

Link Budget – SkyConnector Pro

Overview

Link budget defines the amount of power available in a communication link for transmission loss through the path, whether the loss is through the air or through obstructions like trees and buildings. With a known link budget, the range of a communication link can be determined given a fixed path loss and fade margin. Because of the large variation in path loss models for propagation in real world environments, the link budget becomes a more easily comparable specification for evaluation of communication systems. It is generally true that a higher link budget will provide longer range. For this reason, link budget is an important specification for all RF deployments.

The basic equation for link budget is a fairly simple formula when using units of power in dB.

$$\text{Link Budget} = \text{Transmit Power} + \text{Transmit Antenna Gain} + \text{Receive Antenna Gain} - \text{Receiver Sensitivity}$$

Transmit Power

“Transmit Power” is the power coming out of the radio/power amplifier and into the antenna. Transmit power is normally measured in dBm. Although many companies highlight peak power, it is not accurate to use peak power for link budget calculations. Instead, link budget calculations should always use average power. If you’ve ever used a stereo with a power output display, you should be able to understand the difference between peak power and average power. A general rule of thumb is that the average power is about 5 to 7 dB less than the peak power.

The average transmit power output for SkyPilot’s products changes slightly depending on the modulation. For lower modulations (BPSK & QPSK), the output can be driven harder while for higher modulations (QAM), the average power is lower. This is generally referred to as amplifier back off.

SkyPilot Measured Transmit Power

Data Rate	Modulation Format	Transmit Power (SkyExtender Plus)	Transmit Power (SkyConnector Pro)
6 Mbps	BPSK – 1/2	23 dBm	26 dBm
9 Mbps	BPSK – 3/4	23 dBm	26 dBm
12 Mbps	QPSK – 1/2	23 dBm	26 dBm
18 Mbps	QPSK – 3/4	23 dBm	26 dBm
24 Mbps	16QAM – 1/2	22 dBm	26 dBm
36 Mbps	16QAM – 3/4	21 dBm	24 dBm
48 Mbps	64QAM – 1/2	19 dBm	23 dBm
54 Mbps	64QAM – 3/4	19 dBm	21 dBm

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Antenna Gain

“Antenna Gain” represents the gain of the antenna relative to a single point antenna radiating evenly in all directions (i.e. a sphere). So the gain is actually a measure of how well focused the antenna is at radiating the signal. The important thing about antennas is that the larger the antenna the larger the gain and the smaller the focus. Improvements in antennas are especially beneficial to link budgets because they are counted twice, once for the transmit antenna and once for the receive antenna. SkyPilot’s infrastructure products (SkyGateways and SkyExtenders) have an array of eight antennas, each with 18 dBi of antenna gain, and SkyConnector Pro has an antenna with 22 dBi of antenna gain.

SkyPilot Antenna Characteristics

Product	SkyExtender Plus	SkyConnector Pro
Antenna Gain	18 dBi	22 dBi
Elevation beam width	6°	6°
Azimuth beam width	45°	6°

Receiver Sensitivity

“Receiver Sensitivity” is a measure of the minimum signal level that can be received by a radio. The word “received” has to be defined in terms of the quality of the link. At SkyPilot, we use a 10% packet error rate (PER) as the metric for link quality (this is the same metric used by RF chip companies as well). Testing is done with no external interference and the signal power is reduced until a 10% PER occurs, at which time the average power is then measured. Receiver sensitivity changes with modulation and data rates as shown in the table below (all numbers +/- 1.5 dB tolerance):

SkyPilot Measured Receiver Sensitivity

Data Rate	Modulation Format	Receiver Sensitivity (SkyExtender Plus)	Receiver Sensitivity (SkyConnector Pro)
6 Mbps	BPSK – 1/2	-90 dBm	-94 dBm
9 Mbps	BPSK – 3/4	-87 dBm	-93 dBm
12 Mbps	QPSK – 1/2	-86 dBm	-91 dBm
18 Mbps	QPSK – 3/4	-84 dBm	-90 dBm
24 Mbps	16QAM – 1/2	-80 dBm	-86 dBm
36 Mbps	16QAM – 3/4	-78 dBm	-83 dBm
48 Mbps	64QAM – 1/2	-70 dBm	-77 dBm
54 Mbps	64QAM – 3/4	-68 dBm	-74 dBm

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Downlink Link Budget – from SkyExtender Plus to SkyConnector Pro

The summary for SkyPilot’s downlink link budget can therefore be calculated as follows:

Modulation Rate	Transmit Power	Transmit Antenna Gain	Receive Antenna Gain	Receiver Sensitivity	Link Budget
6 Mbps	23 dBm	18 dBi	22 dBi	-94 dBm	157 dBm
9 Mbps	23 dBm	18 dBi	22 dBi	-93 dBm	156 dBm
12 Mbps	23 dBm	18 dBi	22 dBi	-91 dBm	154 dBm
18 Mbps	23 dBm	18 dBi	22 dBi	-90 dBm	153 dBm
24 Mbps	22 dBm	18 dBi	22 dBi	-86 dBm	148 dBm
36 Mbps	21 dBm	18 dBi	22 dBi	-83 dBm	144 dBm
48 Mbps	19 dBm	18 dBi	22 dBi	-77 dBm	136 dBm
54 Mbps	19 dBm	18 dBi	22 dBi	-74 dBm	133 dBm

Uplink Link Budget – from SkyConnector Pro to SkyExtender Plus

The summary for SkyPilot’s uplink link budget can therefore be calculated as follows:

Modulation Rate	Transmit Power	Transmit Antenna Gain	Receive Antenna Gain	Receiver Sensitivity	Link Budget
6 Mbps	26 dBm	22 dBi	18 dBi	-90 dBm	156 dBm
9 Mbps	26 dBm	22 dBi	18 dBi	-87 dBm	153 dBm
12 Mbps	26dBm	22 dBi	18 dBi	-86 dBm	152 dBm
18 Mbps	26 dBm	22 dBi	18 dBi	-84 dBm	150 dBm
24 Mbps	26 dBm	22 dBi	18 dBi	-80 dBm	146 dBm
36 Mbps	24 dBm	22 dBi	18 dBi	-78 dBm	142 dBm
48 Mbps	23 dBm	22 dBi	18 dBi	-70 dBm	133 dBm
54 Mbps	21 dBm	22 dBi	18 dBi	-68 dBm	129 dBm