two workshops, and address the following issues that would enable the development of a specification of an Ethernet PHY for operation on MCF:

- MCF optical fiber and cable characteristics, including fiber attenuation, chromatic dispersion, polarization mode dispersion (PMD) and differential group delay (DGD)
- Optical insertion loss and reflection characteristics for optical MCF connectors will need to be defined.
- It is anticipated that with MCF crosstalk will be introduced between fiber cores or at any connectors, which will introduce new additional penalties in an optical link power budget. Limits for core-to-core crosstalk in both the forward propagation direction and the reverse propagation direction from connector reflections would need to be defined.
- Specifications defining the physical characteristics of any optical connectors that could be normatively referenced for the associated Ethernet PHY would need to be identified.
- Alternatively, if single mode fiber (SMF) connectors with external fiber fanouts to MCF were used, it would be necessary to understand the optical insertion loss, reflection, and crosstalk characteristics of these elements when used as part of the optical channel.

We look forward to forward interaction with your organization as the potential future of multi-core fiber for Ethernet solutions is explored.

Sincerely,

David Law

Chair, IEEE 802.3 Ethernet Working Group

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