



6th International Conference On Advances In Computing & Communications, ICACC 2016, 6-8  
September 2016, Cochin, India

## Design and Simulation of Radio Frequency Micro Electro Mechanical Capacitive Shunt Switches

Aswathy G. Nair<sup>a,\*</sup>, E.S.Shajahan<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Electronics and Communication, Government Engineering College, Painavu, Idukki, Kerala, India

<sup>b</sup>Department of Electronics and Communication, College of Engineering Trivandrum, Kerala, India-695016

### Abstract

Radio Frequency Micro ElectroMechanical (RFMEM) switches play an important role in microwave switching. The demand for low voltage, low insertion loss, high Isolation RF MEMS capacitive switches for high frequency (10-40 GHz) applications has led to the development of MEMS based switching devices in the RF domain. This work reports the design and simulation of RF MEMS capacitive shunt switches for K and Ka bands. The switching element consists of a thin gold membrane which gets actuated over a transmission line under an applied bias. The dc simulation is carried out in CoventorWare and the designed switch is found to actuate at 18.75 volts. HFSS simulation results demonstrate an acceptable RF performance with an insertion loss of 0.25 dB in the range 20-35 GHz and an isolation better than 20 dB beyond 20GHz.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of ICACC 2016

**Keywords:** RF MEM; insertion loss; isolation; capacitive; actuation

### 1. Introduction

RF MEMS switches are one of the most fundamental structures of MEMS technology. RF MEMS switch technology has been under intense research for the last 10-15 years and is being touted as a viable alternative with superior RF performance over traditional solid state switches. RF MEMS switches are prime candidates to replace conventional GaAs field effect transistor (FET) and p-i-n diode switches, mainly due to their ultra low insertion loss, high isolation, excellent linear characteristics and miniscule power consumption. These capacitive shunt switches are electrostatically operated, consuming essentially no DC power. This makes RF MEMS switches suitable for hand-held devices, satellite and space systems.

Since these devices are highly linear, they offer an excellent choice for broadband communication with high dynamic range. Various designs of capacitive MEMS shunt switches with membranes made out of nickel<sup>2</sup>, aluminum<sup>1</sup>, gold<sup>5</sup>, and copper<sup>1</sup> have been reported in literature for a variety of applications such as phase shifters, reconfigurable filters and tuners. The structure of all these reported designs consists of a lower electrode (transmission line), a thin

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +91-9496338185 ; fax: +0-000-000-0000.

E-mail address: [aswathyg499@gmail.com](mailto:aswathyg499@gmail.com)

dielectric layer deposited over the transmission line and a movable thin membrane hanging over the dielectric shunting the transmission line.

### 1.1. RF MEMS Capacitive Shunt Switches

In capacitive switches (actuating membrane is in shunt with the Coplanar waveguide transmission line), a metal membrane is pulled down onto a dielectric layer, usually by electrostatic means, to form a capacitive sandwich. At high frequencies, this capacitive sandwich acts like a shunt capacitor with a 100:1 ratio (actuated:unactuated). Thus the mechanical deformation of the metal membrane causes the switch to efficiently change from a high impedance to a low impedance. However this performance of the RF MEMS switches comes with some trade-offs as well compared to their solid-state counterparts. These include dielectric charging<sup>3</sup>, high pull-down voltage and slow switching speed. The pull-down voltage is very decisive for commercial applications. There exist great challenges to lower the actuation voltage using different methods including electromagnetic and thermal actuation<sup>4</sup>, lowering the spring constant of the membrane and gap height. Several methods have been proposed to improve the performance characteristics of RF MEMS switches with primary focus on lowering actuation or pull-down voltage. Although there is currently tremendous amount of research in RF MEMS devices, reliability and packaging of the switches continue to be problematic. The switches are limited in their power handling capability as well.

### 1.2. Proposed Shunt switch

The single MEMS switch is fabricated on a CPW transmission line with dimensions of  $G/W/G = 60/100/60$  (all in  $\mu\text{m}$ ). The selected CPW dimensions correspond to a characteristic impedance ( $Z_0$ ) of  $50 \Omega$ . A coplanar waveguide (CPW) consists of a centre conductor with semi-infinite ground planes on either side. Principal advantage of CPW at millimeter wave frequencies is that the signal grounds as well as signal line are on the same plane. This simplifies the fabrication process and allows easy integration of shunt and series circuit elements. The substrate used is high resistivity silicon ( $4000 \Omega\text{-cm}$ ) of  $500 \mu\text{m}$  thick and relative dielectric constant of 11.7. The beam length ( $L$ ) shunting the transmission line, beam width ( $w$ ), beam thickness ( $T$ ) and the air gap between the beam and transmission line ( $g$ ) are shown in Figure 1(a) and (b). A DC control voltage actuates the membrane for switching action. During unactuated state, the RF signal travels down the transmission line unaffected from input port to output port. This is ON state of the shunt switch.

When a control voltage is applied between the beam and the transmission line, the electrostatic field forces the membrane to deform downwards. The elastic force due to the membrane stiffness balances the electrostatic force until the threshold voltage is reached. When the control voltage exceeds the threshold voltage (also called actuation voltage or pull-down voltage), the field overcomes the elastic force and pulls the membrane down on to the transmission line, presenting an RF short. This is OFF state. On removal of control voltage, the elastic force brings the membrane back to the original position.

### 1.3. Pull-in voltage

Most RF MEMS switches generally employ electrostatic actuation to overcome the spring force leading to relatively high dc voltage of the order of 20-60 V for switching heights of 2-2.5  $\mu\text{m}$ . This brings up the issue of additional CMOS integrated up converter to raise the usually used 5 Volts control voltage to the required level. The actuation voltage is an important index of RF MEMS switch function. This will directly impact the circuit design and performance of the whole system such as the system size, power consumption etc. Simple beam theory gives a relation between the flexibility degree of the beam and pull-in voltage. Thus Pull-in voltage  $V_p$  and switching time  $t_s$  are given by equation 1 and 2.<sup>6</sup>

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