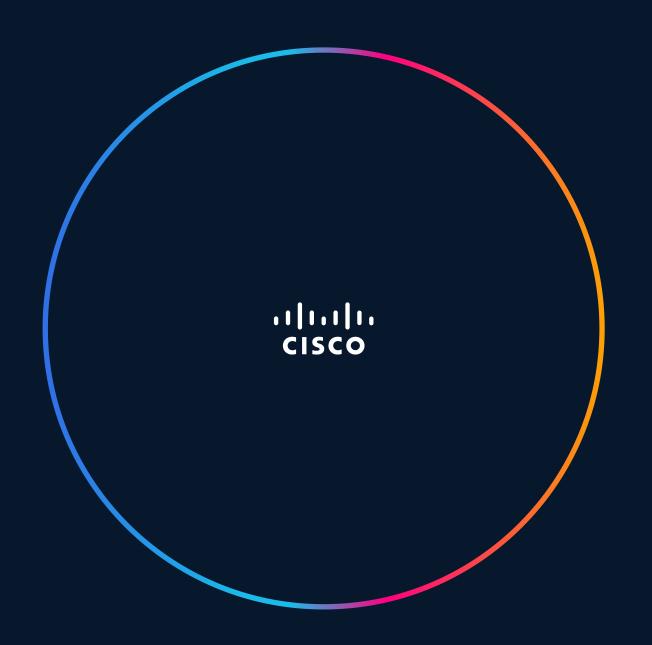
CISCO Connect

Data Center Networking for the Al Era

Chris Barrett
DCN Specialist | WW CAI Team

Marc Belle-Isle
DCN TSA | Cloud and Al Infrastructure



About This Session

Chris Barrett - Specialist World-Wide DC Network Team



Marc Belle-Isle - DCN TSA Cloud and Al Infrastructure



-Session Abstract-

Al training and inference clusters generate massive east-west traffic and require predictable, lossless packet delivery. This session covers Ethernet-based fabric design, congestion management, and observability. We'll also explore Cisco's latest innovations in Network Infrastructure (Silicon One, Nexus platforms, Optics, and Hyperfabric AI), Integrated Security (Live Protect and Smart Switches) and Unified Operations (Nexus Dashboard) for scalable, secure Al-ready networks.

Agenda

1. Introduction

- Al Technology requirements and what "Al Ready" Means
- Cisco Al fabric operational models

2. Al Ready DC Network Infrastructure

- Al fabric design requirements
- Hardware innovation Cisco silicon, platforms, optics
- Software innovation NXOS feature / function for AI fabrics

Al Ready DC Network Security

- Hardware integrated security Cisco Smart Switches
- Software integrated security Cisco Live Protect

4. Al Ready DC Network Operation

- Unified Nexus Dashboard
- Operational integration(s)



Artificial Intelligence Outcomes Span Every Industry



Government

- Deliver enhanced citizen services
- Data-driven policy decisions and creation
- Modernizing and streamlining operations
- Optimizing infrastructure management
- AI-powered traffic design and public safety



Manufacturing

- Intelligent quality control
- Proactive machine maintenance
- Digital twin creation
- Supply chain optimization and tracking
- Optimizing production processes



Finance

- Predictive trading algorithms
- Fraud detection and prevention
- Personalized financial advice
- Investment portfolio optimization
- Virtual assistants and seamless transaction experiences



Healthcare

- Medical imaging analysis
- Enhance diagnosis and treatment
- Patient management through predictive analytics
- Improved access to healthcare with remote monitoring tools
- Drug research and development



Retail

- Consumer behavior analytics
- Enhanced customer experiences
- Personalized product recommendations
- Dynamic virtual shopping experience
- Demand analysis and prediction

Build the model | Training

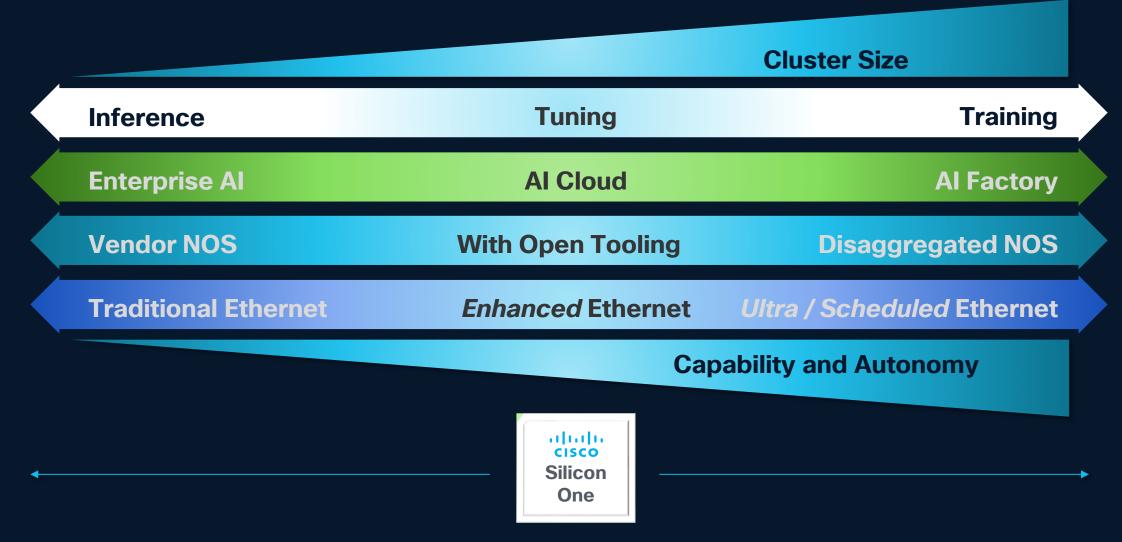
Optimize the model | Fine-tuning and RAG

Use the model | Inferencing



Where does Ethernet fit across Al Landscape?

An Oversimplified Clustering of Al Technology Requirements





Cisco Al Networking

Powering AI at Every Scale, Everywhere



-(1)

Accelerated time-to-value through streamlined infrastructure

2

Maximized resource
utilization means improves
performance while
reducing costs

(3)

Enhanced operational efficiency with simplified management and troubleshooting

4

Future-ready infrastructure that scales with evolving Al requirements

Cisco Al PODs Solution Options

Choose Based on Al Use-Case and Operational Model

Nexus Dashboard

On-premises managed network



Cisco UCS

NVIDIA HGX, MGX or RTX PRO 6000 Servers



Cisco Nexus 9300

w/ Silicon One w/ Cloud Scale

Networking

w/ NVIDIA Spectrum-X



NetApp | Pure Storage | **VAST Data | Hitachi Vantara**

Storage

Training, fine-tuning, inference

Nexus 9300 managed with Nexus Dashboard NVIDIA aligned Enterprise Reference Architecture Flexible design consistent performance at any scale Dedicated Al or multi-purpose DC

Nexus Hyperfabric

Cisco-managed network cloud controller



Cisco UCS

NVIDIA HGX, MGX or RTX PRO 6000 Servers

Compute

Cisco Nexus Hyperfabric w/ Silicon One

Networking

NetApp | Pure Storage | **VAST Data | Hitachi Vantara**

Storage

Inference

Cloud-managed fabric-as-a-service

Deploy anywhere, easy to scale BYO servers, GPUs, storage, software stack Multi-purpose DC with Al & non-Al services

Nexus Hyperfabric Al

Cisco-managed network cloud controller



Cisco UCS

NVIDIA HGX (885a with 8x H200) **Future: RTX PRO Server**

Compute

Networking

Cisco Nexus Hyperfabric w/ Silicon One



VAST Data

Storage

Training, fine-tuning, inference

Full stack: network, servers, GPU, storage **NVIDIA Enterprise Reference Architecture compliant** Blueprints encompass the entire cluster Monitoring spans network to compute NIC

Customizable

Prescriptive

Al Ready DC Network Infrastructure



As Enterprises adopt Al there are unique network challenges

Parallel GPU workloads create massive, bursty east-west traffic



Al jobs require predictable, lossless packet delivery



Conventional congestion control insufficient for AI scale

Cisco Data Center Networking - Al Workload





Cisco Nexus Hyperfabric

Cisco cloud-managed, fully integrated

Easily design, order, deploy, monitor and upgrade fabrics

Purpose built vertical stack

Cisco 6000 series switches





Cisco Nexus (Dashboard)

Private cloud managed, flexible solution

Versatile data center solution

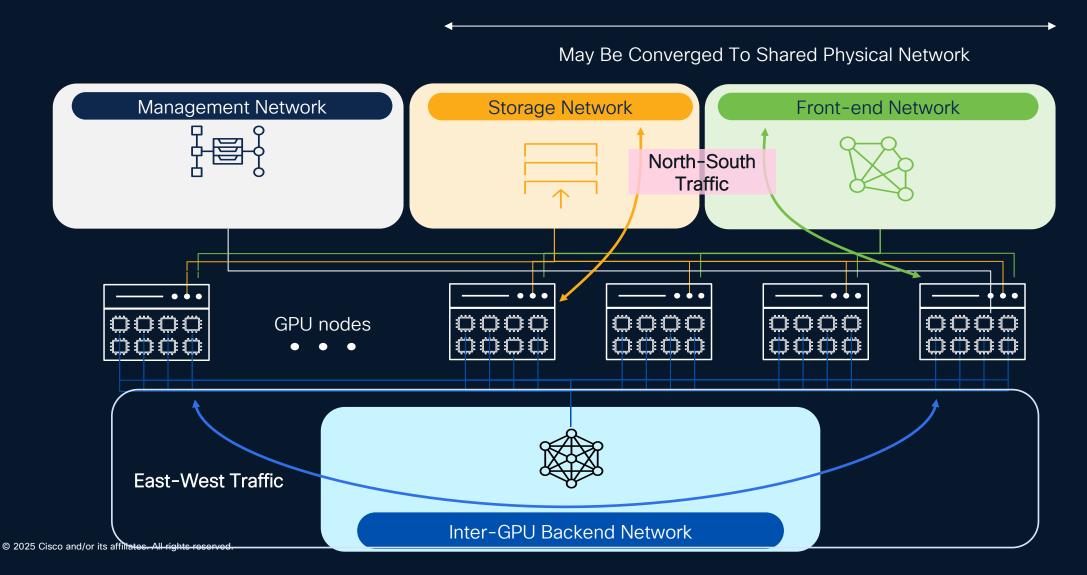
Nexus Dashboard for simplified ops

Nexus 9000 series switches

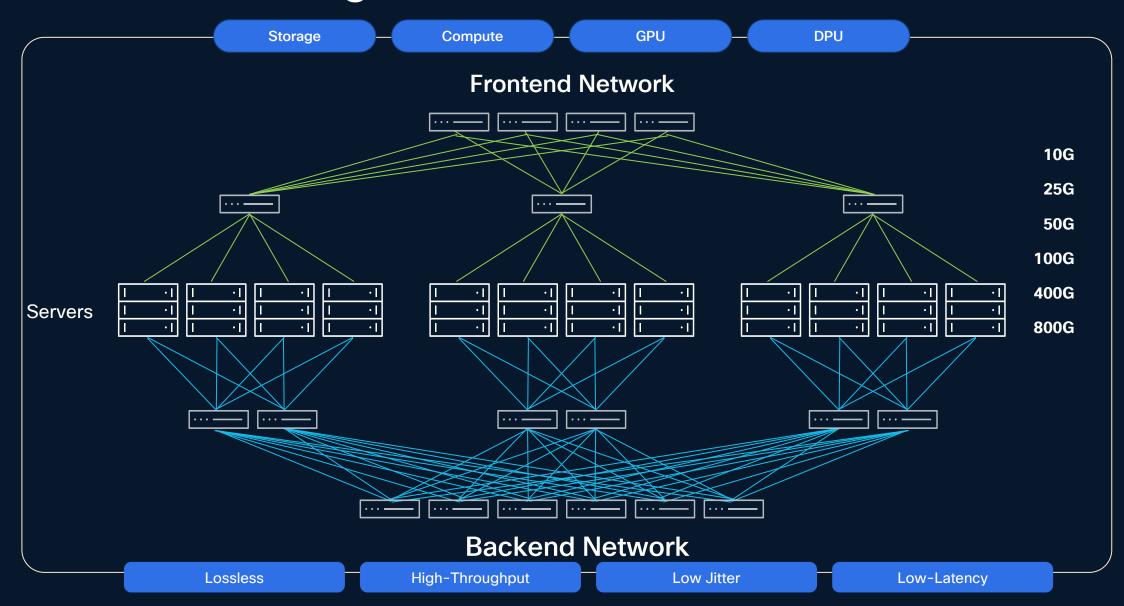
Functional Networks Front End | Storage | Back End (GPU) | Mgmt/OOB

North-South Traffic

East-West Traffic



Cisco Al Networking Infrastructure

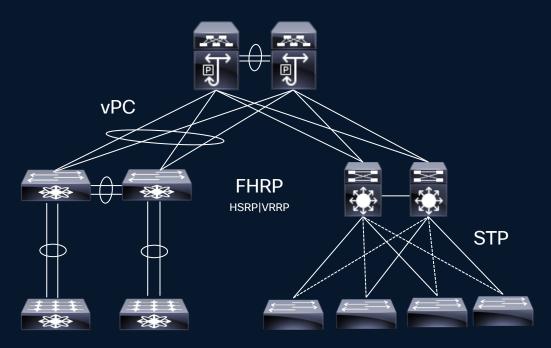




Network Topology Design

Three-Tier Hierarchical

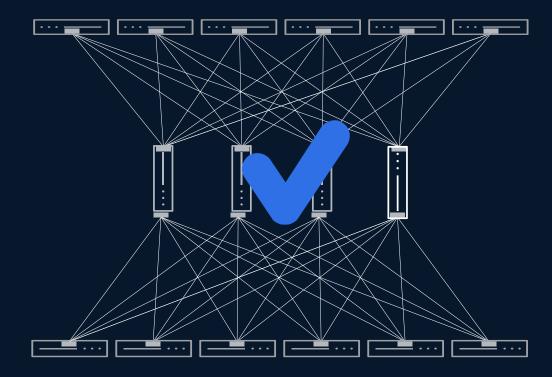
Inherent scale up topology building blocks
Requires multiple independent protocols configured in
concert to be able to use all network links



"I always thought Ethernet forwarding with STP was a kludge, and the right solution was to do layer 3 forwarding..." ~Radia Perlman

CLOS Fabric

Fully Interconnected 'fabric' with multiple design variations Inherent modular scale out design (intra and inter-fabric)



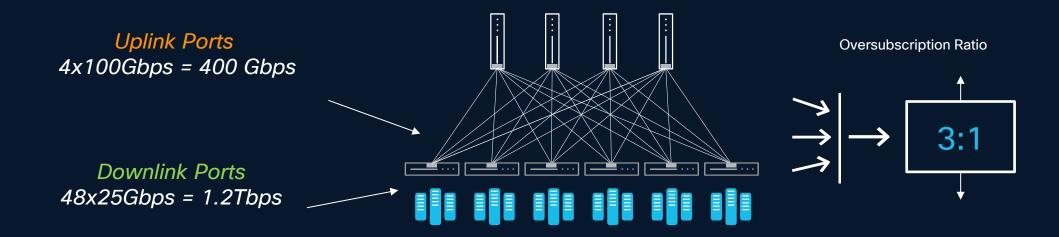


Oversubscription and Non-Blocking

Oversubscription happens when an intermediate network device (switch) or link doesn't have enough capacity (bandwidth) to allow line rate communication between the two devices

Oversubscription Ratio

[Number of Downlink Ports * Speed] ÷ [Number of Uplink to Spine * Speed] : 1



Cisco ASIC Innovations - Nexus 9000 Series



READY

Fully Programmable Multi-Slice Architecture

Features & Performance

25**G**

SERDES

<= 100G Ports

<= 3.6Tbps 16nm

Deep Visibility & Observability

Secure Connectivity

Low Latency & Power Efficiency

Modular & Fixed Switches

50G

SERDES <= 400G Ports <= 25.6Tbps 7nm

100G **SERDES** <= 800G Ports <= 51.2Tbps

5nm

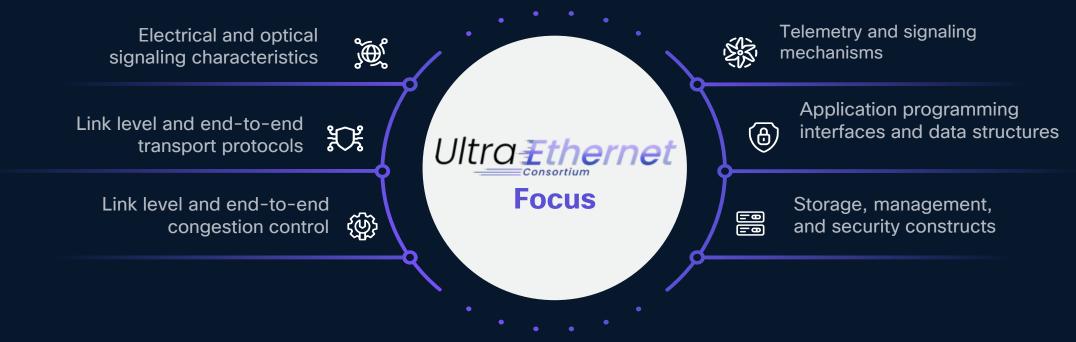
200G SERDES

> <= 1.6T Ports <= 102.4Tbps 3nm

Cloud Scale | Cisco Silicon One

UEC Seeks to Bring Open Standards to Al Networks

Open specifications, APIs, source code for optimal performance of AI and HPC workloads at scale.





























Al Ethernet Fabric Options

			2	2 _U	3
	Ethernet	Enhanced Ethernet		Ultra £thernet	Scheduled Ethernet
Load Balance	Stateless ECMP	Stateful Flow/Flowlet	Spray & Re-order in SmartNIC	Endpoint Controlled adaptive packet spraying	Spray & Re-order in leaf
Fabric Congestion Management	Congestion Reaction with ECN/PFC	Congestion Reaction with congestion score to adjust distribution		Network influenced Congestion Management	Congestion Avoidance
Link Failure	Software	Hardware			
Job Completion Time	Good	Better		Even Better	Best
Coupling between NIC and Fabric	No		Yes		No
Place in Network	Frontend, Backend		Backend	Frontend, Backend	
Fabric Architecture	Effecti	Modular Chassis			

Effectiveness IS dependent on Traffic Characteristics

Effectiveness IS NOT dependent on Traffic Characteristics

Hardware Terminology - Quick Reference



Die / Package

A Die is a block of semiconducting material (silicon) on which an integrated circuit is fabricated

Encapsulated / sealed die(s) are referred to as a package



ASIC

Application Specific Integrated Circuit

Sometimes referred to as 'silicon' (Cisco vs Merchant)



SoC

Switch on Chip / System on Chip

Multiple interconnected dies (chiplets) on a single package -Used in modern ASIC design (ex Cisco CloudScale)



Slice

Self-contained forwarding complex with ingress and egress forwarding pipelines on a single ASIC

Think of them as fully interconnected (no bus/arbitration) line cards within an ASIC



On-Die Buffer and HBM

- · Buffer integrated on the silicon die
- High Bandwidth Memory is external buffer memory interconnected to the ASIC



SFP | QSFP | QSFP-DD

- [Quad] Small Form Factor Pluggable [Double Density]
- Compact (standards based) transceiver



- Serializer + Deserializer Converts serial data to parallel and vice versa
- Clocking speed increases result in higher BW



MACSEC | CloudSEC

- MACSEC is line rate encryption of a physical link / port
- CloudSEC is effectively multi-hop or tunneled MACSEC (TEP<->TEP)



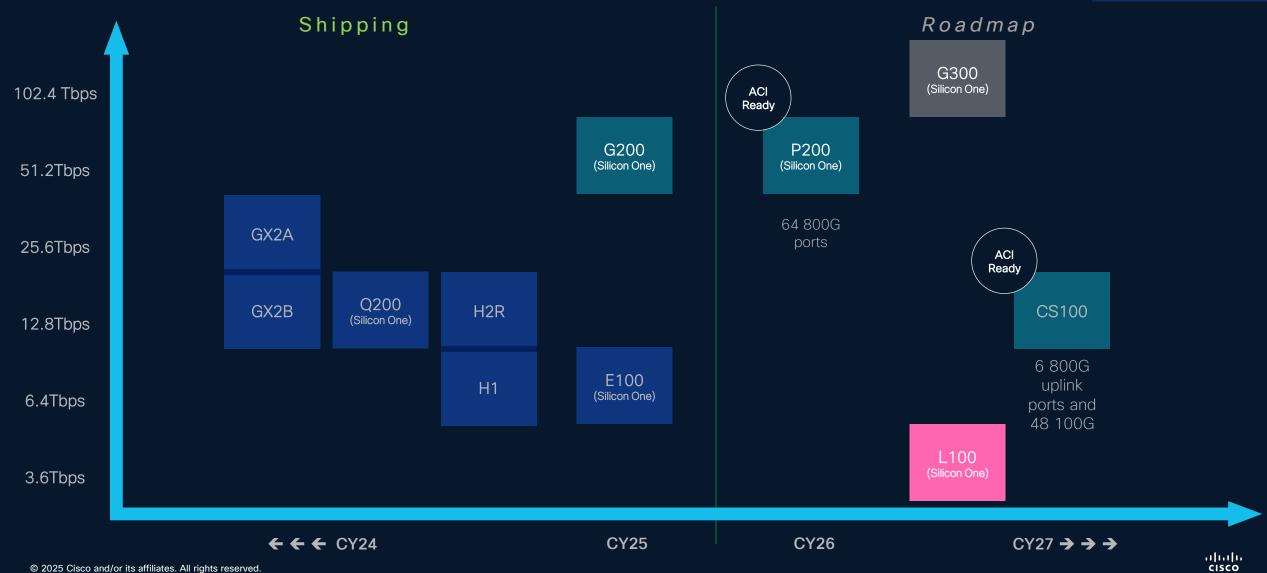


Cisco Nexus 9000 ASICs

3nm; 200G SERDES

3 or 5nm; 100G SERDES

7nm; 50G SERDES



Nexus 9K Platform Naming Convention Reference

Nexus 9K Switches adhere to the following naming convention in general

Reference Example - 93180YC-FX3

The Numbers (ex. 9|3|180)

```
(9) First number = Switch make
```

```
(3) Second number = Switch model / family
```

(180) Third number = Max aggregate throughput in GB -or- Port count if all same speed (ex. 9336C-FX2)

The Letters (ex. YC-FX3)

(YC) First letter group designates the switch face plate / port connections (speed and inherent connectivity)

```
E: Native 800-Gbps front-panel ports (QSFP-DD)
```

D: Native 400-Gbps front-panel ports (QSFP-DD)

Q: Native 40-Gbps front-panel ports (QSFP)

Y: Native 25-Gbps front-panel ports (SFP+/SFP28)

C: Native 100-Gbps front-panel ports (QSFP)

L: Native 50-Gbps front-panel ports (QSFP)

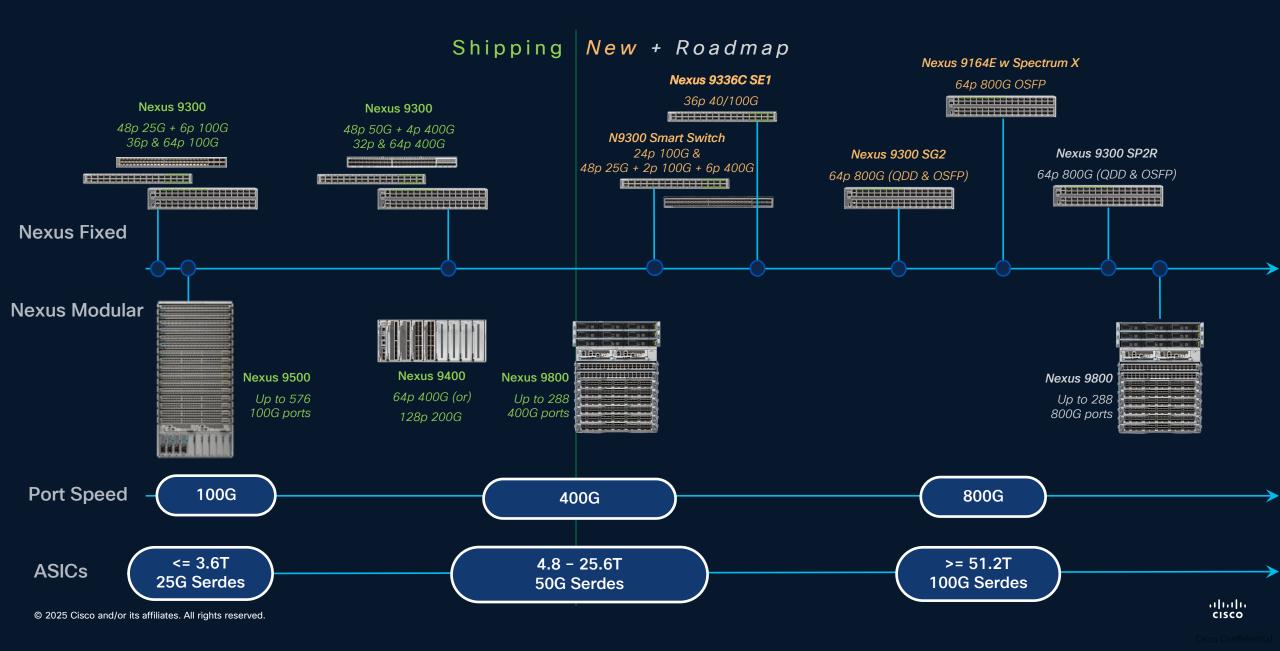
T: 100M*, 1GT, and 10GT (Base-T - RF45)

G: 100M, 1G (Base-T - RJ45)

P: Power Over Ethernet (UPoE) capable

(FX3) Second letter group designates which ASIC is used (EX, FX, FX2, FX3, GX etc..)

Cisco Nexus 9000 Series Switches



Cisco Nexus 9300 64 Port 800G Switch

512-wide radix

Fully shared packet buffer

Advanced load balancing

Low Latency

N9364E-SG2-Q or N9364E-SG2-O

Compact 2RU 51.2T Switch

G200 ASIC (5nm) | 100G SerDes | 256MB packet buffer

64 800G ports | Up to 128 line-rate 400G ports (2x400G breakout)

Choice of QSFP-DD or OSFP ports

Multi Core x86 CPU | 32GB RAM | 128GB SSD

Cisco NXOS spine and AI/ML spine/leaf capable

Nvidia FGLB license available





Cisco Nexus 9164E 64 Port 800G Switch

NCP Reference Architecture (RA) Compliant

Advanced load balancing

Low Latency

Compact 2RU 51.2T Switch

Nvidia Spectrum-X ASIC



64 800G ports | Up to 128 line-rate 400G ports (2x400G breakout)

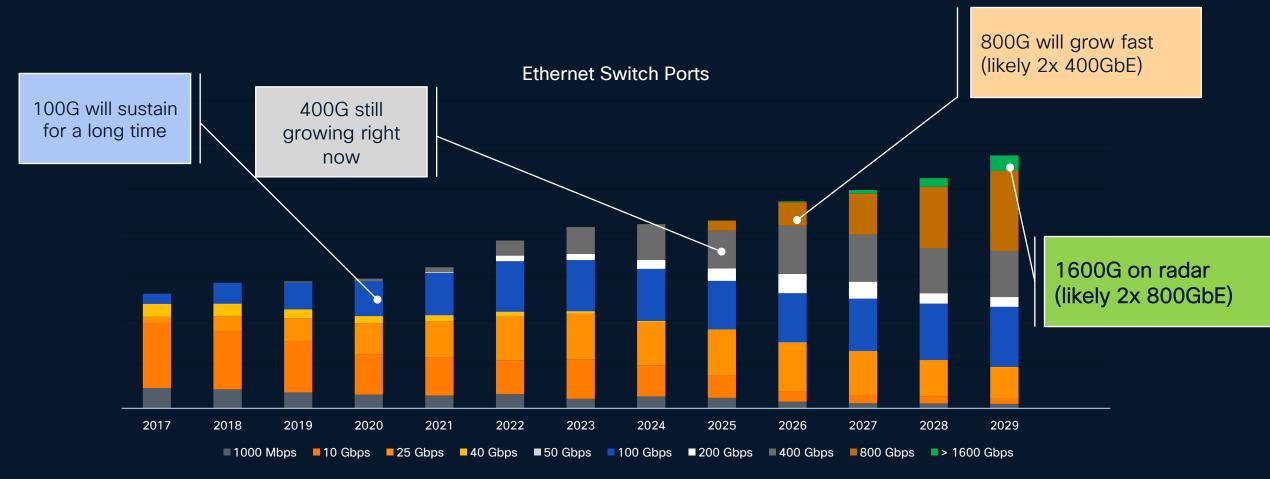
Low-Latency, Lossless Ethernet

Supported by Nexus Dashboard

Supports NX-OS or SONiC



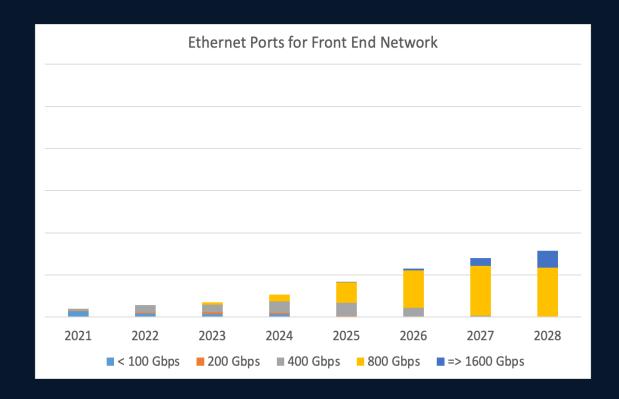
Ethernet Data Center Switch Port Speed Transitions

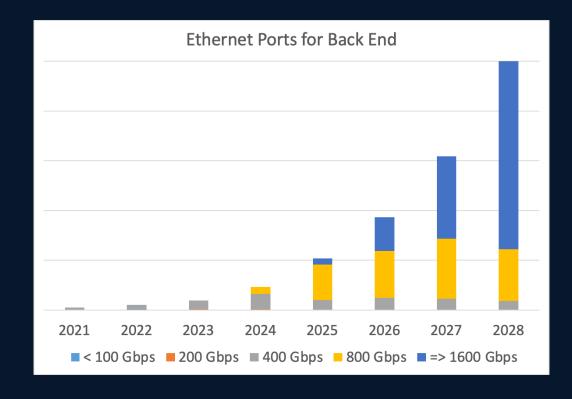


- Majority of the highest speed transitions are webscale (top 8) customers
- Webscale will drive the speed transitions quickly to scale
- Rest of the market will leverage that scale in their own time frame



Ethernet Speed Transitions in Al Networks



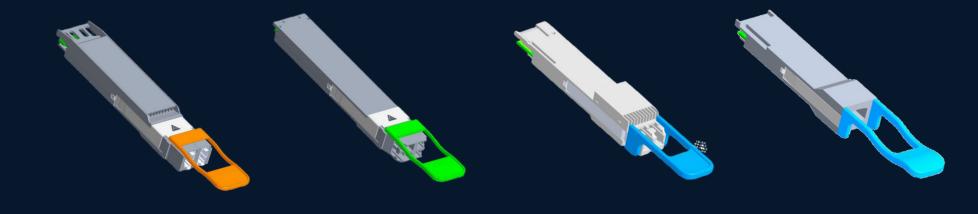


Majority of the switch ports in Al back-end Networks to be 800 Gbps in 2025 and 1600 Gbps in 2027, showing a very fast migration to the highest speeds available in the market.

Dell'Oro: 95N01_Advanced_Research_Al_Networks_For_Al_Workloads_Report_3Q24



Pluggable Optical Modules Options



	OSFP	OSFP-RHS	QSFP-DD	QSFP	
Host high-speed pins	8	8	8	4	
Module capacity (Gbit)	400, 800, 1600	400, 800, 1600	400, 800, 1600	40, 100, 200, 400	
Cooling	Integrated heatsink	Riding heatsink	Riding heatsink	Riding heatsink	
High-speed IO Compatibility (Gbps)	50-100-200	50-100-200	50-100-200	1-25-50-100	
Port compatibility	OSFP	OSFP-RHS	QSFP-DD & QSFP		
Management	CMIS				

System and ASIC design dictate which modules are supported and speed backwards compatibility



Pluggable form factors – a wealth of options



Port Compatibility

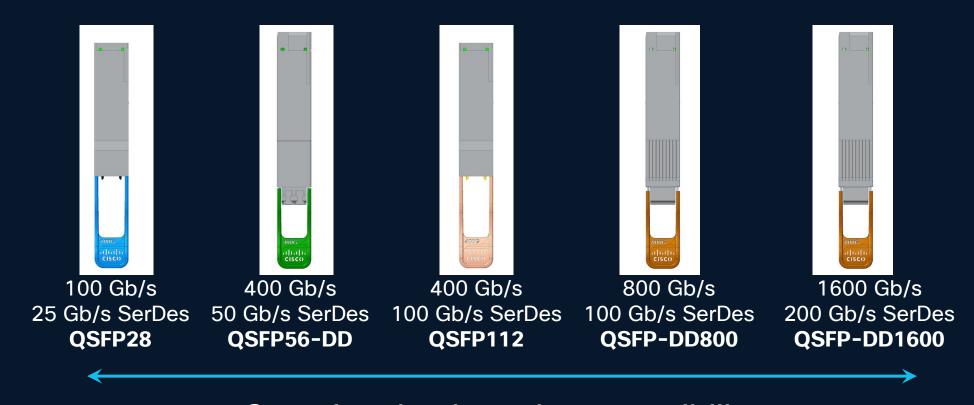
Everything within a square is compatible with each other

ıılıılı. cısco

1.6T

16x

QSFP-DD Extends to 1.6T



Complete backwards compatibility

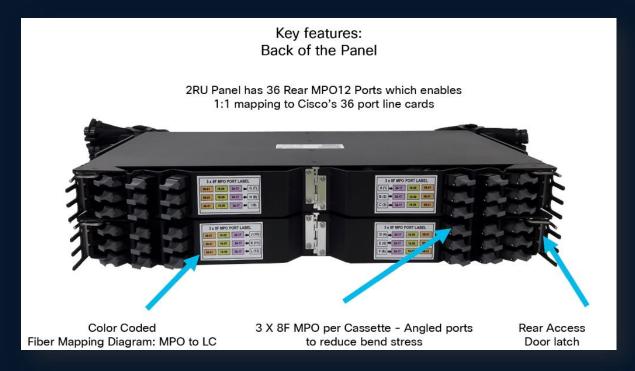
Powerful value proposing to enable seamless network growth and investment protection. Technically superior solution.

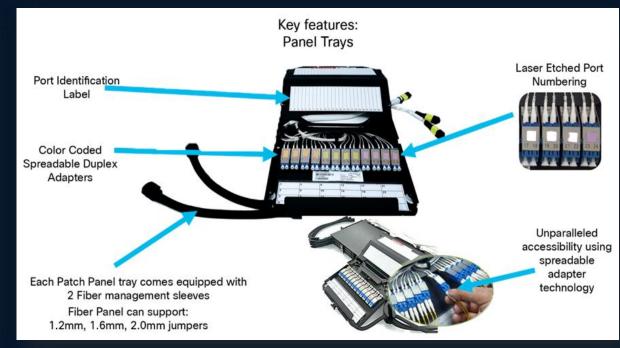


Cisco High-Density Fiber Patch Panel

-> Data Sheet

Structured cabling and breakout cassettes





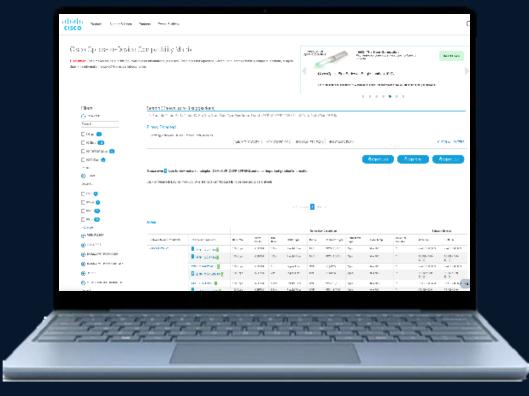
1RU == 72 LC Ports (18 MPO)

2RU == 144 LC Ports (36 MPO)

3RU == 216 LC Ports (54 MPO)



TMG Matrix - Authoritative Optics Compatibility



https://tmgmatrix.cisco.com/

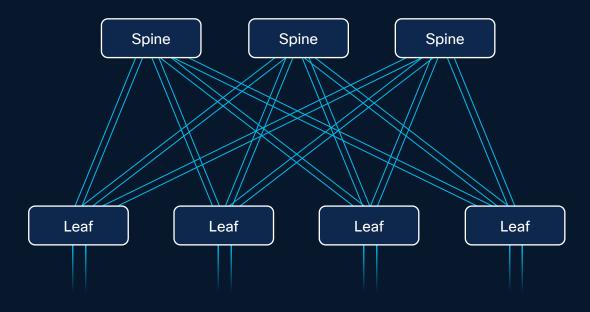
- Comprehensive list of Cisco hardware
- Cisco validated compatibility
 - Optics <-> Platform <-> SW release
- Responsive support team
- Continuously maintained to ensure up to date information
- Search by HW platform and/or Optic name
 - Cisco tested and validated Optic compatibility
 - Optics specs & platform software release mapping
 - 1-click to datasheet



Powering Al Fabrics with Cisco Intelligent Packet Flow

Intelligent Load Balancing for every path and every flow







FEATURES

Dynamic Load Balancing (DLB) with Load and Congestion Awareness

Weighted Cost Multi Path Load Balancing (h-WCMP) with Dynamic Load Balancing

Advanced load balancing

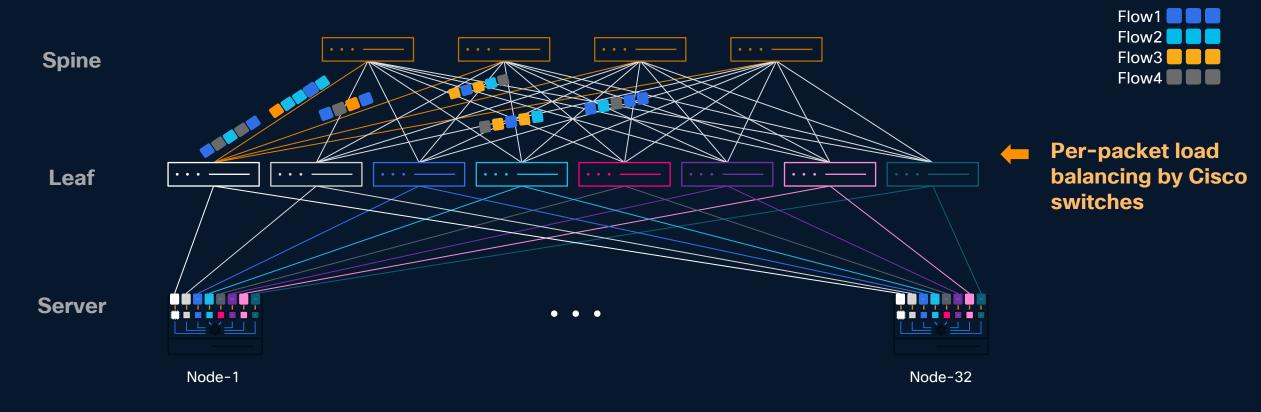
Per Packet and Selective Packet Spray (Ex: RDMA vs. non-RDMA) + NVIDIA Spectrum-X integration*

Policy Based Flowlet Load Balancing (DSCP, ACL...) + RoCEv2 Header Filter*

ECMP Static Pinning

High Entropy ECMP

Per-Packet Load Balancing



Cisco Per-Packet Load Balancing

- Traffic is forwarded on a per packet basis, every packet will be hashed on different output port
- Expected that receiver will put packet in order (server NICs do the packet reordering)





Cisco Silicon (S1 and Cloud Scale) & Cisco Optics fully validated as part of **Spectrum-X**

The only 3rd party switch validated as part of the reference architecture

Support packet spraying and adaptive routing capabilities in Cisco Silicon Nexus Switches

Co-develop Cisco N9164E switch based on Spectrum-X ASIC



NEW Per-Packet Load Balancing with **NVIDIA Spectrum-X Integration**



Cisco Per-Packet Load Balancing with NVIDIA Spectrum-X integration

- Traffic is forwarded on a per packet basis, every packet will be hashed on different output port
- Expected that receiver will put packet in order (server NICs do the packet reordering)
- Turned 'ON' on-NIC by connecting to Spectrum-X capable switches
- Provide best utilization of network links, leading to more efficient and reliable data transmission

Cisco Data Center Networking - Al Workload





Cisco Nexus Hyperfabric

Cisco cloud-managed, fully integrated

Easily design, order, deploy, monitor and upgrade fabrics

Purpose built vertical stack

Cisco 6000 series switches



Cisco Nexus (Dashboard)

Private cloud managed, flexible solution

Versatile data center solution

Nexus Dashboard for simplified ops

Nexus 9000 series switches



Cisco Nexus Hyperfabric

It's the same Hyperfabric service, extended for Al



NOW ORDERABLE

Cisco Nexus Hyperfabric

High-performance Ethernet

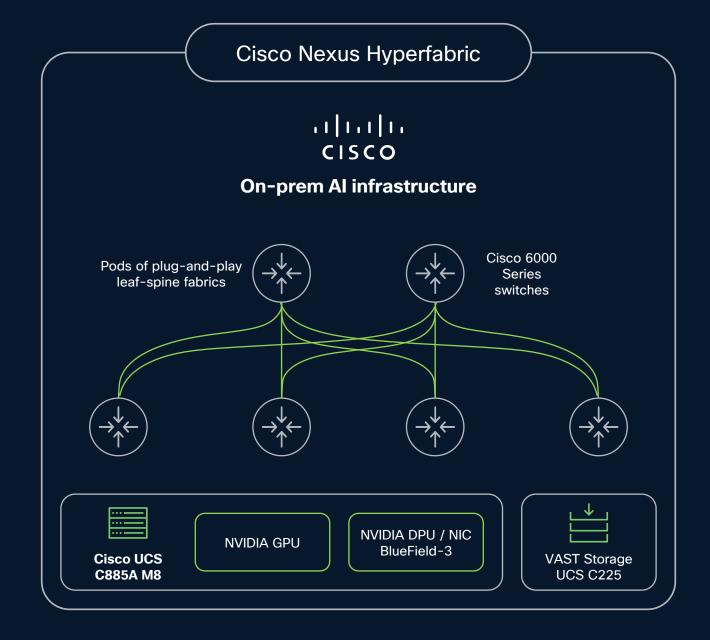
Cloud-managed operations

Unified stack including NVAIE

Al-native operational model

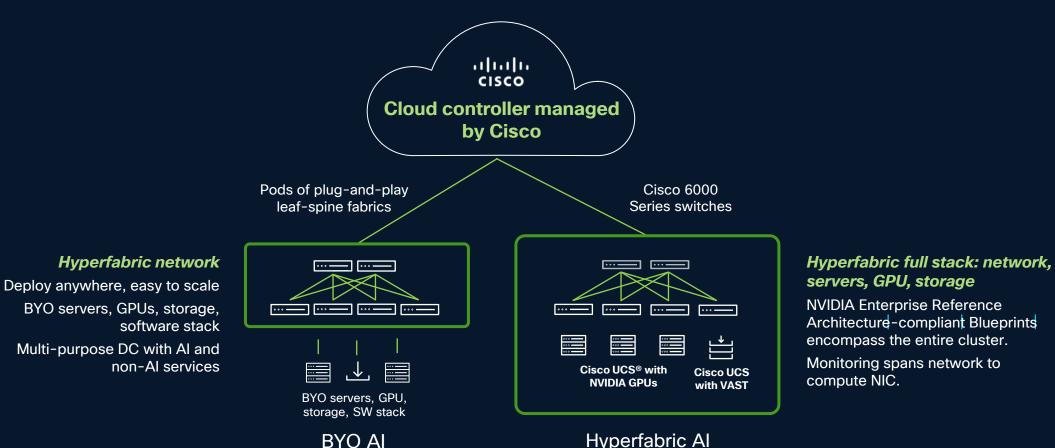
Democratize
Al infrastructure

Visibility into full stack Al



Al solutions with Cisco Nexus Hyperfabric

Inference

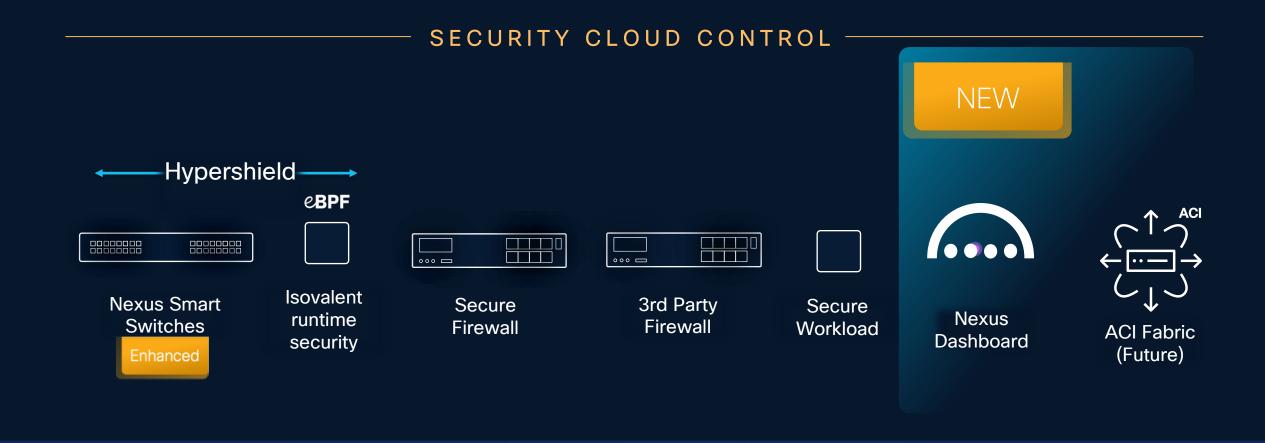


Easy to design, deploy, operate, and scale High-performance Ethernet networks

Training, fine tuning, inference

Al Ready DC Network Security

Cisco Hybrid Mesh Firewall in Data Center



Write policy once, enforce across the mesh



Nexus Smart Switch

Unmatched Flexibility, Performance, and Efficiency

Networking









- Rich NX-OS Features and Services
- High-speed connectivity and scalable performance
- Optimized for latency and power efficiency







EVPN/MPLS/ VXLAN/SR



Rich Telemetry



Line-rate Encryption



Power Efficiency

- Software-defined Stateful Services
- Programmable at all layers: add new services without HW change
- Scale-out services with wire-rate performance
- Power down DPU complex when not used



Hypershield Security



IPSEC Encryption



Large-Scale NAT



Event-Based Telemetry



DoS Protection

Future Use Cases

Cisco Smart Switches Integrated with Hypershield Security

Ultra **Ethernet**

Cisco N9300 Series
Smart Switches



N9324C-SE1U

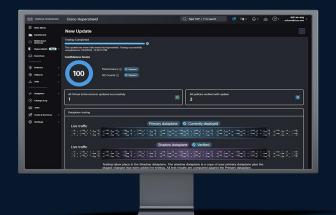
24-port 100G

800G Services Throughput



48-port 1G/10G/25G, 6-port 400G, 2-port 100G 800G Services Throughput

Cisco Hypershield



Use Cases

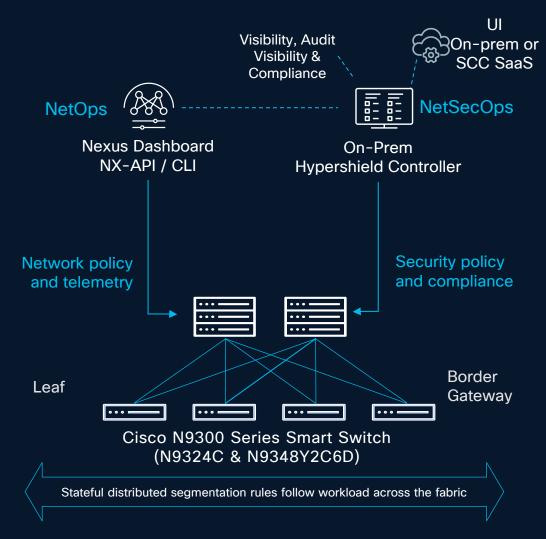
Top of Rack segmentation and enforcement

Cloud Edge

Zone-based segmentation

Smart Switch "Networking & Security" Use Case

Top of Rack L4 Segmentation - November GA



Security Infused in Data Center Fabric

Version: NXOS 10.6(2), Hypershield 1.2

Smart Switches: N9348Y2C6D-SE1U, N9324C-SE1U

Fabric: VXLAN-EVPN, VXLAN-multi-site, BGP fabric, brownfield

Segmentation: VRF/VLAN + CIDR rules, stateful/stateless, 100K rules, 800G throughput (final scale based on benchmarking)

Policy: CRD schema, policy validation and canary rollout/rollback

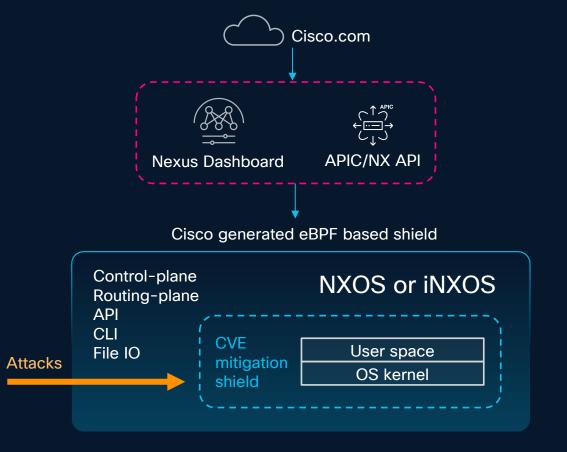
Hypershield: Air-gap ready on-prem controller* and optional Security Cloud Control SaaS

Upgrade: NXOS CLI for DPU load, SMU for Hypershield agent

Observability: Nexus Dashboard, Splunk, Prometheus/Grafana

Live Protect - CVE Mitigation for Nexus NXOS Switches

No Downtime or Immediate PSIRT Software Upgrades



Data Center is critical infrastructure:

- PSIRTs require large switch fleet upgrades (100s-1000s)
- Require testing, planning, multiple maintenance windows
- High cumulative downtime (high MTTR)

Live Protect workflow:

- Support on Nexus CloudScale and Silicon1 switches
- Download compensating controls from cisco.com
- Tetragon agent applies eBPF policy CVE shields
 - Monitor mode
 - Enforce mode
- Privilege escalation CVEs (NXOS 10.6(2))
- Network control DDoS CVEs (future)

Benefits:

- Nexus is 1st to market
- Arista, Juniper, Aruba, etc ... don't have it
- CVE mitigation with no downtime
- Upgrades during regular maintenance window

Roadmap

April 2026 Sept 2025 Nov 2025 (Planning) NXOS 10.6(1s) NXOS 10.6(2) GA + Hypershield 1.2 NXOS 10.6(3) + Hypershield 1.x Top of Rack Use Case in ToR Segmentation Use Case Cloud Edge & Zone Seg * **Smart Switch Networking Mode** N9324C-SE1U with Hypershield N9348Y2C6D-SE1U **Hypershield** VXLAN-EVPN, Multi-site Al Frontend BGP routed fabric Hypershield: On-Prem Controller Fabric Use Case N9348Y2C6D-SE1U VXLAN-EVPN, Multi-site NPU: IPSec - 800G, 1k tunnels N9324C-SE1U BGP routed fabric 30+ networking enhancements Management Network Use Case Live Protect Observability Live Protect Live Protect Live Protect CloudScale devices only Privilege escalation Network control DDoS CloudScale & Silicon 1 devices



Al Ready DC Network Operation

Unified Cisco Nexus Dashboard

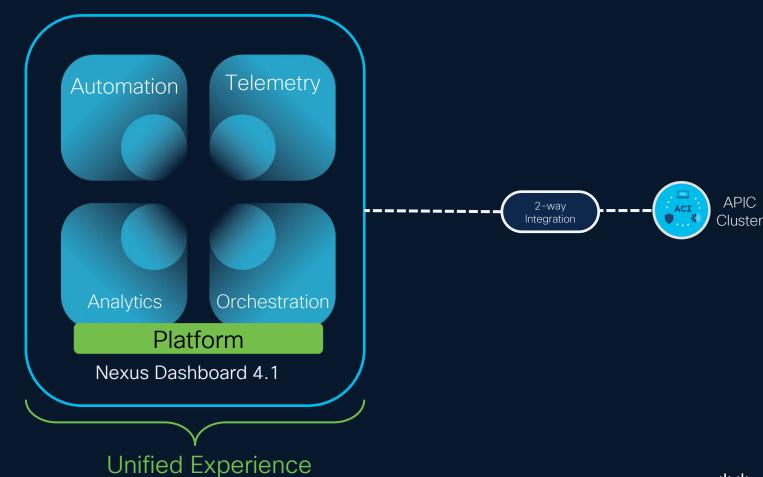
A consistent user experience for open networking





Unify your Operational Experience





NEXUS DASHBOARD

0

Physical or virtual cluster

Data plane | Policy and control plane | Management plane

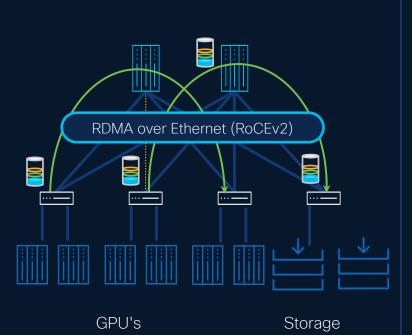
SAN





Cisco Nexus Dashboard

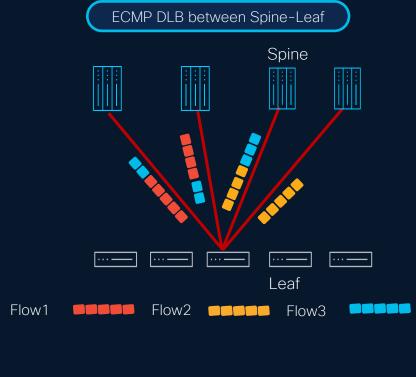
Automate your AI/ML network configurations



Manage network congestion

with Lossless Network (PFC + ECN)

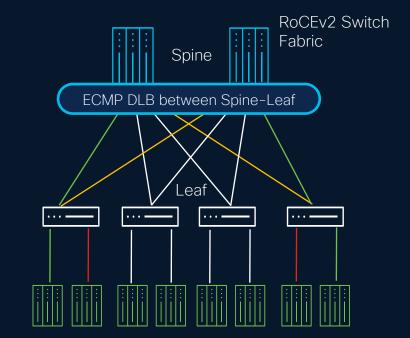
RoCEv2 support on Nexus 9800



Load balance flows/flowlets/Packets

based on link utilization

Better hashing results in Al fabrics with uniform flow size and header information



Traffic efficiency through pinning rules

Map traffic from each downlink to the desired uplink

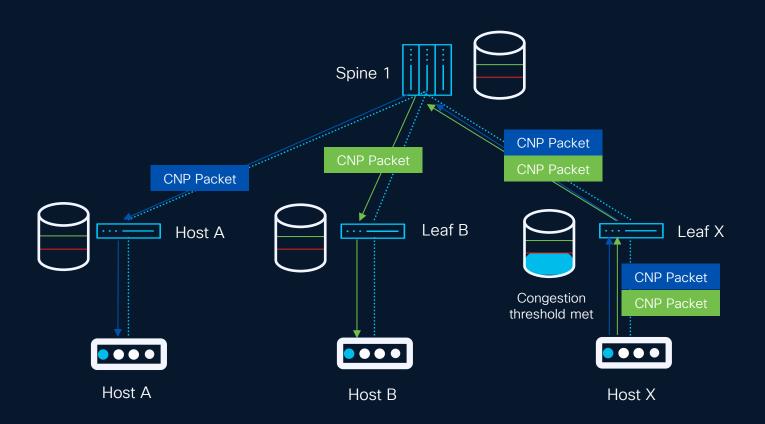
Allows efficient selection of Spines for communication between leaf and spines





Committed

AI/ML Fabric Settings



QoS metrics easily accessible with a new tab in fabric settings

Automated BGP pool allocation

Easily enable PFC/ECN and fine-tune thresholds

Enable Dynamic Load Balancing and set parameters

Benefits



Cisco Nexus Dashboard

Advanced Congestion detection

Nexus Dashboard provides critical insights into network health, detecting congestion even without Dynamic Load Balancing (DLB) enabled. This deep visibility ensures optimal performance for your Al workloads.

PFC Pattern Analysis

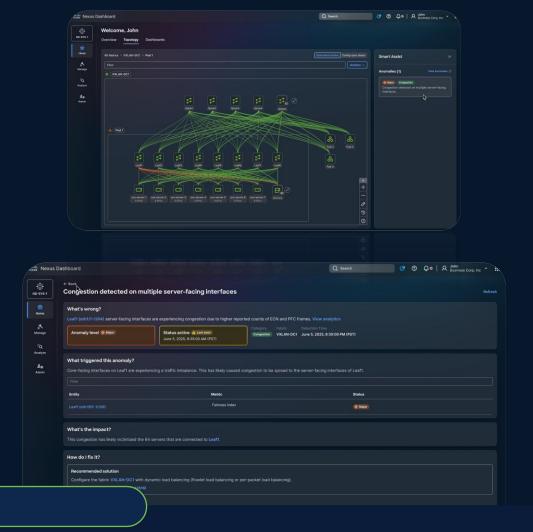
Detects congestion through detailed Priority Flow Control (PFC) patterns.

ECN Packet Monitoring

Analyzes Explicit Congestion Notification (ECN) packets for early warnings.

Hierarchical Scoring

Applies a hierarchical congestion score from interface to switch to the entire fabric.

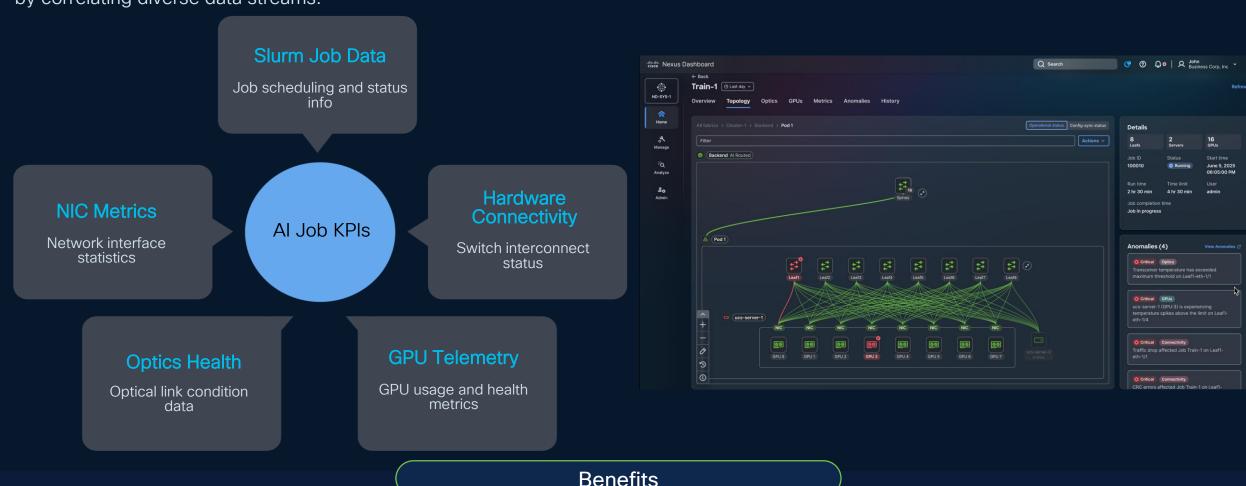


Benefits

Topology-driven visualization enables rapid drill-down, allowing targeted mitigation through flowlet-based or per-packet load balancing.

Integration with Slurm for AI Job monitoring, Job-Centric Correlation for AI Fabrics

Optimizing performance for complex AI workloads requires a comprehensive understanding of interactions across the entire fabric, achieved by correlating diverse data streams.



This multi-faceted correlation, spanning orchestration, connectivity, and hardware telemetry, enables proactive detection of potential performance bottlenecks before they impact critical AI application throughput

Cisco Nexus Dashboard

Optimize experiences with end-to-end visibility



Observability & Security

For networking, IT, security and engineering teams

Cross domain full stack observability with Application, Networking, Security and Al

Airgap / Cloud native including application dependency mapping, IT service intelligence and Enterprise security

Single DCN app for Splunk Enterprise and Splunk Cloud for ND, ACI and N9K

Nexus Dashboard with Splunk Embedded

VCCEDIVN

Assurance

For network and IT teams

Cloud-native Al service assurance for service provider/telco using nexus Dashboard and Provider connectivity assurance

Network performance, enriched connectivity analysis, DC to external services

Accedian SFP recognition, Automation of agent installation using Nexus Dashboard

ThousandEyes

Assurance

For network and IT teams

CloudAl driven closed loop assurance for Airgap, cloud, and hybrid Enterprise networks

DC configuration correlation, active synthetics, proactive recommendations for Inter DC, Intra DC, and Hybrid insights

Automated ThousndEyes agent installation, Internet insights, application performance

Benefits



Transform data centers to power AI workloads anywhere



Robust, flexible infrastructure

Power Al and traditional workloads with networking, silicon, and compute in fully-integrated and scalable systems

Security from ground to cloud

Protect distributed workloads by infusing security everywhere

Seamless operations and observability

Remove silos with unified management, observability, and assurance for traditional and Al workloads, across all environments

Resources





Cisco Data Center Networking

View on Cisco.com





Cisco Nexus Dashboard

View on Cisco.com





Cisco Nexus Hyperfabric

View on Cisco.com





Cisco Secure Al Factory with NVIDIA

Visit Cisco.com





Blogs

Visit blogs.cisco.com/datacenter





Online community

Visit the Data Center and Cloud online community

CISCO Connect

Thank you

