THESIS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Self-Switching Diodes for Zero-Bias Terahertz Detection

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Abstract

The self-switching diode (SSD) has been investigated as a potential terahertz detector in recent years. The SSD accomplishes a non-linear current-voltage relation through a field-effect, which enables detection at zero bias from microwave up to terahertz frequencies. In this work, SSDs were realised in two new materials; InAs and graphene. InGaAs SSDs were also fabricated. The effect of geometrical and material parameters on SSD detector performance under zero bias were for the first time described by an analytical model, and confirmed by experiment.

InAs SSDs were fabricated in an InAs/AlSb heterostructure. A noise equivalent power (NEP) of 150-200 pW/Hz½ was observed at 2-315 GHz with a 50 Ω source. InGaAs SSDs fabricated in an InGaAs/InAlAs heterostructure exhibited an NEP of 40-150 pW/Hz½ at 2-315 GHz with a 50 Ω source, the lowest NEP reported for any SSD in this frequency range. An InAs SSD integrated with a spiral antenna and silicon lens demonstrated an NEP of less than 4.4 nW/Hz½ at 600 GHz.

SSDs require a deep submicron isolation pattern which presents a major fabrication challenge in the InAs/AlSb heterostructure due to the oxidation sensitivity of the thick AlSb buffer layer. An SSD process was developed that allowed the fabrication of InAs/AlSb isolation patterns with feature sizes down to 35 nm.

Graphene SSDs were demonstrated for the first time. The SSD was based on epitaxial graphene on silicon carbide. A flat NEP of 2.4 nW/Hz½ was measured from 1 to 67 GHz using a 50 Ω source.

An analytical model of the SSD was derived to explain the influence of geometrical and material parameters. The model predicted that lowering the two-dimensional electron gas carrier concentration in the heterostructure increased the responsivity and reduced the NEP of the SSD zero-bias detector. Device simulations and measurements confirmed the predictions. Further, the model, together with experiments, showed that to minimize NEP there is an optimum number of channels and optimal channel length. The frequency dependence of SSD detectors was described using a small-signal equivalent circuit, which reproduced the measured responsivity up to 315 GHz. The highest cut-off frequency of InAs SSDs was estimated to 775 GHz.

Keywords: InAs, SSD, self-switching diode, graphene, InGaAs, zero-bias, detector, terahertz, noise-equivalent power.
List of publications

Appended papers

This thesis is based on the following papers.


Other papers

The following papers are not appended to this thesis, either due to contents overlapping with the appended papers, or due to contents not related to this thesis.


As part of the author’s doctoral studies, some of the work presented in this thesis has previously been published in [n]. Figures, tables and text from [n] may therefore be fully or partly reproduced in this thesis.
**Abbreviations and notations**

**Abbreviations**

2DEG Two-dimensional electron gas  
AlGaSb Aluminium gallium antimonide  
AlSb Aluminium antimonide  
BCB Benzocyclobutene  
CMOS Complimentary metal-oxide semiconductor  
CVD Chemical vapour deposition  
DC Direct current  
FET Field-effect transistor  
GaAs Gallium arsenide  
HEMT High-electron-mobility-transistor  
InAs Indium arsenide  
InGaAs Indium gallium arsenide  
MBE Molecular beam epitaxy  
MC Monte Carlo  
MOSFET Metal-oxide semiconductor FET  
NEP Noise-equivalent power  
PECVD Physically enhances chemical vapour deposition  
RF Radio frequency  
RFID Radio frequency identification card  
RIE Reactive ion etch  
SEM Scanning electron microscopy  
SSD Self-switching diode

**Notations**

$\beta_{\text{opt}}$ Responsivity with optimal RF-match  
$\beta_{50\Omega}$ Responsivity with 50 $\Omega$ source  
$NEP_{\text{opt}}$ Noise-equivalent power with optimal RF-match  
$NEP_{50\Omega}$ Noise-equivalent power with 50 $\Omega$ source
\( V_{th} \) Threshold voltage
\( V_T \) Thermal voltage
\( V_D \) Drain voltage
\( I_D \) Drain current
\( k \) Boltzmann’s constant
\( n \) Gate ideality factor
\( R_0 \) Zero-bias resistance
\( L \) Channel length
\( W \) Channel width
\( W_v \) Width of trench separating gate and channel
\( W_h \) Width of trench separating gate and source
\( C_h \) Gate capacitance
\( C_v \) Capacitance between drain and source
\( C_p \) Equivalent parasitic capacitance
\( S \) Separation of channels
\( W_{\text{mesa}} \) Mesa width
\( L_{\text{mesa}} \) Contact separation
\( C_{\text{pad}} \) Pad capacitance
\( L_{\text{pad}} \) Pad inductance
\( R_{s1} \) Parasitic series resistance
\( R_{s2} \) Parasitic series resistance
\( T \) Physical temperature
\( f_c \) Cut-off frequency
Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................... iii
List of publications .................................................................................................. v
Abbreviations and notations ................................................................................. ix

1 Introduction ......................................................................................................... 1

2 Background ......................................................................................................... 3
   2.1 Theory of zero-bias detection .................................................................. 3
      2.1.1 Responsivity ............................................................................ 3
      2.1.2 Noise-equivalent power ......................................................... 4
   2.2 Self-switching diodes .............................................................................. 6
   2.3 Materials for SSDs .............................................................................. 7
   2.4 State-of-the-art direct terahertz detectors ........................................... 9

3 SSD models for zero-bias detection .................................................................. 11
   3.1 Intrinsic SSD models ......................................................................... 12
      3.1.1 The SSD model by Åberg et al. ............................................ 12
      3.1.2 Triode-region SSD model ................................................ 13
      3.1.3 Sub-threshold SSD model ............................................... 14
   3.2 The SSD as a zero-bias detector .......................................................... 15
      3.2.1 Responsivity and NEP ....................................................... 15
      3.2.2 Equivalent circuit of an SSD ........................................... 15
      3.2.3 Implications from model on SSD design ......................... 17
   3.3 Summary ............................................................................................ 18

4 Self-switching diode fabrication ..................................................................... 19
   4.1 InAs SSDs .................................................................................... 19
      4.1.1 Epitaxial engineering ...................................................... 19
4.1.2 Fabrication process ........................................................................... 21
4.2 InGaAs SSDs .......................................................................................... 26
4.3 Graphene SSDs ...................................................................................... 28
4.4 Transport properties ............................................................................... 29
4.5 Summary ............................................................................................... 29

5 Characterisation of zero-bias SSD detectors ............................................. 31
  5.1 InAs SSDs ............................................................................................. 31
    5.1.1 DC Characterisation .................................................................... 32
    5.1.2 RF Characterisation .................................................................... 32
  5.2 InGaAs SSDs ......................................................................................... 36
    5.2.1 DC Characterisation .................................................................... 36
    5.2.2 RF Characterisation .................................................................... 36
  5.3 Graphene SSDs ...................................................................................... 38
    5.3.1 DC Characterisation .................................................................... 38
    5.3.2 RF Characterisation .................................................................... 39
  5.4 Comparison of SSD performance .......................................................... 41
  5.5 Summary ............................................................................................... 42

6 Optimisation of SSDs for zero-bias detection ............................................ 43
  6.1 Doping and channel width .................................................................... 43
  6.2 Maximum responsivity ......................................................................... 48
  6.3 Channel length ....................................................................................... 50
  6.4 Number of channels ............................................................................. 52
  6.5 Frequency dependence .......................................................................... 52
  6.6 Summary ............................................................................................... 55

7 Conclusions ............................................................................................. 57

8 Future outlook ........................................................................................ 59

Acknowledgements .................................................................................... 61

References .................................................................................................. 63
Chapter 1

Introduction

Detection in the terahertz (0.3 THz-3 THz) regime has been of importance to astronomy and spectroscopy for decades [1]. While space science has historically been the main driving force [2], there has been an increasing interest from new fields such as security [3] and data communication [4]. As a result, existing as well as new types of detectors operating at terahertz frequencies are constantly being developed for larger bandwidth and lower noise.

Low-noise detection in the terahertz regime is often accomplished with square-law-detectors such as the Schottky diode detector [5–7]. Zero-bias operation offers reduced 1/f noise [8]. Lately, metal-oxide-semiconductor field-effect transistors (MOSFETs) have been explored as a terahertz detector [9–11]. A less explored device with potential for zero-bias terahertz detection is the self-switching diode (SSD) [12]. The SSD generates a nonlinear current-voltage relationship (I-V) through a field effect. When the first SSD was presented, it was described as a field-effect transistor with nanometer sized channels and lateral gates connected to the drain, forming a two-terminal diode [12]. The non-linear I-V enables square-law detection, and SSDs using the two-dimensional electron gas (2DEG) of III-V heterostructures have been utilised for direct detection [13, 14]. Under cryogenic conditions, detection has been demonstrated up to 2.5 THz using InGaAs SSDs [13]. At room temperature, zero-bias direct detection has been demonstrated up to 1.5 THz with GaAs SSDs [14] and 0.3 THz with GaN SSDs [15].

Previous SSDs for terahertz detection were fabricated in GaN, InGaAs or GaAs heterostructures [14–16]. In this thesis, SSDs are realised in two new materials: InAs and graphene. InAs has a bulk electron mobility over three times larger than GaAs [17] which potentially means improved high-frequency performance. Monte Carlo (MC) simulations have predicted lower roll-off of responsivity in InAs SSDs than in InGaAs SSDs. InAs is preferably grown on an AlSb buffer, which is chemically unstable in air and water. In this work, a special InAs SSD process was developed that allowed deep submicron structures to be defined in the InAs/AlSb heterostructure for successful SSD detection experiments.
Graphene has recently received huge interest due to its high intrinsic mobility [18] and unique physical properties such as optical transparency [19]. The first realization and characterization of graphene SSDs is presented in this work [20, 21].

The first SSDs were fabricated in InGaAs/InAlAs heterostructures using wet etching [16, 22]. This thesis presents InGaAs SSDs where the channels are instead fabricated by a dry-etch process. In the first room-temperature terahertz measurements on InGaAs SSDs at 2-315 GHz, a new state-of-the-art noise equivalent power for SSDs was observed across the entire frequency range.

Prior to this thesis work, the influence of doping and design parameters on noise performance in SSD detectors had not been studied. In this thesis, a physics-based model for the SSD is derived by viewing the SSD as a MOSFET. The effects of doping and geometry are explained through the model, and studied in Monte Carlo simulations and detector experiments on SSDs.

This thesis is organised as follows. Chapter 2 presents the background to square-law detectors and SSD direct detectors including an overview of state-of-the-art detectors. In chapter 3, models for the SSD operating as MOSFETs in both the-triode region and sub-threshold region are derived along with an equivalent small-signal circuit of the SSD. Implications of the model are discussed. In chapter 4, the fabrication processes for each material system is presented. Chapter 5 covers the DC and RF characterisation and comparison of SSDs in the three materials InGaAs, InAs and graphene. In chapter 6, the model’s predictions of design dependence are evaluated with measurements and MC simulations. Finally, the thesis is summarised in chapter 7, and recommendations for the future development in the field of SSD zero-bias THz detection are given in chapter 8.
Chapter 2
Background

SSDs are in this thesis investigated as square-law detectors. A square-law detector produces a current or voltage proportional to the square of the amplitude of an applied oscillating voltage, that is, an absorbed radio-frequency (RF) power. Both heterodyne detectors and direct detectors employ square-law detectors, see Fig. 2.1. The heterodyne detector consists of a local oscillator and mixer that down-converts the radio-frequency (RF) signal, which is then detected by a square-law detector. In a direct detector, the RF signal is applied directly to the square-law detector. The heterodyne detector can provide high spectral resolution and phase information, however, is limited in bandwidth by both the mixer and square-law detector. The direct detector is only limited by the square-law detector. Direct detectors are therefore typically more broadband than heterodyne detectors.

This chapter covers the theory of direct detection with square-law detectors, previous work on SSDs as detectors, and the state-of-the-art for zero-bias terahertz detectors.

2.1 Theory of zero-bias detection

Any diode with a nonlinear I-V relationship may act as a square-law detector under small-signal conditions. On the following pages the figures-of-merits responsivity and noise-equivalent power are introduced, and the potential for low noise detection at zero bias explained.

2.1.1 Responsivity

The basis for direct detection is that a difference in incident RF power ($\Delta P_{in}$) on the detector causes a corresponding shift in voltage across the device ($\Delta V$), see Fig. 2.1 (a). The ratio

$$\beta = \frac{\Delta V}{\Delta P_{in}}$$  \hspace{1cm} (2.1)

is called voltage responsivity, from here on referred to simply as ‘responsivity’.
Chapter 2. Background

The non-linearity of the I-V of a diode translates directly into a responsivity. If the $\Delta P_{in}$ is incident on the diode and the diode is optimally matched, the absorbed power is $\Delta P_{abs} = \Delta P_{in}$. In small-signal operation, the diode then generates a voltage

$$\Delta V = -\frac{1}{2}R_D\gamma \Delta P_{abs}$$

(2.2)

across the terminals [23], where $R_D$ is the differential intrinsic resistance and

$$\gamma = \frac{d^2I}{dV^2}/\frac{dI}{dV}$$

(2.3)

The quantity $\gamma$ is referred to as ‘curvature’ or ‘curvature coefficient’ [24]. The responsivity with an optimum match is thus (ignoring the sign of $\Delta V$)

$$\beta_{opt} = \frac{1}{2}R_D\gamma$$

(2.4)

When the detector is not matched and instead driven by a source with an RF impedance $Z_s$, the responsivity is found as

$$\beta_{Zs} = \beta_{opt}(1 - |\Gamma|^2)$$

(2.5)

from the reflection coefficient $\Gamma = (Z_{diode} - Z_s)/(Z_{SSD} + Z_s)$ where $Z_{diode}$ is the impedance of the diode.

It follows from (2.2) that increasing $R_D$ enhances $\beta_{opt}$. However, large $R_D$ makes an impedance matching network narrowband and lossy, limiting the power transfer from source to detector. For $R_D >> Z_s$ at low frequencies and with no matching network, (2.5) is reduced to

$$\beta_{Zs} = 2Z_s\gamma$$

(2.6)

which notably is independent of $R_D$.

2.1.2 Noise-equivalent power

In addition to $\Delta V$, a noise voltage $V_n$ arises across the diode’s terminals. In general, several noise sources can be expected to contribute to $V_n$ in a semiconductor diode.
Johnson-Nyquist noise appears across any conductor or semiconductor at thermal equilibrium due to thermal agitation of the carriers, and its root mean square voltage is [25]

\[ V_{j-N} = \sqrt{4kTB_{D}} \]  

(2.7)

where \( k \) is Boltzmann’s constant, \( T \) the physical temperature, and \( B \) the post-detection bandwidth [22].

Flicker noise is a group of known and unknown noise sources commonly observed in semiconductor devices. The flicker noise is represented by a noise voltage [26]

\[ V_{1/f} = K_f V^x f^y \]  

(2.8)

where \( K_f \) is a device-specific constant. Typically \( x = 2 \) and \( y = -1 \), explaining why flicker noise is often called “1/f noise”. Flicker noise has been observed as both related to bulk phenomena such as mobility fluctuations [27] and interface phenomena [28].

Lastly, carriers crossing a potential barrier at random times generate a shot noise term [29]:

\[ V_{shot} = 2qIB \]  

(2.9)

where \( q \) is the elementary charge. Notably, shot noise is independent of temperature and device parameters. The total noise voltage is found as [8]

\[ V_n^2 = V_{j-N}^2 + V_{1/f}^2 + V_{shot}^2 \]  

(2.10)

In zero-bias detectors, both shot noise and flicker noise are greatly reduced compared to biased detectors, since \( V = 0 \) and \( I = 0 \) in the absence of incident power. During detection, \( \Delta V \) will self-bias the diode and cause both flicker noise and shot noise, although the shot noise in practical conditions is much smaller and hence usually ignored [8, 23, 30]. A good first-order estimation of noise in zero-bias detectors is to consider the low-power limit, where \( \Delta V \) is arbitrarily low and only Johnson-Nyquist noise is present [31, 32].

The noise equivalent power (NEP) is commonly defined as the \( \Delta P_{abs} \) for which \( \Delta V = V_n \) [23]. With an optimum lossless match, considering only Johnson-Nyquist noise, the NEP per Hz\(^{1/2}\) post-detection bandwidth of a zero-bias detector is found as

\[ \text{NEP}_{opt} = \frac{4kTR_0}{\beta_{opt}} \]  

(2.11)

where \( R_0 \) is the zero-bias resistance. When the diode is driven by a limited source impedance, the NEP is instead calculated as

\[ \text{NEP}_{zs} = \frac{4kTR_0}{\beta_{zs}} \]  

(2.12)
Chapter 2. Background

2.2 Self-switching diodes

The first SSD was demonstrated in 2003 by Aimin Song et al. [12]. SSD is characterised by an etched pattern of conductive and isolating regions as illustrated in Fig. 2.2. The isolating trenches define nanometre-sized channels that connect the diode terminals denoted source and drain. In Song’s paper, the device principle was explained as that of a field-effect transistor (FET), see Fig. 2.3 (a). The flanges between the channels act as gates, connected to the drain. The source is grounded. At zero-bias, a depletion region forms around the etched trenches, making the effective channel width, $W_{\text{eff}}$, smaller than $W$. For negative bias (Fig. 2.3 (b)), the gates act to deplete the channel, restricting current flow. Conversely, for a positive bias (Fig. 2.3 (c)), depletion is reduced, facilitating current flow. Thus, a non-linear I-V curve is created.

SSDs have been investigated in several applications. When first introduced, the SSD was presented as a rectifying diode [12]. With a slight variation of the trench design and by adding a terminal, a logic OR gate was constructed [12]. In device simulations, it has been demonstrated that the trench structure of the SSD can facilitate Gunn oscillations in the channel, making the SSD oscillate at frequencies beyond 100 GHz [33–35]. This phenomenon has however not yet been demonstrated in experiments. SSDs have also been employed in heterodyne detection [36]. However, the most investigated application of the SSD has been as a zero-bias direct detector of from microwave up to the terahertz regime [16].

The most notable direct detection result was reported for a zero-bias GaAs SSD in a quasi-optical configuration, where an NEP of 330 pW/Hz$^{1/2}$ was reached at 1.5 THz [14]. A cryogenic InGaAs SSD was demonstrated at 2.5 THz [13]. GaN...
SSDs were demonstrated with a zero-bias $NEP_{opt}$ of 140-280 pW/Hz$^{1/2}$ in the range 140-315 GHz [15].

The SSD layout permits numerous options in device design such as number of channels and geometrical dimensions in channel and trench. Notably, before this work, there has been no study, neither in experiments nor in simulations that reported on the relationship between the SSD design and NEP of the SSD detector.

### 2.3 Materials for SSDs

SSDs can be fabricated in any semiconductor material through a single etch. For example, silicon [37] and low-cost polymers [38], in transparent semiconductors such as indium-tin-oxide (ITO) [39] and ZnO [40]. However, SSDs in those materials have only been demonstrated up to 50 MHz [40].

SSDs for terahertz detection have used 2DEGs in III-V heterostructures based on compound semiconductors such as In(Ga)As, GaAs or GaN [14–16]. By separating electrons from donors, a 2DEG provides both high electron mobility and high sheet carrier concentration [41]. 2DEGs are frequently used in electronics, the most prominent example being high-electron mobility transistors (HEMTs) [42].

The material’s influence on the responsivity of SSDs have been studied in Monte Carlo (MC) simulations [43, 44]. The MC simulation method solves the full Boltzmann’s transport equation in the time domain, making it suitable for studying nanometre-sized devices [45]. MC simulated detection of SSDs with the same design but different materials is presented in Fig. 2.4. InAs SSDs operate at almost double the frequency of GaAs SSDs. The simulations are two-dimensional, meaning that the structure has a cross-section as in Fig. 2.2 while being infinitely thick. Therefore, parasitics such as capacitance through a substrate, which may affect SSD considerably, are not taken considered. Nevertheless, Fig. 2.4 indicates that under the same conditions, InAs SSDs operate at higher frequencies than GaAs SSDs and InGaAs SSDs.

In this thesis SSDs in InAs, InGaAs and graphene are studied. InGaAs has previously been employed in SSDs [16, 22]. In$_{65}$Ga$_{35}$As can be grown...
pseudomorphically on an InAlAs buffer and InP substrate, whereas InAs can be grown on an AlSb buffer. InAs has a drastically higher bulk mobility than In$_{65}$Ga$_{35}$As ($33,000 \text{ cm}^2/\text{Vs}$ vs. $18,000 \text{ cm}^2/\text{Vs}$) making InAs more suited for high-frequency applications. In$_{65}$Ga$_{35}$As channels are used in state-of-the-art low noise HEMTs (InP HEMTs) [46], whereas down-scaled InP HEMTs for high-frequency operation have increased indium content. Using thin (~3 nm) InAs channels, HEMTs and monolithic microwave integrated circuits (MMICs) operating beyond 1 THz have been achieved [47]. The high mobility of InAs makes it attractive also for SSD.

Graphene has in the last years attracted huge interest in the scientific community due to its electronic properties. In exfoliated graphene, sheet carrier mobilities >200,000 cm$^2$/Vs have been observed under cryogenic conditions [18]. Graphene can be grown epitaxially over large surfaces on a SiC substrates [48]. By hydrogen intercalation, wafers of quasi-free-standing bilayer graphene are obtained. Further, graphene can be made at low cost [19] and is highly optically transparent [21].

Before this thesis work, no graphene SSD had been presented in the scientific literature. Two properties of graphene make it relevant for SSDs. Although graphene is a zero-bandgap material, graphene exhibits a maximum sheet resistance for a certain gate voltage, the Dirac voltage $V_{\text{Dirac}}$, when used as a transistor channel. Therefore a nonlinear I-V may be expected from SSDs in graphene.

The other aspect of graphene relevant to SSDs is the concept of nanoribbons. Narrow (20 nm) strips of graphene have been shown to exhibit a small (100 meV) band gap [49]. Since SSDs involve nanometre-sized channels, simulations on graphene SSDs have shown an enhanced rectification for width-induced band gaps, which could improve responsivity of graphene SSDs [50].
2.4 State-of-the-art direct terahertz detectors

An overview of NEP of state-of-the-art direct detectors at room temperature is provided in Fig. 2.5. The metal-semiconductor (Schottky diode) detector is more than a hundred years old [51, 52], and today provide state-of-the-art NEP up to and beyond 1 THz with zero-bias [32, 53], both in quasi-optical configurations and on-wafer [54]. Recent progress on Schottky diodes has been made using semimetal-semiconductor contacts, reaching an NEP of 0.4 pW/Hz$^{1/2}$ at 100 GHz [54]. Zero-bias Schottky diodes have been integrated in metamorphic HEMT (mHEMT) monolithically microwave integrated circuits (MMIC) [6].

Heterostructure backward diodes produce larger curvatures than Schottky diodes, which resulted in an NEP of 0.18 pW/Hz$^{1/2}$ measured at 94 GHz [24].

Microbolometers provide state-of-the-art at direct detection at frequencies beyond 2 THz by measuring the resistance of temperature-sensitive elements. Microbolometers have the drawback of requiring a bias and has a response time of milliseconds, slower than Schottky diodes [9].

In the last ten years, CMOS FETs (complimentary metal-oxide-semiconductor field-effect transistor) have emerged as promising detectors [55]. Although the FETs are biased with a gate voltage, they draw zero bias current, enabling low noise. An NEP close to Schottky diode has in the last years been demonstrated from a few hundred GHz to 4.3 THz, using moderate gate lengths of 150 nm [11, 56]. The high performance and easy integration with other CMOS technologies opens for low-cost terahertz detector arrays [57].

---

Fig. 2.5: State-of-the-art direct terahertz detectors at room-temperature. Shown are Schottky diodes mounted in a waveguide (WG) [53], in quasi-optical configuration (QO) [32, 92, 93], in on-wafer measurements (CPW) [6, 54], CMOS FET (QO) [11], microbolometers (QO) [94–98], and heterostructure backward diodes [24].
Chapter 3
SSD models for zero-bias detection

A model puts experimental observations into context and enables prediction of future experiment outcomes. An electrical model of an SSD is essential in the understanding of how and to what extent geometrical and material parameters affect key detector properties such as responsivity and NEP.

Prior to this work, no model for the SSD as detector had been presented. When the self-switching diode was first introduced, its function was conceptually explained through the analogy of an enhancement-mode FET [12]. Åberg et al. later modelled the I-V of silicon-based SSDs based on FET-equations, and their model is briefly reviewed here [58]. The Shockley diode equation has also been used to describe the I-V of SSDs, however without any connection to design or detector properties [22].

This chapter presents a physics-based model which predicts both responsivity and NEP of SSDs based on design and material parameters. The model, which was introduced in [C] and [D], is derived by applying the FET equations differently than Åberg et al. [12]. As a result, also the theoretical maximum responsivity of SSDs can be calculated. An equivalent circuit is introduced to describe the frequency dependence of SSD detectors. The model is evaluated in chapter 6.

In the first section of this chapter, the source of the nonlinear I-V curve is analysed by studying the intrinsic SSD channel, as done in [D]. Depending on bias conditions, the SSD is treated as an FET operating in either the triode region or sub-threshold region. The influence of design parameters on the I-V curve is derived.

In the second section, SSDs are studied as zero-bias detectors. The design and material dependence of detector properties such as responsivity and NEP is analysed. Parasitic elements are taken into account to describe the variation of responsivity over frequency [C].
Chapter 3. SSD models for zero-bias detection

3.1 Intrinsic SSD models

A schematic design of a single intrinsic SSD channel is shown in Fig. 3.2. Fictional gate terminals with potential $V_g$ are introduced in Fig. 3.2. The capacitance $C_h$ is essential in creating a nonlinear I-V, by coupling the field from the gates to the channels, thereby regulating the intrinsic channel resistance $R_i$.

3.1.1 The SSD model by Åberg et al.

Åberg et. al made the first physical model of the I-V of SSDs [58]. Equations similar to the ones for MOSFETs are used to express the drain current in an SSD channel as

$$I_D = \begin{cases} -K(V_{Di} - V_{tn})^2, & \text{for } V_{Di} < V_{tn} \\ 0, & \text{for } V_{tn} < V_{Di} < V_{tp} \\ K(V_{Di} - V_{tp})^2, & \text{for } V_{Di} > V_{tp} \end{cases}$$

(3.1)

where $K=\mu_nC_h/L$, $q$ is the elementary charge and $\mu_n$ the mobility of electrons in the channel. $V_m$ and $V_{ip}$ are negative and positive threshold voltages. In for example forward bias, $I_D$ is modelled as a FET in saturation mode when $V_{Di} > V_{ip}$, and vice versa for reverse bias. Below threshold though, the current is simply set to zero. This model is therefore not applicable for SSDs for zero-bias detection.


3.1 Intrinsic SSD models

3.1.2 Triode-region SSD model

When the channel is under strong inversion, such as a 2DEG at equilibrium, the SSD can be expected to behave as a depletion mode MOSFET. Applying a voltage to $V_g$ modulates the channel resistance $R_i$. Assuming that the channel is operating in the triode region, $I_D$ is found as \[ I_D = NK \left( \frac{q n_s W_{eff}}{2 C_h Z} + V_{Di} \right) V_{Di} - \frac{V_{Di}^2}{2} \tag{3.2} \]

where $n_s$ is the sheet electron concentration in the channel. $W_{eff}$ is an effective channel width, here introduced to take into consideration that depletion layers may form at the channel sidewalls. $W_{eff}$ is related to $W$ as

\[ W_{eff} = W - W_o \]

where $W_o$ is a constant [15]. Consequently, $W_{h,eff} = W_h + W_o$, see Fig. 3.1.

From (3.2), a threshold voltage may be identified as

\[ V_{th} = -\frac{q n_s W_{eff}}{2 C_h} \tag{3.3} \]

The conditions to be fulfilled for (3.2) to hold may now be expressed as (a) the transistor is operating in the triode region ($V_g - V_{th} \gg V_{ds}$ and $V_g \gg V_{th}$), (b) $\mu_n$ is field-independent ($V_{Di} \approx 0$ V), and (c) that the long-channel approximation is valid. For the special case of zero-bias operation ($V_{Di} \approx 0$ V), the condition (a) may be expressed as $V_{th} \ll 0$ V.

By recognizing that $V_g = V_{Di}$, (3.2) can now be rewritten as

![Fig. 3.2: Åberg et al.’s model for the I-V of an SSD. The current is modelled as zero between the positive and negative threshold voltages $V_{tp}$ and $V_{tn}$ which makes the model inapplicable for zero-bias detectors.](image-url)
Chapter 3. SSD models for zero-bias detection

An example of an I-V produced by (3.4) is plotted in Fig. 3.3.

3.1.3 Sub-threshold SSD model

For $V_{th} >> V_{Di}$, and long-channel conditions, the transistor is operating in the sub-threshold region, meaning the channel is either in weak inversion or depleted. For the drain current of a MOSFET in subthreshold operation is \[ I_D = N K \left( \frac{V_{Di}}{2} - V_{th} \right) V_{Di} \] (3.4)

which for $V_g = V_{Di}$ and for simplicity the gate ideality constant $n = 1$ simplifies to

\[ I_D = \frac{N}{L} I_0 \exp\left( \frac{V_g - V_{th}}{nV_T} \right) \left( 1 - \exp\left( -\frac{V_{Di}}{V_T} \right) \right) \] (3.5)

An example of an I-V produced by (3.4) is plotted in Fig. 3.3.

![I-V curve](image)

Fig. 3.3: I-V curved as predicted by (solid line) the triode-region SSD model and (dashed line) the subthreshold SSD model. Parameters used are $V_{th} = -0.25$ V for the triode region model and $V_{th} = 0$ V for the subthreshold model.

where $I_0$ is a process-dependent constant and $V_T$ the thermal voltage $V_T = kT/q$.

The triode-region FET model is compared to the sub-threshold FET model in Fig. 3.3. The former exhibits a quadric I-V whereas the latter an exponential I-V. Both models display nonlinear I-V curves around $V_{Di} \approx 0$ V, which enables zero-bias detection with SSDs.
3.2 The SSD as a zero-bias detector

3.2.1 Responsivity and NEP

The non-linearity of the I-V of an SSD translates directly into a responsivity for a detector application. By applying the general theory of square-law detectors in section 2.1 on the triode-region FET model (3.4), the zero-bias responsivity and NEP can be expressed in terms of design parameters.

The intrinsic channel resistance $R_i$ and the intrinsic curvature $\gamma_i$ are found simply as

$$R_i = \left(\frac{dI_D}{dV_{Di}}\right)^{-1} = \frac{1}{NK(V_{Di} - V_{th})} = \{V_{Di} = 0\} = \frac{L}{q\eta W_{eff} \mu_n N} \quad (3.7)$$

and

$$\gamma_i = \frac{d^2I_D}{dV_{Di}^2} / \frac{dI_D}{dV_{Di}} = \frac{1}{(V_{Di} - V_{th})} = \{V_{Di} = 0\} = \frac{2C_h}{q\eta W_{eff}} \quad (3.8)$$

These two quantities $R_i$ and $\gamma_i$ form the basis of the following analysis. Inserting (3.7)-(3.8) into (2.4)-(2.6) and (2.11)-(2.12), the following relationships are obtained:

$$\beta_{\text{opt}} = C_h \frac{L}{\mu_n N} \left(\frac{1}{q\eta W_{eff}}\right)^2 \quad (3.9)$$

$$\beta_{ZS} = Z_s C_h \frac{4}{q\eta W_{eff}} \quad (3.10)$$

$$\text{NEP}_{\text{opt}} = \frac{1}{C_h} \sqrt{4kT} \sqrt{\frac{\mu_n N}{L}} \left(q\eta W_{eff}\right)^{3/2} \quad (3.11)$$

$$\text{NEP}_{ZS} = \frac{1}{2C_h Z_s} \sqrt{kT} \left(\frac{L}{\mu_n N \sqrt{q\eta W_{eff}}}\right) \quad (3.12)$$

In equations (3.9)-(3.12) it is assumed that detection is performed at low frequencies and that no parasitic elements are at play. In the next section, the responsivity and NEP of a realistic SSD at high frequencies are studied.

3.2.2 Equivalent circuit of an SSD

The frequency dependence of an SSD is found by calculating the power coupled into the intrinsic channel ($P_{Ri}$) in relation to the total absorbed power ($P_{abs}$). The expression for $\beta_{\text{opt}}$ in (2.4) is modified to
where $F = P_R / P_{abs}$.

A number of parasitic elements degrade the SSD’s responsivity and NEP. In Fig. 3.4, elements of an equivalent small-signal model are defined in an SSD with a single channel. The capacitance $C_v$ appears across the trench drawn vertically in Fig. 3.4. $C_v$ is the main parasitic element. A fair assumption is that $C_v$ is roughly proportional to the $W_{mesa}$, which is roughly proportional to $N$, the number of channels.

To find the frequency response of SSDs, a simplified version of the small-signal model is used, as shown in Fig. 3.5. For the designs in this work, the designs in this thesis, $R_{g1}$ and $R_{g2}$ may be neglected since $W \ll S$ and thus $R_{g1} + R_{g2} \ll R_i$. In Fig. 3.4, the capacitances $C_v$ and $C_h$ are represented by a single capacitance $C_h$ in parallel to $R_i$ and $R_{g2}$. (A more accurate model would consider $C_v$ and $C_h$ separately.) By representing all capacitances in the SSD with $C_p$, $F$ is slightly underestimated at high frequencies but the parameter extraction process simplified.

The zero-bias resistance $R_0$ is related to the other resistances in Fig. 3.3-3 as

$$R_0 = R_i + R_{sa} + R_{da} + R_{s2}$$

(3.14)

Empirical measurements of sheet resistance $R_{sh}$ can be used to calculate $R_i$ and $R_{s2}$. At zero-bias, the small-signal value of $R_i$ is found as

$$R_i = \frac{R_{sh} L}{NW_{eff}}$$

(3.15)

$R_{s2}$ represents the part of the channels that cross the vertical trench and is modelled as

$$R_{s2} = \frac{R_{sh} W_v}{NW_{eff}}$$

(3.16)
3.2 The SSD as a zero-bias detector

The parasitic source-side and drain-side access resistances \( R_{sa} \) and \( R_{da} \), respectively, represent the mesa resistance on the two sides of the channel. \( R_{s1} = R_{sa} + R_{da} \) may vary with \( W \) somewhat due to current crowding at the entry of the channels. \( R_{s1} \) and \( R_{s2} \) are here considered linear.

The coupling factor \( F \) in (3.13) can now be calculated as

\[
F = \frac{R_i}{R_{s1} + R_{s2}} \cdot \frac{1}{1 + \frac{R_{s1}(R_i + R_{s2})^2C_p^2\omega^2}{R_i + R_{s1} + R_{s2}}}
\]

which at low frequencies is reduced to \( F = \frac{R_i}{R_{s1} + R_{s2}} \).

A detector’s frequency dependence is often described by a “cut-off frequency” \( f_c \). The definition of \( f_c \) is the frequency for which the power delivered to \( R_i \) is halved when the SSD is driven by a constant voltage source [61]:

\[
f_c = \frac{1}{2\pi R_{s1}C_p} \left(1 + \frac{R_{s1}}{R_i + R_{s2}}\right)
\]

Often, (3.18) is written simply as \( f_c = 1/(2\pi R_{s1}C_p) \), assuming \( R_{s1} \ll (R_i + R_{s2}) \). \( f_c \) is commonly applied to Schottky diodes and other diodes that can be described with an R-C network [6, 62].

3.2.3 Implications from model on SSD design

Certain conclusions regarding optimisations of SSDs can be drawn from the triode-region SSD model derived above. Analyzing the influence of device design on detector properties is simplified by studying the low-frequency performance as described by (3.7)-(3.12), with negligible parasitics.

In general it can be noted that increasing \( \gamma_i \) has only positive effects on NEP or responsivity. Increasing \( R_i \) improves \( \beta_{opt} \) and \( \text{NEP}_{opt} (\propto \sqrt{R_i}) \), however, affects \( \text{NEP}_{zs} \) negatively and complicates an input match network. It follows from (3.7) and (3.8)
that $C_h$ is the only parameter that increases $\gamma_i$ without increasing $R_i$. $C_h$ can be increased for example by minimizing $W_h$.

Next are two parameters that affect $R_i$ and $\gamma_i$ equally: $W_{\text{eff}}$ and $n_s$. By reducing $W$ and the channel doping, responsivity and NEP improve both with optimal matching and with a limited source impedance.

Three parameters affect only $R_i$ and not $\gamma_i$: $L$, $N$ and $\mu_n$. The ratio $L/(N\mu_n)$ should be maximised to increase $R_i$ and thus minimise $\text{NEP}^{\text{opt}}$. High $R_i$ does however have negative effects on $\text{NEP}^{\text{opt}}$ through increased thermal noise. Further, $N$ strongly affects the minimum mesa width and thus $C_p$, pad capacitance and the high-frequency response. Through careful examination of (3.7)-(2.12) it follows that $\mu_n$ should in fact be maximised and $L$ minimised (without voiding the long-channel condition). The choice of $N$ is then a trade-off between $\text{NEP}^{\text{opt}}$, $\text{NEP}^{50\Omega}$, responsivity and high-frequency performance, as discussed in chapter 6.

An interesting observation is that in sub-threshold operation, $\beta^{\text{opt}}$ and $\beta^{50\Omega}$ are inversely proportional to $T$, while independent of $T$ in the triode region. $n_s$, the only material parameter that affects responsivity in the triode region, is very weakly affected by $T$ in III-V 2DEGs [63, 64].

When $V_{\text{th}} \to 0$ V, (3.8) suggests $\gamma_i$ grows infinitely. But (3.8) was derived for an SSD channel operating in the triode region. For $V_i \approx 0$ V and $V_i \ll 0$ V, the SSD channel is instead operating in weak inversion and the sub-threshold model is more applicable. It follows from (3.6) and (2.3) that for $V_{\text{th}} < 0$ V, $\gamma_i$ takes on a maximum value

$$\gamma_{i,\text{max}} = \frac{q}{kT} = \{T = 300 \text{ K}\} = 38.7 \text{ V}^{-1}$$

which translates to a maximum responsivity of 3870 V/W when driven by a 50 $\Omega$ source. The same $\gamma_{i,\text{max}}$ is observed in ideal Schottky diodes [59]. Thus, the maximum zero-bias curvature in an SSD is identical to the maximum curvature of a Schottky diode.

### 3.3 Summary

A model for the I-V of the intrinsic SSD channels was derived by considering the SSD an FET operating in either the triode region or sub-threshold region. Responsivity and NEP were expressed in terms of SSD design parameters. Trench width, channel width and carrier concentration were identified as the most important design parameters to optimise performance. Electron mobility was found to not affect responsivity, only NEP. Channels should be just long enough to exhibit long-channel behaviour. With the sub-threshold SSD model, it was shown that the theoretical maximum unmatched responsivity for an SSD equals that of the Schottky diode.
Chapter 4
Self-switching diode fabrication

SSDs are formed through a single etch of nanometre-sized into a single sheet of semiconductor. It was shown in chapter 3 that the lowest NEP is expected from SSDs with narrow channels defined by narrow etched trenches, meaning that an optimised fabrication process is essential for improving detector performance.

This chapter presents the fabrication processes for SSDs using the three different channel materials investigated in this thesis: InAs [A-D], InGaAs [e] and graphene [E]. InAs SSDs were fabricated in an InAs/Al$_{80}$Ga$_{20}$Sb heterostructure for InAs’ high mobility. InGaAs SSDs were fabricated in an In$_{65}$Ga$_{35}$As/InAlAs heterostructure using a dry-etch process for comparison with previously demonstrated InGaAs SSDs based on wet-etched channels [14]. Graphene SSDs were fabricated in epitaxial graphene on SiC, which can be grown on wafer-scale [65]. A physical characterisation of SSDs fabricated in all three materials is presented.

4.1 InAs SSDs

InAs SSDs are expected to show less roll-off than InGaAs SSDs. However, InAs is grown pseudomorphically on AlSb which is tremendously sensitive to oxidation, and therefore presents a substantial technological obstacle in device fabrication [66]. InAs SSDs had been presented, but never in a process with stable devices [g,m]. The problem of instability is here addressed both through design of the epitaxial layers and through preventative measures in the device fabrication process. This process was developed for producing the deep submicron isolation patterns needed for InAs SSDs, while protecting the device from oxidation [A].

4.1.1 Epitaxial engineering

The design of the epitaxial structure is the first step for successful fabrication of InAs SSDs. By introducing a fraction of gallium into AlSb and forming the ternary
compound Al\(_{x}\)Ga\(_{1-x}\)Sb, the chemical stability is improved considerably also for moderate Ga contents [67]. Although Ga is known to be more conductive than AlSb, a mixed AlSb/Al\(_{80}\)Ga\(_{20}\)Sb buffer is commonly used in InAs/AlSb devices such as HEMTs [67, 68]. However, a transistor biased for amplification has per definition much higher current per device width than a zero-biased InAs SSD. The leakage is thus more significant in an InAs SSD. The buffer design in InAs SSDs is a trade-off between chemical stability and electrical isolation [67].

Two investigated buffer designs are shown in Fig. 4.1 together with scanning electron microscopy (SEM) images of trenches passivated with silicon nitride. The cross-sections in Fig. 4.1 were prepared by fabricating long trenches and subsequently breaking the substrate perpendicularly to the trenches. None of the samples were subject to wet chemistry, and both were cut and imaged within minutes following the etch and subsequent passivation. The etched AlSb layer in Fig. 4.2 (a) shows a clearly oxidised area around the trenches. The Al\(_{80}\)Ga\(_{20}\)Sb in Fig. 4.2 (b) exhibits considerably less oxidation. Hence, even though the parallel conduction may be increased by replacing AlSb with Al\(_{80}\)Ga\(_{20}\)Sb, it is motivated by the dramatic increase in stability.

An early InAs SSD showed that an isolation resistance >100 M\(\Omega\)/sq across a 0.1×30 \(\mu\)m isolating trench would produce a leakage current on the same level as single SSD channel at zero-bias [a]. The design in Fig. 4.1 (b) yielded an isolation
4.1 InAs SSDs

Table I: Epitaxial structure of InAs SSDs. Samples with and without δ-doping were studied.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layer</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Thickness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cap layer</td>
<td>InAs, Te: 1×10^{19} cm(^{-3})</td>
<td>5 nm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection layer</td>
<td>In(<em>{50})Al(</em>{50})As</td>
<td>4 nm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrier</td>
<td>Al(<em>{80})Ga(</em>{20})Sb</td>
<td>8 nm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δ-doping</td>
<td>Te: 0-1×10^{12} cm(^{-2})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spacer</td>
<td>Al(<em>{80})Ga(</em>{20})Sb</td>
<td>5 nm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel</td>
<td>InAs</td>
<td>15 nm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffer</td>
<td>Al(<em>{80})Ga(</em>{20})Sb</td>
<td>100 nm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metamorphic buffer</td>
<td>AlSb</td>
<td>1000 nm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoothing layer</td>
<td>GaAs</td>
<td>300 nm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substrate</td>
<td>S.I. GaAs (001)</td>
<td>500 μm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

resistance of >1 GΩ/sq across etched trenches, which was be sufficient both in terms of isolation and stability.

The heterostructure used for fabrication of InAs SSDs in [A-D] is described in Table I. The structure was grown by molecular beam epitaxy (MBE) on a GaAs substrate. Al\(_{80}\)Ga\(_{20}\)Sb was preferred over AlSb in three layers affected by the trench etch: The barrier, the spacer and the top part of the buffer. An In\(_{50}\)Al\(_{50}\)As protection layer was placed on top of the Al\(_{80}\)Ga\(_{20}\)Sb barrier. This layer allows the InAs cap layer to be etched away without exposing Al\(_{80}\)Ga\(_{20}\)Sb to air.

4.1.2 Fabrication process

Trenches are in this process fabricated by dry etching. Ion implantation is an attractive alternative for AlSb materials since exposure of the buffer can be completely avoided [69, 70], and has been used for GaN/AlGaN SSDs [15]. However, ion implantation in InAs/AlSb structures causes transitions between isolating regions and unperturbed lattice over hundreds of nanometres, meaning limited resolution [71]. Since SSDs benefit from nanometre-sized trenches, and nanometre-sized channels, sharper transitions between conductive and isolating regions are needed. Ion implantation is therefore not suited for InAs/AlSb SSDs. Instead, a dry-etch process with \textit{in situ} encapsulation with silicon nitride deposited with plasma-enhanced chemical vapour deposition (PECVD) was further developed [68].

It has been shown in elevated-temperature life-testing that Al\(_{70}\)Ga\(_{30}\)Sb encapsulated with PECVD- grown silicon nitride does, in fact, oxidise after some time [72]. It is therefore relevant to grow a thick silicon nitride layer. The process in [68] uses lift-off of the deposited silicon nitride, which limits either thickness or
Chapter 4. Self-switching diode fabrication

resolution. The process in [68] was in [A] further developed to include in situ resist removal, allowing silicon nitride of arbitrary thickness to be deposited as protection against oxidation. Since no lift-off is required, the improved process simultaneously allows nanometre-sized features and thick silicon nitride layers.

Fabrication of InAs SSDs starts with the formation of annealed Pd/Pt/Au ohmic contacts and Ti/Au metal pads. Then follows the formation of the active device and mesa isolation as described below and illustrated in Fig. 4.2.

a. **Recess etch:** A recess is etched in the cap layer using a citric acid solution. The purpose of the etch is to prevent parallel conduction through the cap layer in the SSD channels.

b. **Trench etch:** Trenches are patterned by e-beam lithography. Trenches are then formed through a time-controlled etch with a highly directional Cl₂:Ar reactive ion etch (RIE) process. The etch is stopped just below the InAs 2DEG, reaching the Al₈₀Ga₂₀Sb buffer. The resist is then removed in situ with an NF₃ RIE process, which does not etch III-V semiconductors [73].

c. **Early-passivation of trenches:** A 25 nm layer of silicon nitride is grown using through plasma enhanced chemical vapour deposition (PECVD) to temporarily encapsulate and electrically passivate the etched surfaces. Thus, the oxidation-prone Al₈₀Ga₂₀Sb and AlSb layers

Fig. 4.2: Schematic view of the trench and mesa fabrication in InAs SSDs. (a) Recess in cap layer etched with citric acid, (b) dry etch of trenches, (c) in situ removal of resist and temporary silicon nitride encapsulation, (d) dry etch of mesas and (e) in situ removal of resist and temporary passivation and subsequent deposition of silicon nitride.
4.1 InAs SSDs

are never exposed to air through the etch, resist removal, and passivation steps.

d. Mesa etch: Mesas are patterned in resist, covering all active device areas and metal pads. The 25 nm silicon nitride layer is etched using the NF3 RIE process in step b). The sample is etched down to the GaAs substrate with a Cl2:Ar RIE/ICP process. Using the aforementioned NF3 RIE etch process, also the remaining resist and the 25 nm silicon nitride previously deposited to protect the etched trenches is removed.

e. Final passivation: A new, 150 nm thick silicon nitride layer is grown. The silicon nitride completely fills the etched trenches and covered the mesa sidewalls.

Fig. 4.3: A scanning electron micrograph (SEM) of an InAs SSDs with temporary encapsulation of 25 nm silicon nitride, corresponding to Fig. 4.2 (c). The imaged SSD channels were designed for $W=45$ nm.

A top-view SEM-image of an InAs SSD after step c is shown in Fig. 4.3. The trenches are clearly defined and uniformly etched, suggesting that the narrower trenches could be fabricated with the same process.

A cross-section of finalised SSD channels is shown in Figs. 4.4-5, imaged via scanning transmission electron microscopy (STEM). Fig. 4.5 shows how the silicon nitride completely fills the etched trenches. The trench etch reached through the InAs channel, thereby creating an isolating pattern. The channel was designed for $W=50$ nm, which corresponds to the width of the top of the physical InAs channel. Furthermore, Fig. 4.4 reveals that the physical InAs channel has a slightly trapezoidal cross-section with a 70 nm wide base. The Al$_{80}$Ga$_{20}$Sb barrier on top of the InAs
Chapter 4. Self-switching diode fabrication

channel was somewhat overetched and 35 nm wide, 15 nm narrower than the rest of the channel.

A photo of an InAs SSD is available in Fig. 4.7 (a). A structure used for coplanar RF measurements is shown in Fig. 4.7 (b). Similar structures were used for SSDs in all three materials. An approximately 70 µm transmission line was used to provide a partial RF match.

$W_{eff}$ in InAs SSDs was determined by plotting the zero-bias resistance $R_0$ and zero-bias conductance $1/R_0$ versus $W$, see Fig. 6. $W_{eff}$ is the $W$ for which the conductance reaches zero. A function of the form $R'_0 = a + b/(W - W_0)$ was fitted to
InAs SSDs

4.1

InAs SSDs

4.1 InAs SSDs

InAs SSDs

Fig. 4.7: (a) Micrograph of an InAs SSD. (b) Pad structure used in on-wafer RF measurements of InAs SSDs.

Fig. 4.6: Zero-bias resistance $R_0$ (triangles) and zero-bias conductance $1/R_0$ (crosses) versus $W$ in InAs/AlSb SSDs. Extrapolation of $R_0$ and $1/R_0$ (solid lines) determined the effective channel width $W_{\text{eff}}$. [A]

$R_0$, where $a$ and $b$ are constants. Extrapolating $R'_0$ gives $W_o=16$ nm. Although the edges of the InAs channels in Fig. 4.4 are not perfectly sharp, the physical width is not significantly less than $W$, suggesting that $W_o$ is to a large part due to depletion by surface charge.

InAs surfaces may exhibit either accumulation or depletion layers [23]. The type of layer and its magnitude can be affected by several factors such as passivation, etch chemistry and ion energy. A positive $W_o$ indicates that with this process a depletion is layer formed at the channel sidewalls. Since the responsivity in SSDs at zero-bias is increased for narrow channel widths, an effective channel width smaller than the physical width is favourable for SSDs in detector applications.
Chapter 4. Self-switching diode fabrication

4.2 InGaAs SSDs

The In$_{65}$Ga$_{35}$As/InAlAs heterostructure is an established material system for SSDs [12, 16]. In contrast to InAs/AlSb, InGaAs/InAlAs does not suffer from oxidation issues and SSDs can therefore be fabricated with well-known processing concepts. Wet-etched InGaAs SSDs, and GaAs SSDs, have been used in several experiments, also at terahertz frequencies [13, 16]. An example of a wet etched SSD channel is shown in Fig. 4.8. The roughness of the channel is of the same order as the channel width. In this thesis, however, InGaAs SSDs were fabricated by dry etching, for better control of channel width.

The MBE-grown pseudomorphic In$_{65}$Ga$_{35}$As/InAlAs structure used for InGaAs SSDs in this thesis is shown in Table II. Identical structures are used for low-noise InP HEMTs [46]. After deposition of Ti/Pt/Au contacts and Ti/Au pads, the trenches and SSD channels were formed. Trenches were patterned with e-beam lithography and etched using the same RIE recipe as for InAs SSDs [A]. The InGaAs SSDs were taken out of the etch chamber, cleaned from resist with a solvent, and passivated with 25 nm silicon nitride using the same recipe as for InAs SSDs [A].

An example of a dry-etched InGaAs SSD channel is given in Fig. 4.9. Compared to the wet-etched channels in Fig. 4.8, the roughness is negligible and resolution greatly increased.

The channel in Fig. 4.9 was designed for $W = 100$ nm. The physical of the In$_{65}$Ga$_{35}$As layer is 85 nm (top) and 100 nm (bottom). From Fig. 4.10, a $W_p = 29$ nm is extracted, indicating an effective width $W_{\text{eff}} = W - 29$ nm. The difference between physical width and $W_{\text{eff}}$ is ~15-30 nm, suggesting that the depletion layer at the surface is the same as for InAs.
### Table II: Epitaxial structure of InGaAs SSDs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layer</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Thickness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cap layer</td>
<td>In$<em>{53}$Ga$</em>{47}$As, Si: 1×10$^{19}$ cm$^{-3}$</td>
<td>5 nm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection layer</td>
<td>In$<em>{52}$Al$</em>{48}$As</td>
<td>4 nm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrier</td>
<td>In$<em>{52}$Al$</em>{48}$As</td>
<td>8 nm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δ-doping</td>
<td>Si: 5×10$^{12}$ cm$^{-2}$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spacer</td>
<td>In$<em>{52}$Al$</em>{48}$As</td>
<td>5 nm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel</td>
<td>In$<em>{65}$Ga$</em>{35}$As</td>
<td>15 nm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffer</td>
<td>In$<em>{52}$Al$</em>{48}$As</td>
<td>500 nm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substrate</td>
<td>S.I. InP (001)</td>
<td>400 µm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 4.9: (a) Top-view SEM of a dry-etched InGaAs SSD channel after passivation with 25 nm silicon nitride. (b) Cross-section SEM of an SSD channel designed for $W=100$ nm.

![Top-view SEM of a dry-etched InGaAs SSD channel](image1.png) ![Cross-section SEM of an SSD channel](image2.png)

Fig. 4.10: Zero-bias resistance $R_0$ (triangles) and zero-bias conductance $1/R_0$ (crosses) versus $W$ in InAs SSDs. Extrapolation of $R_0$ and $1/R_0$ (solid lines) determined the effective channel width $W_{eff}$.

![Zero-bias resistance and conductance graph](image3.png)
Graphene exhibits the highest mobility when produced through exfoliation of graphite, which yields small samples sizes [74]. With graphene grown epitaxially on SiC, wafer-scale graphene is obtained, which is more suited for production of electronic devices [48]. Graphene SSDs were therefore fabricated from epitaxial graphene on SiC.

The graphene was obtained as follows. A carbon buffer layer and a graphene monolayer were grown on the Si-face of 4H-SiC at 1400 °C in a horizontal hot-wall chemical vapour deposition (CVD) reactor [75]. One sample underwent hydrogen intercalation, in which the carbon buffer layer was released from the SiC. Hence, quasi-free standing bilayer graphene was obtained [48, 76, 77]. Micro-Raman spectra confirmed the expected number of graphene layers in both samples.

The processing began by patterning the isolating trenches with e-beam lithography [E]. A short (5 s) O$_2$ plasma was used to etch the graphene. Ohmic contacts (Ti/Au) were deposited and mesa defined using an O$_2$ plasma [78]. After depositing contact pads (Ti/Au) the SSDs were covered in benzocyclobutene (BCB) [78]. BCB was used to encapsulate and preserve the graphene.

Fig. 4.11: Scanning electron micrograph (SEM) of a single SSD channel etched in as-grown bilayer graphene on SiC. The narrowest width of the depicted channel is 15 nm. The inset shows the SSD design used in the RF detection experiments, with 9 parallel channels.
4.4 Transport properties

Table III: Summary of transport parameters extracted from Hall measurements on samples that had undergone the developed SSD processes. For the InAs SSD and InGaAs SSD samples, the measurements were performed on etched and passivated areas. For graphene, the areas were coated with BCB.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>$\delta$-doping (cm$^{-2}$)</th>
<th>$R_{sh}$ (Ω/sq)</th>
<th>$n_s$ ($\times 10^{12}$ cm$^{-2}$)</th>
<th>$\mu_n$ (cm$^2$/Vs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>InAs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>26 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InAs</td>
<td>$1\times 10^{12}$</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>17 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InGaAs</td>
<td>$5\times 10^{12}$</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>15 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphene, as-grown</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>6500</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>1 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphene, H-interc.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>20$^1$</td>
<td>1 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^1$Hole concentration, $p_s$.

Fig. 4.11 shows a scanning electron micrograph of an SSD fabricated in epitaxial graphene. The inset shows an SSD design used for the RF detection experiment reported on in this thesis, with nine channels in parallel to reduce resistance and NEP.

4.4 Transport properties

The materials used for fabrication of SSDs will affect how the SSDs perform as detectors. Of special relevance is sheet electron mobility $\mu_n$ and sheet carrier concentration $n_s$. Hall measurements performed on samples prepared exactly as the surface of the etched SSD channels are presented in Table III. Due to the deep quantum well in InAs/AlSb structures, a significant $n_s$ is reached even without $\delta$-doping, which is expected [64]. The $n_s$ reached in the InGaAs process is somewhat lower than what is reached with the same structure when silicon nitride is deposited at high temperature instead of room temperature [63].

While the as-grown sample was n-type, the H-intercalated sample was strongly p-type, thus exhibiting hole conduction [78]. From the $n_s$ presented in Table III, the Fermi energies were estimated to $\varepsilon_f =-88$ meV for the as-grown sample and $\varepsilon_f =-366$ meV in the H-intercalated sample [79]. The change from n-type to p-type upon intercalation, and the observed mobilities, are expected from the literature [78].

4.5 Summary

An epitaxial structure and fabrication process was developed that enabled fabrication of the first InAs SSDs, on an AlSb buffer. Through $in$ $situ$ resist removal and encapsulation with silicon nitride, channels down to 35 nm wide were fabricated without exposure to air.

A process for dry etched InGaAs SSDs was presented with which dramatically narrower and smoother trenches and channels could be etched compared to wet
etched SSDs. The first graphene SSDs were fabricated through dry-etch of graphene grown epitaxially on SiC.

Samples that underwent all three processes exhibited transport properties expected from the literature.
Chapter 5
Characterisation of zero-bias SSD detectors

The fabricated SSDs have been characterised using DC measurements and RF measurements, performed on-wafer and in quasi-optical configuration [A-E, e]. On-wafer measurements provide more accurate measurements of device performance, whereas quasi-optical measurements at higher frequencies better emulate possible terahertz applications of SSDs.

In previous works, MC simulations had shown that SSDs with an InAs channel may show less roll-off of responsivity at high frequencies than SSDs in other III-V, see chapter 2. Detection with wet-etched GaAs SSDs had been demonstrated at 1.5 THz [14] and at 110 GHz with wet-etched InGaAs SSDs [16]. Graphene SSDs had been studied in simulations, however, never demonstrated in electrical measurements [80].

In this chapter, the first RF characterization of InAs SSD and dry-etched InGaAs SSDs are presented, with on-wafer measurements up to 315 GHz. The first graphene SSDs are characterized up to 67 GHz, on-wafer. Using quasi-optical measurements, detection is demonstrated at 200 GHz and 600 GHz with InAs SSDs. InAs SSDs are also employed in an imaging application at 200 GHz.

5.1 InAs SSDs

Throughout chapter 5 and 6, a reference InAs SSD design is used. Only deviations from this design are noted. Referring to Fig. 2.2, the reference design is $W = 45$ nm, $N = 43$, $L = 1000$ nm, $W_v = W_h = 100$ nm, $S = 350$ nm, $W_{mesa} = 30$ µm and $L_{mesa} = 5.3$ µm. The fabrication process was described in chapter 5, and used no $\delta$-doping in the InAs/AlSb heterostructure unless otherwise stated.
5.1.1 DC Characterisation

The basis for detection in the SSD is the nonlinear I-V characteristic of the intrinsic channel. To study the intrinsic channel, \( V_{Di} = V_D - I_D(R_{s1} + R_{s2}) \) was calculated, where \( R_{s1} \) was measured on a mesa without etched trenches to \( R_{s1} = 40 \Omega \), and \( R_{s2} \) calculated through (3.14) using design parameters and \( R_0 \). With \( V_{Di} \), intrinsic channel resistance (\( R_i \)), and intrinsic curvature (\( \gamma_i \)) for an InAs SSD were plotted in Fig. 5.1, together with the drain current \( I_D \). While the I-V appears almost linear in the graph, a nonlinearity is revealed through \( R_i \) and \( \gamma_i \). Fig. 5.1 shows that \( R_i \) is slightly lower in forward bias than backward bias, thereby demonstrating rectifying behaviour of InAs SSDs. More precisely, the non-zero \( \gamma_i \) at \( V_D = 0 \) V enables detection at zero-bias.

The parameters relevant for zero-bias detection extracted from Fig. 5.1 are \( R_i = 281 \Omega \) (12 k\( \Omega \) per channel) and \( \gamma_i = 0.32 \) V\(^{-1}\), both for \( V_D = 0 \) V. From (2.3), the expected zero-bias responsivity with a 50 \( \Omega \) source is \( \beta_{50\Omega} = 16 \) V/W.

5.1.2 RF Characterisation

On-wafer measurements of responsivity of InAs SSDs was performed using a vector network analyzer with frequency extenders as a signal source. Measurements were performed in three different bands (2-50 GHz, 140-220 GHz and 240-315 GHz), with an available power varying from 1.7 \( \mu \)W to 8.6 \( \mu \)W. The measurement structure contained a short coplanar waveguide, see Fig. 4.7 (b), which provided a partial RF match. Further details are available in [B].

Measured responsivity of InAs SSDs (\( \beta_{50\Omega} \)) of two different \( W \) is presented in Fig. 5.2. \( NEP_{50\Omega} \) was estimated from \( R_0 \) and \( \beta_{50\Omega} \) using (2.12) and is shown in Fig. 5.3.
Notably, no strong roll-off of $\beta_{50 \Omega}$ was observed up to 315 GHz. As predicted by (3.2)-(3.13), a smaller $W$ and thus smaller $W_{\text{eff}}$ resulted in higher $\beta_{50 \Omega}$ and lower $\text{NEP}_{50 \Omega}$. The $\beta_{50 \Omega}$ for $W = 35 \text{ nm}$ at low frequencies was close to 16 V/W as predicted from Fig. 5.1, demonstrating consistency between RF and DC measurements for the same SSD.
Chapter 5. Characterisation of zero-bias SSD detectors

At high incident powers, the SSDs deviate from a linear response. In Fig. 5.4, measured $\beta_{\text{SSD}}$ is plotted versus available power $P_{\text{in}}$ at 2 GHz. The measured $\beta_{\text{SSD}}$ differs from the small-signal value by 1 dB at $P_{\text{in}}$ of -2.3 dBm and -4.3 dBm for $W$ of 35 nm and 50 nm, respectively. In comparison, the responsivity for Schottky diodes and Sb-based tunnel diodes reach 1 dB compression at < -20 dBm. The relatively weak nonlinearity ($\gamma$) of the I-V in InAs/AlSb SSDs explains why it remains linear at relatively high powers.

To investigate responsivity at higher frequencies, a quasi-optical measurement was performed at 200 GHz and 600 GHz using the setup in Fig. 5.5 [B]. A detector was constructed from an InAs SSD with an integrated, circularly polarised substrate antenna [81]. The InAs SSD was designed for $N = 11$ and $W = 65$ nm. I-V provided $R_0 = 580 \, \Omega$ and an expected $\beta_{\text{opt}} = 53 \, \text{V/W}$. A silicon lens was placed firmly against the backside of the substrate with the InAs SSD. Detected voltage was measured using a lock-in amplifier, thereby presenting a high DC-load. The transmitter radiated a vertically polarised beam through a horn antenna. The incident power was measured by replacing the receiver with an Erickson PM4 power meter with a horn antenna. At 200 GHz and 600 GHz the average power was 1.15 mW and 7 µW, respectively. By using the power detected this way, the optical responsivity of the system was 2.1 V/W and 0.70 V/W at 200 GHz and 600 GHz, respectively. The associated NEP was 1500 pW/Hz$^{\frac{1}{2}}$ and 4400 pW/Hz$^{\frac{1}{2}}$. The quasi-optical measurements showed that InAs SSDs provide a responsivity at 600 GHz that is of the same order of magnitude as the responsivity at 200 GHz.

Compensating for optical losses from polarisation mismatch (50 %), and reflection at the air-Si interface (30 %), NEP of the InAs SSD with silicon lens is calculated to 500 pW/Hz$^{\frac{1}{2}}$ and 2.0 V/W at 200 and 600 GHz, respectively [82].

Wet-etched GaAs/AlGaAs SSD have demonstrated an NEP of 330 pW/Hz$^{\frac{1}{2}}$ at 1.5 THz in quasi-optical measurements, when the power absorbed by the antenna was estimated [14]. If the whole beam and no optical losses are taken into account,
5.1 InAs SSDs

35

equivalent to the procedure for the InAs SSD presented here, the NEP was instead 80000 pW/Hz
[83].

With the same detector used for quasi-optical detection (N = 11, W = 65 nm), the setup in Fig. 34 was used to image a radio frequency identification (RFID) card. The imaging experiment was performed at 200 GHz with an output power of 1.15 mW. The beam was focused on the radio frequency identification (RFID) card shown in Fig. 35. The card was moved in a grid pattern and the output voltage ∆V in the SSD was recorded for every point. Plotting the signal strength versus position resulted in the image shown in Fig. 5.7. The plastics of the card is transparent to the radiation and thus imaged bright, while whereas metal antenna and microchip are reflective and appear dark.
Chapter 5. Characterisation of zero-bias SSD detectors

5.2 InGaAs SSDs

5.2.1 DC Characterisation

DC measurements of an InGaAs SSD are shown in Fig. 5.8. The design was $L = 1000$ nm, $S = 2000$ nm, $W_v = W_h = 50$ nm, $W_{mesa} = 15$ um and $L_{mesa} = 5.3$ µm. $R_{s1}$, measured without etched trenches, was 200 Ω.

In Fig. 5.8, InGaAs SSDs exhibit DC characteristics qualitatively very similar to InAs SSDs, such as non-zero $\gamma_i$ at zero bias and the asymmetry of $R_i$. The absolute values differ: For InGaAs, $R_i = 13$ kΩ (65 kΩ per channel) and $\gamma_i = 2.0$ V$^{-1}$ at zero bias. From (2.3), $\beta_{50\Omega} = 200$ V/W is expected from the I-V of the InGaAs SSD in Fig. 5.8.

5.2.2 RF Characterisation

Responsivity of InGaAs SSDs was measured in the same way as for InAs SSDs [B]. Measured $\beta_{50\Omega}$ is presented in Fig. 5.9 and estimated NEP$_{50\Omega}$ in Fig. 5.10. The NEP$_{50\Omega}$ noted for InGaAs SSDs with $W=50$ nm, 40-150 pW/Hz$^{1/2}$, is the lowest values reported for any SSD within the entire measured range. The stronger roll-off compared to InAs SSDs is expected from the higher $R_{s1}$.

The roll-off of $\beta_{50\Omega}$ in Fig. 5.9 is somewhat more pronounced than for InAs SSDs. For $W=50$ nm, the $\beta_{50\Omega}$ at low frequencies is about 300 V/W, corresponding to $\gamma_i = 3$ V$^{-1}$, which is considerably higher than the 200 V/W predicted from DC
5.2 InGaAs SSDs

measurements in Fig. 5.10. The reason is this discrepancy is not understood, but could be due to self-heating in the channels in DC measurements.

The deviation from a linear response in InGaAs SSDs at high powers is shown in Fig. 5.11. The InGaAs SSDs reach 1 dB deviation at -7.1 dBm and -8.4 dBm for $W = 50$ nm and $W = 90$ nm. Some compression and expansion of $\beta_{50\Omega}$ has already set
in for the lowest $P_{in}$ and $W = 35$ nm, why the compression point for $W = 50$ nm is likely lower than what is extracted from Fig. 5.11. The deviation from a linear response sets in for lower powers in InGaAs SSDs than InAs SSDs, a consequence of the stronger nonlinearity of the I-V in InGaAs SSDs.

5.3 Graphene SSDs

5.3.1 DC Characterisation

Graphene SSDs were fabricated from both as-grown monolayer graphene, and H-intercalated graphene. This way, both n-type and p-type material was obtained, which from (2.3) is expected to lead to $\gamma$ and thus $\beta_{50\Omega}$ of opposite signs. If $\beta_{50\Omega}$ of opposite signs is observed, it can be concluded that the SSDs operates as intended also in graphene.

DC measurements of SSDs fabricated from as-grown and H-intercalated graphene are shown in Fig. 5.12. The design was $N=9$, $W_v = W_h = 130$ nm and $W$ varying from 15 to 40 nm, as shown in Fig. 4.11. For the as-grown sample, $\gamma = 0.024$ V$^{-1}$ and $R_0 = 67$ k$\Omega$ was obtained at zero-bias. The expected $\beta_{50\Omega}$ was -2.4 V/W. For the H-intercalated sample, the corresponding figures were $\gamma = -0.022$ V$^{-1}$ and $R_0 = 4.2$ k$\Omega$, with an associated $\beta_{50\Omega}$ of 2.2 V/W. DC measurements thus show opposite signs of $\beta_{50\Omega}$ in the two different graphene SSD samples as expected.

In the graphene SSD process, a roughness of the etched channels was observed, see Fig. 4.11, leading to a degraded $\gamma$. A single-channel on the H-intercalated single demonstrated, $\gamma = -0.1$ V$^{-1}$ and $R_0 = 9.2$ k$\Omega$ showing that higher responsivities are possible.

Graphene SSDs exhibit DC characteristics that both resemble and differ from InAs and InGaAs SSDs. The basic operation is the identical: Taking the n-type as-grown sample as an example, the lateral gates at forward bias act to increase electron density and reduce $R_D$, see Fig. 5.12 (a). At (weak) reverse bias, electron density is decreased and $R_D$ increased. In the hydrogen-intercalated p-type sample (Fig. 5.12 (b)), holes are majority carriers and the operation reversed.

A difference between graphene SSDs, and InAs and InGaAs SSDs, is revealed in Fig. 5.12 (a). Again using the n-type as-grown sample as an example, $R_D$ exhibits a local maxima when biased at the Dirac voltage $V_{Dirac} = -70$ mV, see Fig. 5.12 (a). As described in chapter 2.3, a maximum in $R_D$ is indeed expected for a certain $V_D$ which brings the Fermi level in the SSD channels to the Dirac point. For the as-grown sample, the Fermi level was estimated to 86 mV from Hall measurements, which corresponds well to the observed $V_{Dirac}$ in both magnitude and polarity. For the
5.3 Graphene SSDs

hydrogen-intercalated sample, Fig. 5.12 (b) shows that $V_{\text{Dirac}}$ is expected at a positive bias outside the measured range, in qualitative agreement with the Fermi level -366 mV acquired from Hall data.

### 5.3.2 RF Characterisation

Responsivity of graphene SSDs at RF was measured on-wafer from 1 to 67 GHz. A 70 µm coplanar access line was used, similar to what was used for InAs SSDs. The available power at the probe tip was 3 µW to 24 µW across the measured band. The DC voltage generated by the SSD was measured with a voltmeter.

The measured responsivity is presented in Fig. 4. Both samples exhibited a flat responsivity from 1 to 67 GHz, with an average $\beta_{50\Omega}$ of 3.9 V/W and -4.2 V/W for the hydrogen-intercalated and as-grown samples, respectively. As expected from DC measurements, the two samples exhibited $\beta_{50\Omega}$ of similar magnitude but opposite polarity. The opposite polarity of the detected voltage between the as-grown (n-type) and H-intercalated (p-type) shows that the detection is due to the SSD structure and not due to other phenomena.

Estimated NEP$_{50\Omega}$ is shown in Fig. 5.13. The average NEP$_{50\Omega}$ was 2.2 nW/Hz$^{1/2}$ and 8.2 nW/Hz$^{1/2}$ for the H-intercalated and as-grown samples, respectively. While $\beta_{50\Omega}$ was similar in both devices, $R_0$ and therefore NEP$_{50\Omega}$ was considerably lower in the H-intercalated sample.
Chapter 5. Characterisation of zero-bias SSD detectors

Fig. 5.13. Responsivity of SSDs fabricated in as-grown monolayer graphene and hydrogen-intercalated bilayer graphene. [E]

Fig. 5.14. Estimated NEP of SSDs in as-grown monolayer graphene and hydrogen-intercalated bilayer graphene. [E]


5.4 Comparison of SSD performance

Table IV: Figures of merit from DC and on-wafer RF measurements of zero-bias SSDs presented in this thesis compared to previous works.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref.</th>
<th>Technology</th>
<th>$\gamma_i$ (V$^{-1}$)</th>
<th>$R_t$ (N=1, kΩ)</th>
<th>$NEP_{50Ω}$ (N=1, 0 Hz, pW/Hz)$^{1/2}$</th>
<th>RF meas. freq. (GHz)</th>
<th>$\beta_{50Ω}$ (V/W)</th>
<th>$NEP_{50Ω}$ (pW/Hz)$^{1/2}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[e]</td>
<td>InGaAs/InAlAs</td>
<td>3.0$^1$</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>2-315</td>
<td>350-100</td>
<td>40-150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[A-D] InAs/AlSb</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>2-315</td>
<td>17-13</td>
<td>150-200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[E]</td>
<td>Graphene (H-interc.)</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11000</td>
<td>1-67</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[E]</td>
<td>Graphene (As-grown)</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>14000</td>
<td>1-67</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>8200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[E]</td>
<td>Graphene (H-interc.)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[15] GaN/AlGaN</td>
<td>1$^1$</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>20-315</td>
<td>100-20</td>
<td>190-950</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[22] InGaAs/InAlAs</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>13600</td>
<td>3400</td>
<td>1-110$^2$</td>
<td>160$^2$</td>
<td>65$^2$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[16] InGaAs/InP</td>
<td>0.1$^1$</td>
<td>&gt;11000</td>
<td>&gt;42000</td>
<td>1-110$^2$</td>
<td>10-5</td>
<td>&gt;10000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[14] GaAs/AlGaAs</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^1$ Estimated as $\gamma_i = \beta_{50Ω}/2Z_s$, see (2.6).

$^2$ Low-frequency design (explicit data beyond 3 GHz not disclosed).

5.4 Comparison of SSD performance

DC and RF properties of SSDs presented in this thesis is compared to previous works in Table IV. The estimated $NEP_{50Ω}$ of the InGaAs SSDs constitutes the state-of-the-art $NEP_{50Ω}$ up to 315 GHz among SSDs from any other design and technology. InAs SSDs exhibit the second-lowest $NEP_{50Ω}$ in the measured range. InAs SSDs also show the least roll-off of any SSD consistent with the MC simulations in Fig. 2.4.

For comparison, the traditional Schottky diode exhibits $R_0 \approx R_i = 2.6$ kΩ and $\gamma_i = 34$ V$^{-1}$, which through (2.6) and (2.12) yields a low-frequency $\beta_{50Ω}$ of 3400 V/W and $NEP_{50Ω} = 2$ pW/Hz$^{1/2}$ [7].

The $NEP_{50Ω}$ for the SSDs listed in Table IV is heavily affected by the $N$ used in each design. While $N$ is easily changed, $\gamma_i$ and $R_t$ per channel is limited by the SSD process and associated materials. The potential of each SSD process in Table IV may be compared by studying $NEP_{50Ω}$ for $N=1$ at low frequencies. InGaAs SSDs show the lowest $NEP_{50Ω}(N=1)$ of any SSD process, followed by the GaN/AlGaN SSDs, both with dry-etched trenches.

The benefit of dry-etched trenches is revealed by comparing $NEP_{50Ω}(N=1)$ of the InGaAs SSDs in this thesis to the wet-etched SSDs in [22], [16] and [14]. While $\gamma_i$ may reach similar values, the resistance per channel in wet-etched SSDs is dramatically higher, likely due to non-uniform channels, and results in $NEP_{50Ω}(N=1)$ more than ten times higher than dry-etched trenches.
The $NEP_{50\Omega}(N=1)$ of all technologies in Table IV can be improved upon: For example, in the H-intercalated graphene SSDs, $W_h$ was relatively large (~200 nm). By reducing $W_h$ and improving the uniformity of the channels, graphene SSDs could potentially surpass $NEP_{50\Omega}(N=1)$ of InAs SSDs. Regardless of fabrication process, a matching network would reduce the NEP of an SSD-based detector at the desired measurement frequencies.

## 5.5 Summary

Characterisation of InGaAs SSDs yielded state-of-the-art $NEP_{50\Omega}$ for SSDs. The first demonstration of both InAs SSDs and graphene SSDs as microwave detectors was presented.

InGaAs SSDs exhibited an NEP of 40-150 pW/Hz$^{1/2}$ over the range 2-315 GHz with a 50 $\Omega$ source, which is the lowest NEP measured for any SSD in the range. InAs SSDs exhibited an NEP of 150-200 pW/Hz$^{1/2}$ across the same band, with lower high-frequency roll-off than InGaAs SSDs. Graphene SSDs showed an NEP of 2200 pW/Hz$^{1/2}$ from 1 to 67 GHz.

InAs SSDs where implemented in quasi-optical measurements, yielding an optical NEP of lower than 1500 pW/Hz$^{1/2}$ and 4400 pW/Hz$^{1/2}$ at 200 GHz and 600 GHz, respectively.
Chapter 6
Optimisation of SSDs for zero-bias detection

The design of an SSD strongly affects the SSD’s detector properties at microwave frequencies and beyond. It has previously been reported in literature that narrower channels improved responsivity in matched SSD detectors [15]. In MC simulations, ways to increase responsivity have been studied [84, 44, 85, 43]. No other design dependencies than channel width has been studied experimentally, and more importantly, no investigations have reported on the SSD design dependence of NEP, the most important property of direct detectors.

In this chapter, the influence of doping, channel width, channel length, and number of channels on responsivity and NEP of SSDs is investigated. The models derived in chapter 3 are compared to DC and RF measurements on InAs SSDs, and MC simulations [C,D].

First, SSD channels are optimised based on the triode-region SSD model’s predictions regarding doping, channel width and channel length. MC simulations are used to study InAs SSDs in ideal conditions and at doping levels that yield close to maximum theoretical responsivity.

Next, the channel length and number of channels in InAs SSDs are optimized, comparing measurements and models.

Lastly, the equivalent circuit of SSDs presented in Fig. 3.5 is used to model the responsivity of SSDs up to 315 GHz. Approaches for optimisation of SSDs for terahertz frequencies are discussed.

6.1 Doping and channel Width

It was shown in chapter 3 that according to the triode-region FET model, \( n_s \) and \( W \) have similar effects on the SSDs responsivity and NEP. In this section, the influence of \( n_s \) and \( W \) is studied first through the model’s predictions, then through MC simulations, and lastly through DC and RF measurements.
Recalling from (3.7) and (3.8), the triode-region FET model says that at zero-bias,

\[ R_i \propto \frac{1}{n_s W_{\text{eff}}} \]  

(6.1)

and

\[ \gamma_i \propto \frac{1}{n_s W_{\text{eff}}} \]  

(6.2)

and thus, \( \beta_{\text{opt}} = \frac{1}{2} R_i \gamma_i \propto \frac{1}{(n_s W_{\text{eff}})^2} \). Reducing \( n_s \) and \( W_{\text{eff}} \) thus has the effect of increasing both \( R_i \) and, more importantly, \( \gamma_i \).

A physical SSD is affected by processes variations and phenomena such as charges at the etched interfaces. MC simulations allow (6.1) and (6.2) to be evaluated under ideal conditions.

The MC simulations of InAs SSDs were set up in the following way. A single InAs SSD with a cross-section as shown in Fig. 3.4 was simulated in two dimensions, meaning all fields were in the horizontal plane. The channel was designed with \( L = 900 \text{ nm}, Z = 15 \text{ nm}, W_v = W_h = 100 \text{ nm}, W = 35 \text{ nm} \) and a carrier concentration \( N_D \) such that \( N_D Z = n_s \), where \( n_s = 1.5 \times 10^{10} \text{ cm}^{-2} \). \( W \) and \( n_s \) were then varied independently. Since no surface charge was placed on the channel sidewalls, meaning \( W_{\text{eff}} = W \). The current was scaled by \( Z \) and \( N = 43 \) to obtain \( I_D \). \( R_i \) and \( R_{s1} \) were extracted from the simulation at low \( V_D \) and used to calculate \( V_{D1} = V_D - I_D (R_{s1} + R_{s2}) \). From the extracted \( I_D-V_{D1} \)-relationship, \( \gamma_i \), \( R_i \) and intrinsic \( \beta_{\text{opt}} \) were calculated.
according to (3.7)-(3.13). The MC simulation exhibited $\mu_n = 28000 \text{ cm}^2/\text{Vs}$ which was used for calculating the modelled values [86]. Since the MC simulations were two-dimensional $C_h$ was found as $C_h = \varepsilon_0 Z/W_h$, where $\varepsilon_0$ is the permittivity of vacuum. More details are available in [86].

The $n_s$- and $W$-dependence suggested by (6.1)-(6.2) is compared to MC simulations in Fig. 6.1. In the inset, the same comparison is made for $R_i$ and $\gamma_i$. The model accurately predict the variation of both $\beta_{\text{opt}}$ and its constituents $R_i$ and $\gamma_i$. In Fig. 6.2, the $W$-dependence is compared in the same fashion, also with a good agreement between simulation and model. Thus, it can be concluded that the MC simulations confirm the triode region SSD model with respect to $n_s$ and $W$.

To experimentally verify the influence of $n_s$ and $W_{\text{eff}}$, InAs SSDs based on the reference design mentioned in section 5.1 were fabricated, with varying $W$ and with and without $\delta$-doping. Hall measurements are available in Table III. Figures 6.3-6.5 compares RF and DC measurements of the InAs SSDs to the triode-region SSD model. Zero-bias $\beta_{\text{opt}}$, $\text{NEP}_{\text{opt}}$ and $\text{NEP}_{50\Omega}$ were calculated using (2.4)-(2.5) and (2.11)-(2.12), based on $\beta_{50\Omega}$ and $S_{11}$ measured on-wafer at 50 GHz and $R_0$ from DC measurements. $\gamma_i$ was calculated from $\beta_{\text{opt}}$ using (3.13). Modelled values were found through (3.7)-(3.17) based on parameters acquired predominantly from design and material properties: $n_s$ and $\mu_n$ was acquired from Hall measurements. $W_{\text{eff}}$ was defined as $W_{\text{eff}} = W - 16 \text{ nm}$ as found from Fig. 4.6, and consequently, $W_{h_{\text{eff}}} = W + 16 \text{ nm}$. $2C_h$ was found from a model of the capacitance to ground in a co-planar transmission line with the dimensions $W_{\text{eff}}$, $W_{h_{\text{eff}}}$, and $L$, and the relative dielectric constant of AlSb, $\varepsilon_{\text{AlSb}} = 10.9$ [87, 88]. $R_{\delta}$ was measured on a structure without patterned trenches to 40 $\Omega$ and 27 $\Omega$ on the low- and high-doped samples, respectively. Thus, only two parameters were made based on measurements of the InAs SSDs: $R_{\delta}$ and $W_{\text{eff}}$. 

![Fig. 6.2: Intrinsic $\beta_{\text{opt}}$ obtained from 2-D Monte Carlo simulations (crosses) of an InAs SSD and the triode-region SSD model (solid line) as a function of $n_s$. The inset shows simulated $R_i$ (crosses) and $\gamma_i$ (circles), and modelled counterparts. [D]](image)
Chapter 6. Optimisation of SSDs for zero-bias detection

Measured $\beta_{\text{opt}}$ for SSDs with different $W$ on the two samples is compared to $\beta_{\text{opt}}$ from the triode-region SSD model in Fig. 6.3. Measured $\beta_{\text{opt}}$ is increased for small $W$. More importantly, the low-doped sample exhibits a significantly higher $\beta_{\text{opt}}$ than the high-doped sample. For the smallest $W$ available on both samples, $W = 40$ nm, the difference in measured $\beta_{\text{opt}}$ is a factor 1.6x, compared to a factor 2x predicted by the model. Moreover the model overestimates the responsivity for small values of $W$. However, the relative dependencies of both $W$ and $n_s$ is described well by the model.

More information about the mechanics behind an increased $\beta_{\text{opt}}$ is revealed by studying Fig. 6.4. SSDs on the two samples exhibit similar $R_i$. The model predicts $R_i \propto 1/(\mu n_s)$, and since the high-doped sample exhibited lower $\mu_n$, see Table III, the sheet resistance was similar in both samples.

Although $R_i$ was similar in both samples, the difference in $\gamma_i$ is significant. This is expected since $\gamma_i \propto 1/n_s$, and independent of $\mu_n$. From the measured $n_s$, $\gamma_i$ is expected to be 1.8x larger in the high-doped sample than the low-doped sample. For $W = 40$ nm, the different in measured $\gamma_i$ is 1.4x. The agreement is even better for $W = 120$ nm. The $W$-dependence of $\gamma_i$ is exaggerated by the model, which led to $\beta_{\text{opt}}$ being overestimated in Fig. 6.3. Qualitatively, the model is correct: From largest to smallest $W$, $\gamma_i$ increased by 20% in both samples.

The $C_b$ obtained from [87] and used in the model is shown in Fig. 6.4 (b). $C_b$ is reduced for small $W$, which somewhat counteracts the positive effects on responsivity of reducing $W$.

Finally, the effect of varying $n_s$ and $W$ on $\text{NEP}_{50\Omega}$ and $\text{NEP}_{\text{opt}}$ is studied in Fig. 6.5. Measurements show that designs with smaller $W$ effectively reduce both $\text{NEP}_{50\Omega}$ and $\text{NEP}_{\text{opt}}$. 

![Fig. 6.3: Responsivity with an optimally matched source ($\beta_{\text{opt}}$) measured at 50 GHz on SSD from samples with and without doping, compared to modelled values. [C](image)](image)
6.1 Doping and Channel Width

The model described the influence of $\delta$-doping on NEP well. For $W = 40$ nm in Fig. 6.5, the low-doped sample showed a 33% lower $NEP_{opt}$ compared to the high-doped sample (130 pW/Hz$^{1/2}$ and 87 pW/Hz$^{1/2}$, respectively), whereas the model predicted a 46% reduction. Hence, both measurements and model show that reduced $\delta$-doping improves both responsivity and NEP in SSDs.

Prior to this work, all SSDs for terahertz detection in the literature have been designed for high electron concentration, either by including $\delta$-doping [14, 16], or in the case of GaN SSDs, using thick AlGaN barrier layers [15]. Hence the conclusion in this thesis that reducing $n_s$ improves NEP of SSD zero-bias detectors is in direct contradiction to what has been assumed previously.

The demonstrated influence of $n_s$ makes 2DEG structures a questionable choice for SSDs. Since removing the $\delta$-doping of InAs SSDs caused reduced NEP, it is desirable to fabricate SSDs in a structure that does not yield as high $n_s$ for non-intentionally doped samples, while still exhibiting similar $\mu_n$. Since the motivation for using a 2DEG is to have high $n_s$ and $\mu_n$ simultaneously, it can be argued that another InAs structure than the InAs/Al$_{80}$Ga$_{20}$Sb quantum well may yield better NEP.

Fig. 6.4: Intrinsic channel resistance ($R_i$), capacitance $C_h$ and intrinsic curvature ($\gamma_i$) at zero bias, as obtained from DC measurements, and modelled values. [C]
Chapter 6. Optimisation of SSDs for zero-bias detection

6.2 Maximum responsivity

It was noted in section 3.1 that when $V_{th}$ in a zero-bias SSD approaches 0 V, the triode-region SSD model is no longer expected to be valid. For $V_{th} \gg 0$ V, the sub-threshold SSD is a better hypothesis.

To evaluate SSDs with positive $V_{th}$, MC simulations of InAs SSDs with the same configuration as in section 3.1 was used. By reducing $n_s$, $V_{th}$ becomes increasingly more positive. Extracted parameters are presented in Fig. 6.6. For high $n_s$, the SSD channel is in the triode-region as was shown in Fig. 6.1. For sufficiently low $n_s$, the SSD channel enters sub-threshold conditions. In the sub-threshold region, both model and measurement show that $\gamma_i$ and $\beta_{50\Omega}$ are independent of $n_s$ (and thus $V_{th}$). From (3.19) and (2.6), $\gamma_i = q/kT = 38.7$ V$^{-1}$ and $\beta_{50\Omega} = 3870$ V/W. The simulations exhibit $\gamma_i \approx 20$ V$^{-1}$ and $\beta_{50\Omega} = 2000$ V/W. The difference between simulations and measurements may be due to that $W_h$ is of the same order as $W$, making the gates less efficient ($n>1$).

An interesting effect is seen for NEP$_{50\Omega}$ in Fig. 6.6 (a). There is an $n_s$, and thereby $V_{th}$, for which NEP$_{50\Omega}$ exhibits a minimum. The minimum NEP$_{50\Omega}$ is reached for slightly higher $n_s$ (and thus slightly more negative $V_{th}$) than what yields maximum $\beta_{50\Omega}$. Simulated NEP$_{50\Omega}$ in Fig. 6.6 (a) seems to suggests the minimum occurs approximately where the triode-region and sub-threshold SSD models yield the same $\gamma_i$, which by equating (3.8) and (3.19) is found as $V_{th} = -kT/q$. For lower $n_s$, further reduction of $n_s$ increases $R_i$, whereas $\gamma_i$ is fairly constant, which degrades NEP$_{50\Omega}$.

![Fig. 6.5: (a) Estimated NEP$_{opt}$ and (b) NEP$_{50\Omega}$ at 50 GHz for the low-doped and high-doped samples compared to modelled counterparts. [C]](image-url)
6.2 Maximum responsivity

There is thus always an optimum channel design, which can be accomplished through the right choice of $n_s$, $C_h$ and $W$.

In the design of an SSD, $V_{ih}$ cannot be controlled independently. In three-terminal MOSFET detectors which operate in a similar way, $V_{ih}$ is set arbitrarily while still drawing zero bias current [10]. In such detectors, choosing $V_{ih}$ has indeed the same effect as selecting $n_s$ for the zero-bias SSD detector; see Fig. 6.6 (a). In [10], it is said about NMOS detectors with positive $V_{ih}$ that “minimum NEP usually requires a somewhat higher [gate voltage] than required for maximum [responsivity]”. In zero-bias SSDs, instead of setting the gate voltage, the SSD has to be designed for a desired $V_{ih}$.

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Fig. 6.6: (a) $\beta_{50\Omega}$ (circles) and $NEP_{50\Omega}$ (crosses) obtained from 2-D Monte Carlo simulations and (b) the associated $R_i$ (crosses) and $\gamma_i$ (circles). Solid lines show modelled values. Simulations by Dr. Ignacio Iñiguez-de-la-Torre.
6.3 Channel length

Both the triode-region model and the sub-threshold model requires the long-channel approximation to be valid, meaning the channel length $L$ has to be sufficiently long. By extracting $\gamma_i$ for different $L$, the minimum $L$ for which the long-channel condition is valid is found. In Fig. 6.7, $\gamma_i$ and other SSD properties are calculated from DC and RF measurements using the equivalent circuit in Fig. 3.5. Measurements are performed at 2 GHz, meaning $C_p$ can be neglected.

In Fig. 6.7 (a), the modelled $\gamma_i$ is independent of $L$, as in (3.7). The value 0.27 V$^{-1}$ is extracted in section 6.4. The model predicts that $R_i$ is simply proportional to $L$, which is supported by the measurements. More importantly, Fig. 6.7 (a) shows weak $L$ dependence for $L > 1000$ nm, and decreased $\gamma_i$ for $L < 1000$ nm. Measurements thus support the analytical result that $\gamma_i$ is independent of $L$, for sufficiently large $L$.

Responsivity and NEP versus $L$ are studied in Fig. 6.7 (b)-(c). The model reproduces the measurements in Fig. 6.7 (b)-(c) except when short-channel effects are present. Increasing $L$ improves $\beta_{opt}$ and $NEP_{opt}$. Also $\beta_{50\Omega}$ benefits from increased $L$. Modelled $NEP_{50\Omega}$ display a minimum for $L = 2200$ nm, after which the $NEP_{50\Omega}$ increases due to increased thermal noise, as shown in (3.12). However both measured and modelled $NEP_{50\Omega}$ shows little improvement once long-channel conditions are achieved, for $L > 1000$ nm.
Fig. 6.7: (a) $R_i$ (crosses) and $\gamma_i$ (circles) as derived from DC- measurements at zero bias for varying $L$. Other design parameters were according to the reference design. Also shown is $\gamma_i$ as derived from RF measurements (squares). (b) Measured $\beta_{50\Omega}$ and $\beta_{\text{opt}}$ (c) Measured $\text{NEP}_{50\Omega}$ (crosses) and $\text{NEP}_{\text{opt}}$ (circles). Solid lines in (a) to (c) represent the small-signal values derived from the triode-region SSD model. RF measurements performed at 2 GHz. [C]
6.4 Number of channels

In the same way as for $L$-dependence in section 6.3, the measured $N$-dependence of detector parameters compared to the model in Fig. 6.8. The modelled $N$-dependence of both $R_i$ and $\gamma_i$ matches measurements well, see Fig. 6.8 (a). An average $\gamma_i = 0.27 \, V^{-1}$ was extracted from RF-measured $\gamma_i$. Since $\gamma_i$ is independent of $N$, any $N$-dependence of responsivity and NEP is due to changes in $R_i$.

Measured and modelled responsivity and NEP are compared in Fig. 6.8 (b)-(c). For a matched detector, low $N$ is beneficial, resulting in both higher $\beta_{opt}$ and $NEP_{opt}$. The model predicts $\beta_{opt} \propto 1/N$ and $NEP_{opt} \propto \sqrt{N}$ with $R_{s1} = R_{s2} = 0 \, \Omega$. Fig. 6.8 (b) shows that also $\beta_{50\Omega}$ is increased somewhat for low $N$. As shown in (2.6), $\beta_{50\Omega}$ is in fact expected to be independent of $N$ when $R_0 \gg Z_s$. An important observation is that $NEP_{50\Omega}$ exhibits a minimum for $N = 28$. For larger $N$, $NEP_{50\Omega}$ is degraded by low $\beta_{50\Omega}$, and for smaller $N$ by increased thermal noise due to increased $R_0$. Moreover, the minimum in $NEP_{50\Omega}$ is not very sharp: for any $N$ in the range 18 to 54, $NEP_{50\Omega}$ deviates from the optimum value by less than 10%.

The agreement between model and measurements in Fig. 6.7-7 motivates an estimation of the maximum obtainable performance with the InAs SSDs fabrication process outlined in section 3.1. For $W = 35 \, nm$, $\gamma_i = 0.35$ was extracted, for which the model predicts $\beta_{opt} = 1900 \, V/W$, $NEP_{opt} = 7.7 \, pW/Hz^{1/2}$ and $R_0 = 13 \, k\Omega$ at low frequencies for an InAs SSD with $N=1$.

It was concluded in section 5.4 that the InGaAs SSD process in this thesis yielded the lowest $NEP_{50\Omega}(N=1)$ of any SSD process at low frequency, 110 $pW/Hz^{1/2}$. It would therefore be interesting to estimate the $NEP_{50\Omega}$ expected with $N = 43$ and $W_{mesa} = 15$ 30 $\mu m$, as for InAs SSDs in this thesis. Considering (3.12), a low-frequency $NEP_{50\Omega} = 20 \, pW/Hz^{1/2}$ could be expected.

6.5 Frequency dependence

The parasitic capacitance $C_p$ was in section 3.2 identified as the main reason for degrading responsivity of SSDs at high frequencies. In Fig. 6.9, $C_p$ is extracted from SSDs with different $W$ through S-parameter optimisation of modelled $S_{11}$ to measured $S_{11}$. The pad parameters $L_{pad}$ and $C_{pad}$ were extracted from measurements on open- and short-circuited pads. Resistances were found from DC-measurements. The $C_p$ extracted from the SSD with absent channels ($W = 0 \, nm$) is identical to the capacitance $C_v$ as defined in the full equivalent circuit in Fig. 3.4. The fact that $C_p$ for $W = 0 \, nm$ was so similar to $C_p$ for $W = 70 \, nm$ motivates the simplification of representing all parasitic capacitance with $C_p$ in Fig. 3.5: $C_h$ can not easily be distinguished from $C_v$ in measurements.
6.5 Frequency dependence

**Fig. 6.8:** (a) $R_i$ (crosses) and $\gamma_i$ (circles) as derived from DC-measurements at zero bias for varying $N$. Other design parameters were according to the reference SSD design. Also shown is $\gamma_i$ as derived from RF measurements (squares). (b) Measured $\beta_{50\Omega}$ and $\beta_{\text{opt}}$. (c) Measured $\text{NEP}_{50\Omega}$ (crosses) and $\text{NEP}_{\text{opt}}$ (circles). Solid lines in (a) to (c) represent the small-signal values derived from the triode-region SSD model. RF measurements performed at 2 GHz. [C]
Chapter 6. Optimisation of SSDs for zero-bias detection

The ultimate motivation of the equivalent circuit Fig. 3.5 is to model the SSD’s behaviour at high frequencies. In Fig. 6.10 and Fig. 6.11, measured $\beta_{\text{opt}}$ and $\text{NEP}_{\text{opt}}$ is compared to modelled $\beta_{\text{opt}}$. The model accurately describes the measured variations, and captures the stronger roll-off of $\beta_{\text{opt}}$ for $W = 35$ nm than for $W = 70$ nm. Thus, the developed equivalent circuit can be said to model the responsivity of SSDs up to 315 GHz.

Using the values in Fig. 6.9, the cut-off frequency $f_c$ can now be calculated using (3.18) to 775 GHz and 615 GHz for $W = 35$ nm and $W = 70$ nm, respectively. MMIC Schottky diodes have demonstrated similar values, 665 GHz [6].

$N$ can be expected to have a strong but indirect influence on high-frequency responsivity. To start with, only a small variation of $C_p$ was seen between devices in Fig. 6.9. In general, $C_p$ can be expected to depend mainly on $W_{\text{mesa}}$ and $L_{\text{mesa}}$, however, it has not been investigated in this thesis. To minimise $C_p$, an SSD should be designed with a minimum $W_{\text{mesa}}$. Thus, in a well-designed SSD, $W_{\text{mesa}} \propto N$. At the same time, it can be expected that $R_{\text{s1}}$, $R_{\text{s2}}$ and $R_i$ all are proportional to $1/N$. With this in mind, inspection of (3.18) shows that $f_c$ is independent of $N$. Still, an SSD for terahertz detection should likely be designed with $N$ as small as is possible without increasing $\text{NEP}_{50\Omega}$ as shown in section 6.4. The reason is that for low $N$, the pad can be made more narrow, which reduces $C_{\text{pad}}$. Moreover, membrane technology has the potential of reducing both $C_p$ and $C_{\text{pad}}$ [89]. In a real system, both the reactive elements in the SSD itself and the pad should be minimised to maximise the bandwidth of the detector.
6.6 Summary

Before this thesis work, it has been assumed that high carrier concentration beneficial in SSDs for zero-bias detection. Here, it was shown by RF measurements, MC simulations and device modelling that the opposite is true. At the same time, the relevance of the proposed triode region FET-based SSD model was established. It was also demonstrated how detector responsivity saturated for sufficiently low carrier concentrations, as predicted by the sub-threshold SSD model. The existence of an optimum carrier concentration for low NEP was revealed.

The triode-region SSD model and equivalent circuit correctly described the experimental observations from design variations in channel width, channel length and number of channels. A minimum channel length (1 µm) for the InAs SSD process used here was identified, as well as an optimum number of channels (18). The responsivity was accurately modelled up to 315 GHz as demonstrated by measurements.

Fig. 6.10: Measured responsivity $\beta_{\text{opt}}$ for SSDs with two different $W$ and modelled (solid lines) using values from Fig. 6.9, with $\gamma_i$ as a fitting parameter.

Fig. 6.11: Estimated $\text{NEP}_{\text{opt}}$ for SSDs with two different $W$ and as modelled (solid lines) using values from Fig. 6.9, with $\gamma_i$ as a fitting parameter.
Chapter 7
Conclusions

SSDs with InAs, InGaAs and graphene channels were explored as potential zero-bias terahertz detectors. The demonstrated InGaAs SSD advanced the state-of-the-art for low-noise detection using SSDs. Through modelling, measurements and simulations, a powerful set of tools for further optimisation of SSDs was provided.

The first InAs SSDs were fabricated by implementing a new process technique for fabrication of the nanometre-sized isolation pattern required for SSDs in the chemically unstable but electrically promising InAs/Al$_{80}$Ga$_{20}$Sb heterostructure.

SSDs were characterised by DC and RF in on-wafer and quasi-optical measurements. InGaAs SSDs exhibited state-of-the-art NEP for SSDs, estimated to 40-150 pW/Hz$^{1/2}$ for 2-315 GHz with a 50 $\Omega$ source. The weakest roll-off of responsivity at high frequencies was observed for InAs SSDs, which exhibited a cut-off frequency of 600 GHz. In quasi-optical measurements, an InAs SSD detector reached an NEP of 4400 pW/Hz$^{1/2}$ at 600 GHz. Graphene SSDs showed the potential of reaching similar NEP as InAs SSDs, and showed a flat responsivity from 1 to 67 GHz.

An analytical model was derived which described how the SSD design affect detector properties. Responsivity of InAs SSDs up to 315 GHz was reproduced by an equivalent small-signal circuit. The model and experiments showed that SSD channels should be designed for low electron concentration to reduce NEP, whereas SSD have previously always been designed for high electron concentration. The model and Monte Carlo simulations showed how the responsivity saturates for sufficiently low carrier concentrations, theoretically reaching the responsivity of Schottky diodes. For a certain carrier concentration, a minimum, process-dependent NEP is reached. Furthermore, the model and measurements for various SSD designs showed that for a certain process and application, there is an optimum channel length and number of channels for best detector performance in terms of responsivity and NEP.
Chapter 8
Future outlook

This thesis has presented studies on a relatively novel and immature semiconductor device for zero-bias detection, the SSD. In order to successfully compete with established technologies such as the Schottky diode, the SSD must be improved even more than what was done in this thesis work. The results here, however, show that much progress can be made before the theoretical limit is reached. With the presented model, it was for example predicted that an InGaAs SSD with more channels would yield an NEP of 20 pW/Hz^{1/2} with a 50 Ω source at low frequencies.

The MC simulations for InAs SSDs predicted a flat responsivity up to > 2 THz by neglecting capacitance through the substrate. The capacitance through the substrate could be reduced through membrane technology, as is done for Schottky diodes [89]. Further, MC simulations assumed an infinitely thick SSD. Yet, all SSDs in the literature, and also in this thesis have been fabricated in thin semiconductor sheets using 2DEGs. This thesis showed that this may not be desirable. By switching to for example a silicon-based technology, thick channels with deep trenches could be manufactured with large precision [90]. Further, the electron concentration can be made drastically lower in silicon than in III-V 2DEGs.

The SSD was in this thesis treated as a transistor with gate connected to drain. A natural way to further examine the model would be to fabricate a three-terminal SSD. When the gate can be biased independently, the threshold voltage can be extracted. Another approach could be to add a back gate to a conventional SSD structure. Sweeping the back-gate bias would then be equivalent to sweeping the doping, allowing the minimum NEP for a certain SSD process to be extracted.

The large advantage for the SSD lies in its simplicity: it can be fabricated through a single etch in a sheet of semiconductor. SSDs have indeed been demonstrated in low-cost polymer technologies [38] and transparent indium-tin-oxide [39], up to 50 MHz. The graphene SSD technology demonstrated in this thesis could therefore be an alternative for low-cost detector applications, potentially in the terahertz regime.
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Paper A

Nanochannel diodes based on InAs/Al$_{80}$Ga$_{20}$Sb heterostructures: Fabrication and zero-bias detector properties

A. Westlund, P.-Å. Nilsson, P. Sangaré, G. Ducournau, C. Gaquière, L. Desplanque, X. Wallart, and J. Grahn

Paper B

Terahertz detection in zero-bias InAs self-switching diodes at room temperature

A. Westlund, P. Sangaré, G. Ducournau, P.-A. Nilsson, C. Gaquière, L. Desplanque, X. Wallart, and J. Grahn

Paper C

Optimization and Small-Signal Modeling of Zero-Bias InAs Self-Switching Diode Detectors


Paper D

On the effect of δ-doping in self-switching diodes


Paper E

Graphene self-switching diodes as zero-bias microwave detectors
