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# Design and Verification of ACK / NAK Protocol of PCI Express Data Link Layer in System Verilog

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**Abstract** – PCI-Express is a high performance, general purpose I/O interconnect communication protocol for multiplexing various peripheral. PCI Express is third generation Computer Bus(3GIO) to inter connect peripherals in a Computer, Servers, Mobile sets and systems. It is the layered, packet approach serial bus protocol. And the transfer rate of GEN 4 PCI-Express is up to 16GTps, and the throughput is around 2GBps for X1 lane. It has three major layers -Transaction Layer, Data Link Layer and Physical Layer. The basic objective of this project is to designing and verifying the ACK/ NAK Protocol of PCI-Express Data Link Layer. The Primary responsibility of this layer is to assure the integrity of TLPs moving between devices, but it is also plays a part in TLP flow control, Link initialization and power management and convey information between the Transaction Layer above it and the Physical Layer below it. In performing this job, the Data Link Layer exchanges packets with its neighbor know as Data Link Layer Packets (DLLPs). DLLP are communicating between the Data Link Layers of each device. DLLPs of Data Link layer supports ACK / NAK Protocol. This work uses System Verilog to model different blocks of the ACK / NAK Protocol of Data Link Layer layer of PCI Express. The RTL code is designed and Verified using the ModelSim-Altera 6.3g\_p1 (Quartus II 8.1) Web Edition.

**Keywords** – PCIE, TLP, DLLP, CRC, ECRC

## I. INTRODUCTION

PCI-Express is a high performance, general purpose I/O interconnects defined for a wide variety of future computing and communication platforms. PCI- Express takes advantage of recent advances in point-to-point interconnects, switch based technology and packetized protocol to deliver new level of performance and features. Power management, Quality of Services (QoS), Hot-plug/ Hot-swap support, Data integrity and error handling are among some of the advanced features supported by PCI-Express.

The fundamental goal of this layering definition is to facilitate the reader's understanding of the specification. Note that this layering does not imply a particular PCI-Express implementation. PCI-Express uses packets to communicate information between the components. Packets are formed in transaction and data link layers to carry the information from the transmitting component to the receiving component.

As the transmitted packets flow through the other layers, they are extended with additional information necessary to handle packets at those layers. At the receiving side, the reverse process occurs and packets get transformed from their physical layer representation to the data link Fig.1 Layering diagram of PCIE layer representation and finally (for TLP - Transaction Layer Packets) to the form that can be processed by the transaction layer of the receiving device.

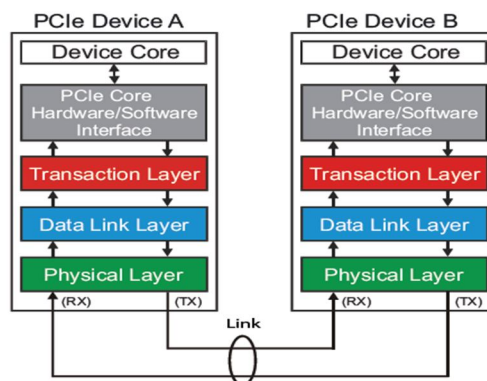


Fig.1 shows the conceptual flow of transaction level information through the layers.

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The data link layer is an intermediate stage between transaction layer and physical layer. Link acknowledgment time out replay mechanism, flow initialization protocol, error correction protocol and power management are some of the basic responsibilities of the data link layer. As shown in Fig.2, packet is assembled in transaction layer by appending header (3-4 DW) as start frame and ECRC (1 DW) as end frame. Again when the packet assembled in transaction layer passes through the data link layer, packet sequence (2 B) will be appended as start frame and LCRC (1 DW) will be appended as end frame. Again physical layer adds start frame and end frame of 1 Byte to data link layer packet. In this way, packet formations through the layer will be completed and finally it will pass through the link which is established between transmitter and receiver.

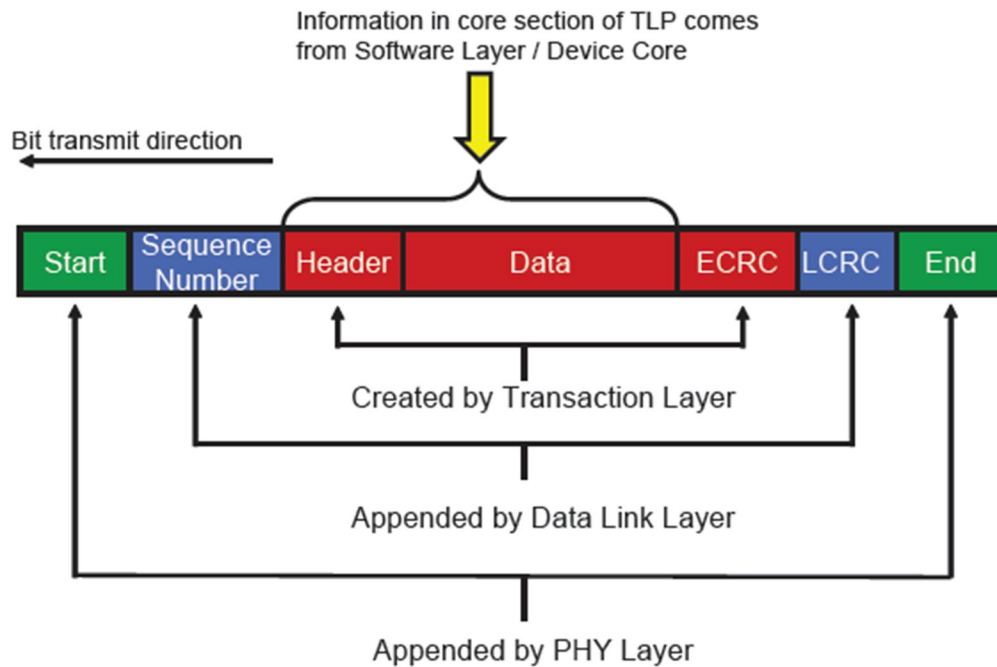


Fig.2 Packet formations through the layers

Data link layer also produce and consume the packets that are used for link acknowledgment and time out replay mechanism. As shown in Fig.3, To differentiate these packets from those used by transaction layer, the term Data Link Layer Packet (DLLP) will be used when referring to packets that are produced and consumed at the data link layer.

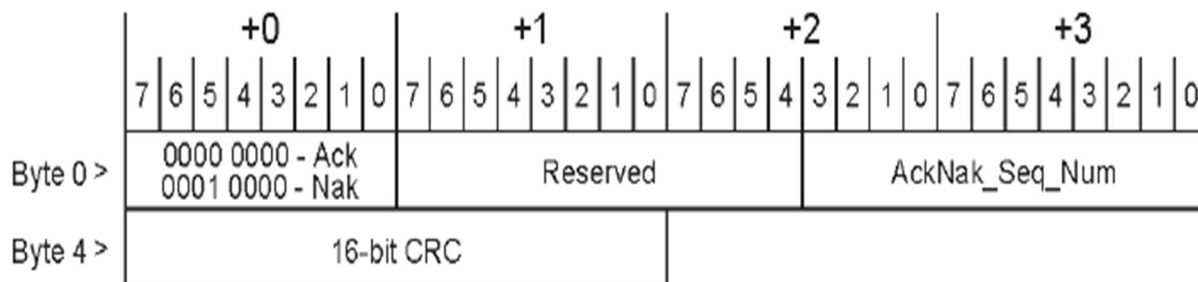


Fig.3 DLLP Packet format

### II. PROPOSED ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

As shown in Fig.4, The transmitter receives TLPs from Transaction Layer and it sends them to the Physical Layer with a sequence number that identifies each TLP and CRC. The transmitter is responsible for the retransmission of TLPs if necessary and it also sends the DLLPs that are generated in the data link layer. Now we will discuss all the individual blocks in detail as follows:

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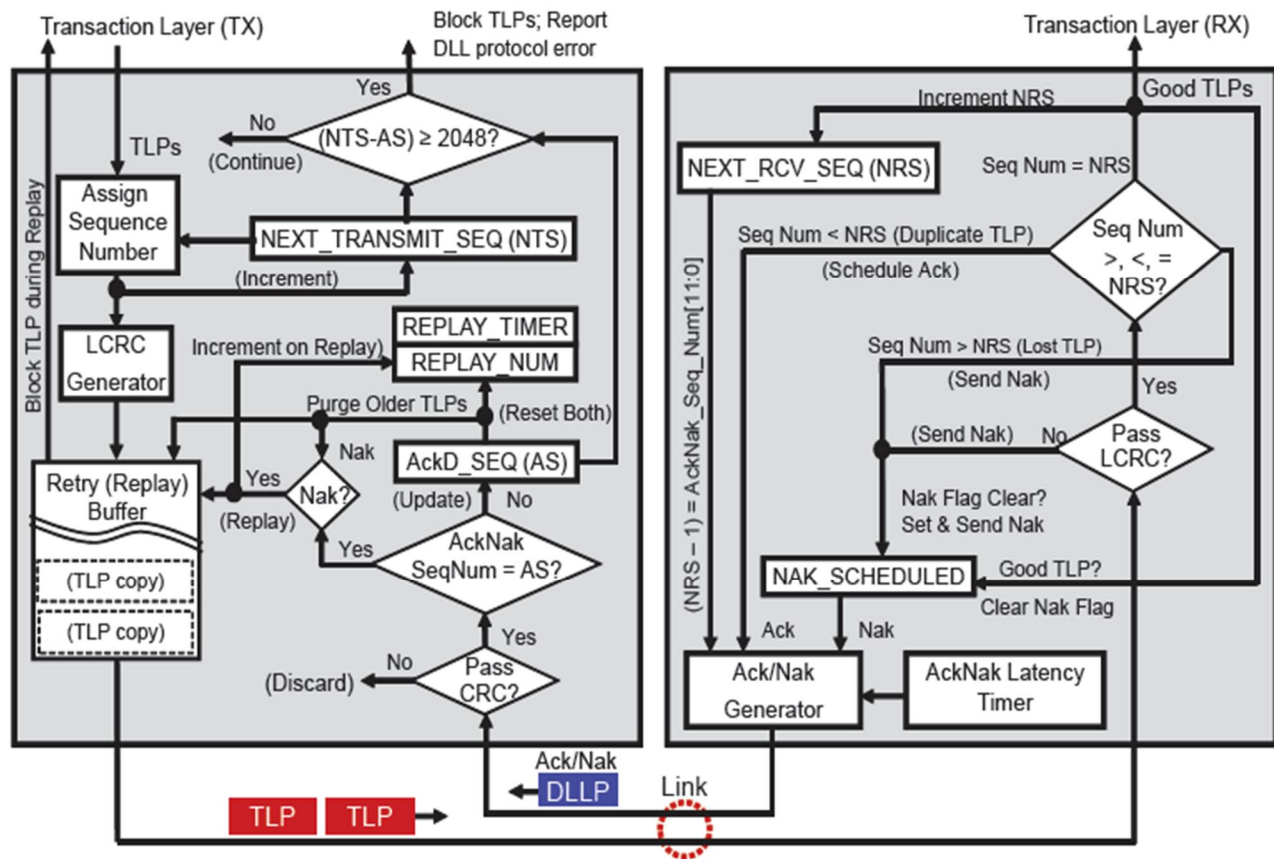


Fig.4 Proposed architecture

### A. Replay Buffer

The replay buffer stores the Data Link layer Packets (DLP). These DLPs include sequence number and Link CRC appended to the TLP. The TLPs are saved according to sequence number of arrival from the Transaction Layer before transmission. As successful reception of TLP at receiver side, ACK DLLP is sent back to the transmitter. It discards the associated DLPs from the Replay Buffer. If, on the other hand, the transmitter receives a NAK DLLP, it re-transmits the contents of the buffer.

### B. NEXT\_TRANSMIT\_SEQ counter

This counter generates sequence number for incoming TLPs. The counter is a 12-bit counter that is initialized to 0 at reset, or when the Data Link Layer is in the inactive state. It increments until it reaches 4095 and then rolls over to 0 (i.e., it is a modulo 4096 counter).

### C. LCRC Generator

The LCRC Generator provides a 32-bit LCRC for the TLP. The LCRC is calculated using all fields of the TLP including the Header, Data Payload, ECRC and Sequence Number. The receiver uses the TLP's LCRC field to check for a CRC error in the received TLP.

### D. REPLAY\_NUM Count

This 2-bit counter stores the number of replay attempts following either reception of a NAK DLLP, or a REPLAY\_TIMER timeout. When the REPLAY\_NUM count rolls over from 11b to 00b, the Data Link Layer triggers a Physical Layer Link-retrain. It waits for completion of re-training before attempting to transmit TLPs once again. The REPLAY\_NUM counter is initialized to 00b at reset, or when the Data Link Layer is inactive. It is also reset whenever an ACK is received, indicating that forward progress is being made in transmitting TLPs.

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### E. *REPLAY\_TIMER Count*

The *REPLAY\_TIMER* is used to measure the time from when a TLP is transmitted until an associated ACK or NAK DLLP is received. The *REPLAY\_TIMER* is started (or restarted, if already running) when the last Symbol of any TLP is sent. It restarts from 0 each time that there are outstanding TLPs in the Replay Buffer and an ACK DLLP is received that references a TLP still in the Replay Buffer. It resets to 0 and holds when there are no outstanding TLPs in the Replay Buffer, or until restart conditions are met for each NAK received (except during a replay), or when the *REPLAY\_TIMER* expires. It is not advanced (i.e., its value remains fixed) during Link re-training.

### F. *ACKD\_SEQ Count*

This 12-bit register tracks or stores the Sequence Number of the most recently received ACK or NAK DLLP. It is initialized to all 1s at reset, or when the Data Link Layer is inactive. This register is updated with the *AckNak\_Seq\_Num* [11:0] field of a received ACK or NAK DLLP. The *ACKD\_SEQ* count is compared with the *NEXT\_TRANSMIT\_SEQ* count. Also, the *ACKD\_SEQ* count is used to check for forward progress made in transmitting TLPs. If no forward progress is made after 3 additional replay attempts, the Link is re-trained by physical layer.

### G. *NEXT\_RCV\_SEQ Count*

The 12-bit *NEXT\_RCV\_SEQ* counter keeps track of the next expected TLP's Sequence Number. This counter is initialized to 0 at reset, or when the Data Link Layer is inactive. This counter is incremented once for each good TLP received that is forwarded to the Transaction Layer. The counter rolls over to 0 after reaching a value of 4095. The counter is not incremented for TLPs received with CRC error, nullified TLPs, or TLPs with an incorrect Sequence Number.

### H. *Sequence Number Check*

After the CRC error check, this block verifies that a received TLP's Sequence Number matches the *NEXT\_RCV\_SEQ* count. If the TLP's Sequence Number = *NEXT\_RCV\_SEQ* count, the TLP is accepted, processed and forwarded to the Transaction Layer. *NEXT\_RCV\_SEQ* count is incremented. The receiver continues to process inbound TLPs and does not have to return an ACK DLLP until the *ACKNAK\_LATENCY\_TIMER* expires or exceeds its set value.

### I. *NAK\_SCHEDULED Flag*

The *NAK\_SCHEDULED* flag is set when the receiver schedules a NAK DLLP to return to the remote transmitter. It is cleared when the receiver sees the first TLP associated with the replay of a previously - Nak'd TLP. The specification is unclear about whether the receiver should schedule additional NAK DLLP for bad TLPs received while the *NAK\_SCHEDULED* flag is set.

### J. *ACKNAK\_LATENCY\_TIMER*

The *ACKNAK\_LATENCY\_TIMER* monitors the elapsed time since the last ACK or NAK DLLP was scheduled to be returned to the remote transmitter. The receiver uses this timer to ensure that it processes TLPs promptly and returns an ACK or a NAK DLLP when the timer expires or exceeds its set value. The timer value is set based on a formula described in "Receivers *ACKNAK\_LATENCY\_TIMER*".

### K. *ACK/NAK DLLP Generator*

This block generates the ACK or NAK DLLP upon command from the LCRC or Sequence Number check block. The ACK or NAK DLLP contains an *AckNak\_Seq\_Num*[11:0] field obtained from the *NEXT\_RCV\_SEQ* counter. ACK or NAK DLLPs contain a *AckNak\_Seq\_Num*[11:0] value equal to *NEXT\_RCV\_SEQ* count -1.

## III. SIMULATION RESULTS

### A. *Simulation Output for Sequence Generator*

This counter generates sequence number for incoming TLPs (refer figure 5). The counter is a 12-bit counter that is initialized to 0 at reset and increase one for every new data input. This can be done from 0 to 4095. ( For ease of visibility packet sequence number up to 10 are used )

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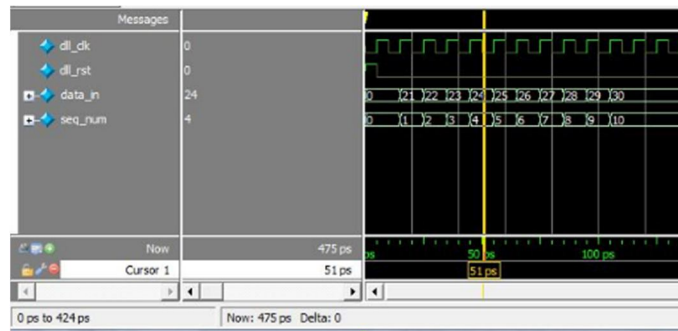


Figure 5. Waveform for Sequence Generator

### B. Simulation Output for TLP stored in Replay Buffer

The replay buffer stores the Data Link layer Packets (DLP). These DLPs include sequence number and Link CRC appended to the received TLP. The TLPs are saved according to sequence number of arrival from the Transaction Layer before transmission. When the transaction layer TLP packet received is enabled, then only the tpls are stored in retry buffer (refer figure 6). For each new arrival of TLP it increase the sequence number one by one until the buffer is full.

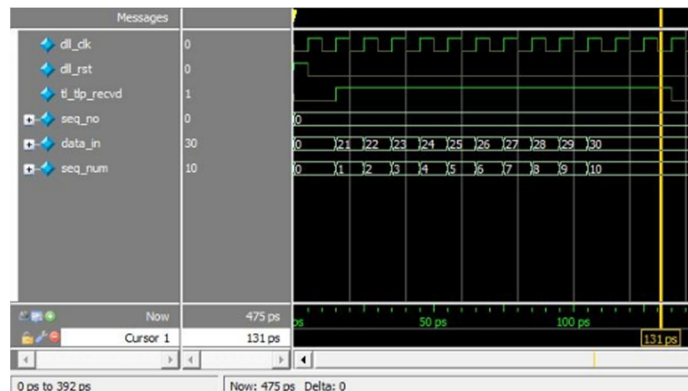


Figure 6. Waveform for TLP stored in Replay Buffer

### C. Simulation Output for Replay Buffer Full and Empty

Replay buffer has storage upto 4096 TLP in it. When the Replay buffer is full it indicates full for avoiding the additional TLPs to enter in it. And indicates empty, when it has no TLPs inside of Replay buffer (refer figure 7). For observation here the size of buffer is 8.

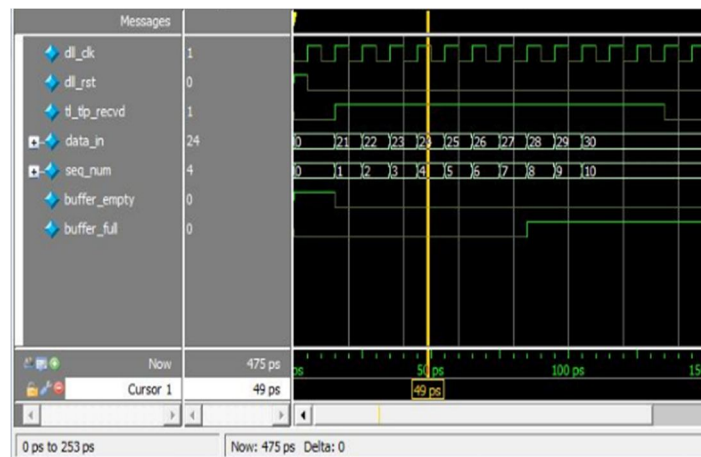


Figure 7. Waveform for Replay Buffer Full and Empty

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### D. Simulation Output for Reception of ACK DLLP

This block generates the ACK DLLP upon command from the LCRC or Sequence Number check block (refer figure 8). The ACK DLLP contains an AckNak\_Seq\_Num[11:0] field obtained from the NEXT\_RCV\_SEQ counter. ACK DLLPs contain a AckNak\_Seq\_Num[11:0] value equal to NEXT\_RCV\_SEQ count -1. When it receives ACK, it simply purges the TLPs from the Replay Buffer upto specified AckNak\_Seq\_Num.

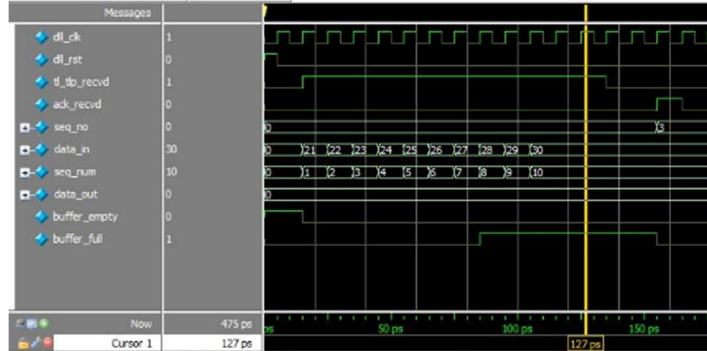


Figure 8. Waveform for Reception of ACK DLLP

### E. Simulation Output for Reception of NAK DLLP

This 12-bit register tracks or stores the Sequence Number of the most recently received NAK DLLP (refer figure 9). It is initialized to all 1s at reset, or when the Data Link Layer is inactive. This register is updated with the AckNak\_Seq\_Num [11:0] field of a received NAK DLLP. The ACKD\_SEQ count is compared with the NEXT\_TRANSMIT\_SEQ count. If the error happened in receiver side due to LCRC and sequence number, then it is going to retransmit the TLPs that after the sequence number of NAK DLLP. And it purges the previous TLPs.

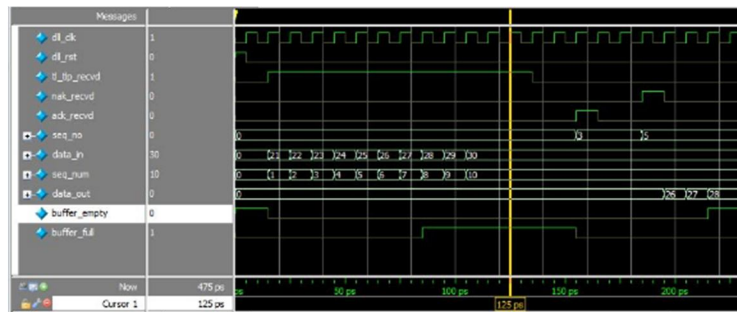


Figure 9. Waveform for Reception of NAK DLLP

### F. Simulation Output for Reception of Repeated NAK DLLP

After the TLPs retransmission there is a possibility to happen another NAK in the receiver side. It can retransmit up to next sequence of TLP to be entered based upon replay timer and replay counter. The REPLAY\_TIMER is used to measure the time from when a TLP is transmitted until an associated ACK or NAK DLLP is received (refer figure 10).

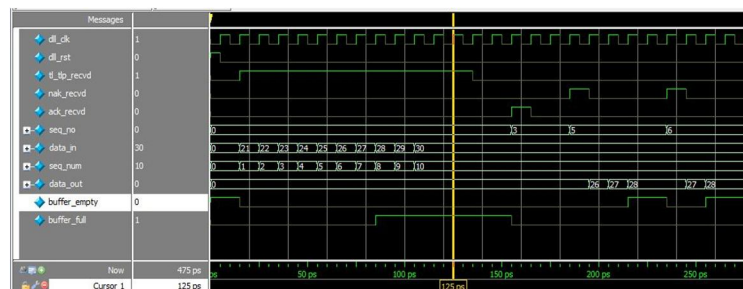


Figure 10. Waveform for Reception of Repeated NAK DLLP

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This 2-bit counter stores the number of replay attempts following either reception of a NAK DLLP, or a REPLAY\_TIMER timeout. When the REPLAY\_NUM count rolls over from 11b to 00b, the Data Link Layer triggers a Physical Layer Link-retrain

### G. Simulation Output for Receiving TLP

In this block explains about the receiver operation of the PCI Express endpoint. The incoming TLPs checked by LCRC processor, it generates the 32-bit LCRC value of the remaining 140-bits. And depends upon the correctness, it provide ACK as well as NAK signal (refer figure 11).

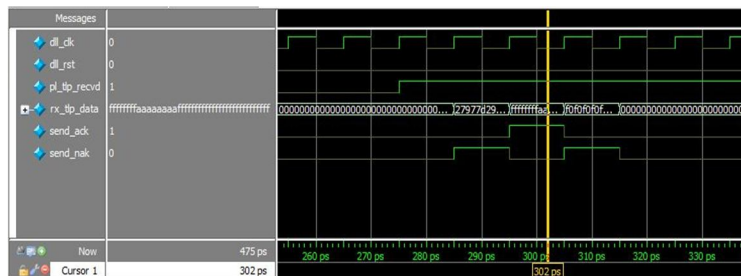


Figure 11. Waveform for Receiving TLP

### H. Simulation Output for Transmitter and Receiver

Complete simulation result that explains the full performance for transmitter and receiver operation. The TX and RX side operations of Data link layer are simulated (refer figure 12).

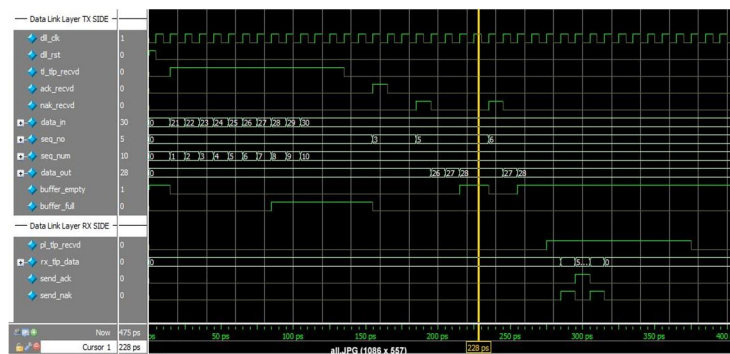


Figure 12. Waveform for Transmitter and Receiver

## IV. CONCLUSION

From this paper, the ACK /NAK protocol of PCI-Express Data Link Layer Transmitter have been demonstrated. This presented design of PCIExpress Data Link Layer Transmitter and Receiver has the compatibility with all PCI-Express versions. By changing the parameters (constants) in the current design, it can be used in upcoming version i.e. PCIExpress to improve the data transfer rate.

## V. FUTURE WORK

In this Project, an efficient design for ACK / NAK protocol for PCI Express is presented. The extensive simulation results demonstrate that our design achieves excellent performance in terms of link packet and data link layer packed handling. As the outcome demonstrated, the traffic performance can be further improved by reducing the unwanted transmission of TLPs transmitting while retry mechanism. The LCRC qualified TLP packets from transmitter are moved to the next sequence checker, if it is the future sequence number then the receiver data link layer produces NAK for that packet. And it makes the enormous retransmission of TLP packets from retry buffer. To avoid this retransmission, it is intended to include a queue inside of receiver data link layer that stores the LCRC approved TLP in it. And by using the sequence controller it is possible to maintaining the sequence of TLPs by avoiding the additional unwanted retry from receiver and improve the traffic performance. It is also have planned to extend this project by simulating physical layer with it.



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## VI. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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