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Sublinear Longest Path Transversals

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Abstract

We show that connected graphs admit sublinear longest path transversals. This improves an earlier result of Rautenbach and Sereni and is related to the fifty-year-old question of whether connected graphs admit longest path transversals of constant size. The same technique allows us to show that 2-connected graphs admit sublinear longest cycle transversals.

1 Introduction

A classical exercise in graph theory is to show that if P and Q are longest paths in a connected graph, then the vertex sets of P and Q have non-empty intersection (see [8], exercise 1.2.40). In 1966, Gallai [2] asked whether this result could be strengthened to assert that the family of all longest paths in a connected graph G has non-empty intersection. It turns out the answer is no, as shown by Walther [6] with a 25-vertex counterexample. A 12-vertex counterexample, due to Walther and Voss [7] and independently Zamfirescu [10], is obtained from the Petersen graph by replacing one vertex v with an independent set $\{v_1, v_2, v_3\}$ such that each v_i becomes an endpoint of an edge incident to v (see Figure 1).

Since Gallai's question has a negative answer, a single vertex is generally insufficient to meet every longest path in a connected graph G. A *longest path transversal* in G is a set of vertices that intersects every longest path. Such a set is a transversal in the hypergraph on $V(G)$ whose edges are the vertex sets of longest paths in G. Let $\mathrm{lpt}(G)$ be the minimum size of a longest path transversal in G. The graph G_0 in Figure 1 is a connected 12-vertex graph with $\mathrm{lpt}(G_0) = 2$. Grünbaum [3] constructed a connected 324-vertex graph G with $\mathrm{lpt}(G) = 3$. Soon afterward, Zamfirescu [10] found such a graph with 270 vertices. Walther [6] and Zamfirescu [9] asked if $\mathrm{lpt}(G)$ is bounded for connected graphs G, and this remains

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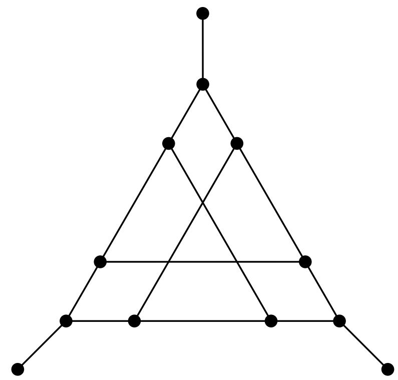

Figure 1: The graph G_0: a 12-vertex graph with $\mathrm{lpt}(G_0) = 2$.

open. In fact, it is not known whether there is a connected graph G with $\mathrm{lpt}(G) \geq 4$. Let G be a connected graph. Since a connected graph does not contain vertex-disjoint longest paths, every partition of $V(G)$ into two sets has a part that contains no longest path in G, forcing the other part to be a longest path transversal. Applying this to a partition of $V(G)$ into two parts of nearly equal size gives $\mathrm{lpt}(G) \leq \lceil n/2 \rceil$ when G is an n-vertex connected graph. It is not too difficult to improve this argument to obtain $\mathrm{lpt}(G) \leq \lceil n/4 \rceil$. Rautenbach and Sereni [4] showed that $\mathrm{lpt}(G) \leq \lceil \frac{n}{4} - \frac{n^{2/3}}{90} \rceil$ for every connected n-vertex graph G. We show that $\mathrm{lpt}(G) \leq 8n^{3/4}$ when G is an n-vertex connected graph, implying that connected graphs have sublinear longest path transversals.

Let $\mathrm{lct}(G)$ be the minimum size of a set of vertices S such that S intersects every longest cycle in G. Analogously to the case of longest paths in 1-connected graphs, every pair of longest cycles in a 2-connected graph intersect. The Petersen graph G is 2-connected and $\mathrm{lct}(G) = 2$. With no connectivity assumptions, Thomassen [5] showed that $\mathrm{lct}(G) \leq \lceil n/3 \rceil$ for each n-vertex graph G. The bound is sharp when G is a disjoint union of triangles and nearly sharp in the 1-connected case when G is obtained from a star with $(n-1)/3$ leaves by replacing each leaf with a triangle. On the other hand, Rautenbach and Sereni [4] proved that if G is 2-connected, then $\mathrm{lct}(G) \leq \lceil \frac{n}{3} - \frac{n^{2/3}}{36} \rceil$. We show that $\mathrm{lct}(G) \leq 20n^{3/4}$ when G is 2-connected (Corollary 2).

The problems of finding small longest path transversals and small longest cycle transversals are special cases of a general problem that we aim to address. Given a multigraph F and an edge $e \in E(F)$ with endpoints u and v, the *subdivision operation* produces a new multigraph F' in which e is replaced by a path uwv through a new vertex w in F'. A *subdivision* of F is a graph obtained from F via a sequence of zero or more subdivision operations. For a multigraph R and a graph G, an R-subdivision in G is a subgraph of G isomorphic to a subdivision of R. We ask for a small set of vertices in G that intersects every R-subdivision in G of maximum size. The cases of longest path transversals and longest cycle transversals arise as $R = P_2$ and $R = C_2$ (the multigraph 2-vertex cycle), respectively. We prove that for each connected multigraph R, if the family $\mathcal{F}$ of maximum R-subdivisions in G is pairwise intersecting, then $\mathcal{F}$ admits a transversal of size at most $Cn^{3/4}$, where C is a constant depending on R.

2 Maximum subdivision transversals

Let R be a multigraph. Recall that an R-subdivision in G is a subgraph of G isomorphic to a subdivision of R, and a *maximum R-subdivision* is an R-subdivision F in G that maximizes $|V(F)|$. An *R-transversal* of G is a set of vertices intersecting each maximum R-subdivision. Let $\tau_R(G)$ be the minimum size of an R-transversal in G.

Given sets of vertices X and Y of G, an *(X,Y)-separator* is a set of vertices S such that no path in $G-S$ has one endpoint in X and the other endpoint in Y. We allow an (X,Y)-separator to contain vertices in X and Y. An *(X,Y)-connector* is a collection of vertex-disjoint paths $\{P_1,\ldots,P_k\}$ such that each P_i has one endpoint in X, the other endpoint in Y, and the interior vertices of P_i are outside $X\cup Y$. A variant of Menger's Theorem asserts that the minimum size of an (X,Y)-separator equals the maximum size of an (X,Y)-connector (see, e.g., Theorem 3.3.1 in [1]).

Our next result shows that when the maximum R-subdivisions in a graph G pairwise intersect, G has sublinear R-transversals. We make no attempt to optimize the multiplicative constant 8 or the dependence on m.

Theorem 1. *Let R be a connected m-edge multigraph with $m\geq 1$ and let G be an n-vertex graph. If the maximum R-subdivisions in G pairwise intersect, then $\tau_R(G)\leq 8m^{5/4}n^{3/4}$.*

Proof. Let $m=|E(R)|$ and let $\varepsilon=2(m/n)^{1/4}$. We may assume that $m\leq n$, since otherwise we may take $V(G)$ as our R-transversal. Let $\mathcal{F}$ be the family of maximum R-subdivisions in G. An *ε-partial transversal* is a triple (H,X,Y) such that H is a subgraph of G, $X=V(G)-V(H)$, $Y\subseteq X$ with $|Y|\leq\varepsilon|X|$, and each $F\in\mathcal{F}$ is a subgraph of H or contains a vertex in Y. Given an ε-partial transversal (H,X,Y), we either obtain an ε-partial transversal (H',X',Y') with $|V(H')|<|V(H)|$ or we produce an R-transversal with at most $8m^{5/4}n^{3/4}$ vertices. Starting with $(H,X,Y)=(G,\varnothing,\varnothing)$ and iterating gives the result.

Let (H,X,Y) be an ε-partial transversal, and let $\mathcal{F}_0$ be the set of $F\in\mathcal{F}$ such that F is a subgraph of H. We may assume that H contains vertex-disjoint paths P_1 and P_2 each of size $\lceil\varepsilon n\rceil$. Otherwise, every path in H has size less than $2\lceil\varepsilon n\rceil$, and so each $F\in\mathcal{F}_0$ has at most $2m\lceil\varepsilon n\rceil$ vertices. Since $\mathcal{F}_0$ is pairwise intersecting, we have that $V(F)\cup Y$ is an R-transversal for each $F\in\mathcal{F}_0$. It follows that $\tau_R(G)\leq|Y|+2m\lceil\varepsilon n\rceil\leq\varepsilon n+2m\lceil\varepsilon n\rceil\leq(2m+1)\varepsilon n+2m\leq(2m+2)\varepsilon n\leq 4m\varepsilon n=8m^{5/4}n^{3/4}$.

Suppose that H has a $(V(P_1),V(P_2))$-separator S of size at most $\varepsilon^2 n$. Since graphs in $\mathcal{F}_0$ are connected, each $F\in\mathcal{F}_0$ has a vertex in S or is contained in some component of $H-S$. Also, since $\mathcal{F}_0$ is pairwise intersecting, at most one component H' of $H-S$ contains graphs in $\mathcal{F}_0$. Since S is a separator, H' is disjoint from at least one of $\{P_1,P_2\}$. With $X'=V(G)-V(H')$ and $Y'=Y\cup S$, we have $|X'|-|X|\geq\varepsilon n$ and $|Y'|=|Y|+|S|\leq\varepsilon|X|+\varepsilon^2 n\leq\varepsilon|X|+\varepsilon(|X'|-|X|)\leq\varepsilon|X'|$. It follows that (H',X',Y') is an ε-partial transversal. Also $|V(H')|<|V(H)|$ since $|X'|>|X|$.

Otherwise, by Menger's Theorem, H has a $(V(P_1),V(P_2))$-connector $\mathcal{P}$ with $|\mathcal{P}|\geq\varepsilon^2 n$. Let $\mathcal{P}'$ be the set of paths in $\mathcal{P}$ of size at most $2/\varepsilon^2$. Note that $|\mathcal{P}'|\geq|\mathcal{P}|/2$, or else $\mathcal{P}$ has at least $(\varepsilon^2 n)/2$ paths of size more than $2/\varepsilon^2$, contradicting that the paths in $\mathcal{P}$ are disjoint. So we have $|\mathcal{P}'|\geq|\mathcal{P}|/2\geq(\varepsilon^2/2)n=2m^{1/2}n^{1/2}\geq 2$. Combining P_1 with two paths in $\mathcal{P}'$ whose endpoints in $V(P_1)$ are as far apart as possible and a segment of P_2 gives a cycle C_0 such that $(\varepsilon^2/2)n\leq|V(C_0)|\leq 2\lceil\varepsilon n\rceil+4/\varepsilon^2-4\leq 2\varepsilon n+4/\varepsilon^2$, where the lower bound

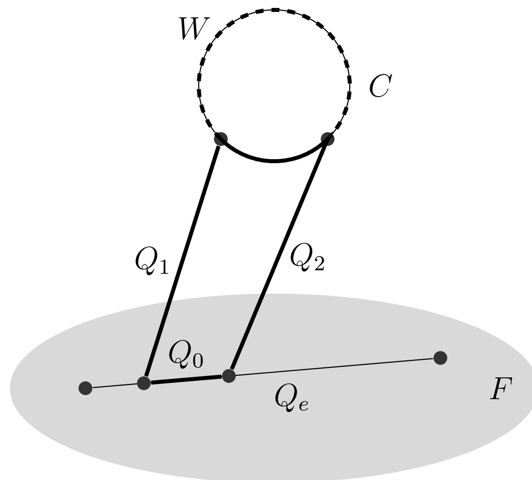

Figure 2: $(V(C), V(F))$-connector case. The subpath W of the cycle C is dashed, and the cycle D is displayed in bold.

counts vertices in $V(P_1) \cap V(C_0)$ and the upper bound counts at most $2\lceil \varepsilon n \rceil$ vertices in $(V(P_1) \cup V(P_2)) \cap V(C_0)$, at most $4/\varepsilon^2$ vertices on the paths in $\mathcal{P}'$ linking P_1 and P_2, and observing that the 4 endpoints of the linking paths are counted twice.

Let C be a longest cycle in H subject to $|V(C)| \leq 2\varepsilon n + 4/\varepsilon^2$, let $\ell = |V(C)|$, and note that $\ell \geq |V(C_0)| \geq (\varepsilon^2/2)n$. If $V(C)$ intersects each subgraph in $\mathcal{F}_0$, then $Y \cup V(C)$ witnesses $\tau_R(G) \leq |V(C)| + |Y| \leq (2\varepsilon n + 4/\varepsilon^2) + \varepsilon n = 3\varepsilon n + (n/m)^{1/2} < 8m^{5/4}n^{3/4}$. Otherwise, choose $F \in \mathcal{F}_0$ that is disjoint from C. We may assume $|V(F)| \geq \ell$, or else $Y \cup V(F)$ witnesses that $\tau_R(G) \leq |V(F)| + |Y| < (2\varepsilon n + 4/\varepsilon^2) + \varepsilon n < 8m^{5/4}n^{3/4}$.

If H has a $(V(C), V(F))$-separator T of size at most $\varepsilon\ell$, then we obtain an ε-partial transversal as follows. At most one component H' of $H - T$ contains graphs in $\mathcal{F}_0$. Let $X' = V(G) - V(H')$ and let $Y' = Y \cup T$. Since H' is disjoint from one of $\{C, F\}$, it follows that $|X'| - |X| \geq \ell$. We compute $|Y'| = |Y| + |T| \leq \varepsilon|X| + \varepsilon\ell \leq \varepsilon|X| + \varepsilon(|X'| - |X|) \leq \varepsilon|X'|$. Hence (H', X', Y') is an ε-partial transversal with $|V(H')| < |V(H)|$.

Otherwise, H has a $(V(C), V(F))$-connector $\mathcal{Q}$ with $|\mathcal{Q}| \geq \varepsilon\ell$. We use $\mathcal{Q}$ to obtain a contradiction. For $e \in E(R)$, let Q_e be the path in F corresponding to e, and let $\mathcal{Q}_e$ be the set of paths in $\mathcal{Q}$ which have an endpoint in Q_e. Since $|E(R)| = m$, it follows that $|\mathcal{Q}_e| \geq |\mathcal{Q}|/m \geq \varepsilon\ell/m$ for some edge $e \in E(R)$. Let $\mathcal{Q}'$ be the set of paths in $\mathcal{Q}_e$ of size at most $\frac{2mn}{\varepsilon\ell}$, and note that $|\mathcal{Q}'| \geq |\mathcal{Q}_e|/2 \geq \frac{\varepsilon\ell}{2m}$, or else $\mathcal{Q}_e$ has at least $\frac{\varepsilon\ell}{2m}$ paths of size more than $\frac{2mn}{\varepsilon\ell}$, a contradiction. The endpoints of paths in $\mathcal{Q}'$ divide Q_e into $|\mathcal{Q}'| - 1$ edge-disjoint subpaths. Choose $Q_1, Q_2 \in \mathcal{Q}'$ to minimize the length of such a subpath Q_0 of Q_e, and note that Q_0 has length at most $\frac{n-1}{|\mathcal{Q}'|-1}$; see Figure 2. Since $m \leq n$, we have $2m \leq 2m^{3/4}n^{1/4} = \frac{\varepsilon^3}{4}n \leq \frac{\varepsilon\ell}{2}$, and hence $\frac{n-1}{|\mathcal{Q}'|-1} < \frac{n}{\frac{\varepsilon\ell}{2m}-1} = \frac{2mn}{\varepsilon\ell - 2m} \leq \frac{4mn}{\varepsilon\ell}$.

The endpoints of Q_1 and Q_2 on C partition C into two subpaths; let W be the longer subpath. If $|E(W)| \geq |E(Q_0)|$, then we would obtain a larger R-subdivision by using Q_1, W, and Q_2 to bypass Q_0. Since F is a maximum R-subdivision, we have $|E(W)| < |E(Q_0)|$. Therefore using Q_1, Q_0, and Q_2 to bypass W gives a cycle D with $|E(D)| > |E(C)|$. By the extremal choice of C, it follows that $|V(D)| > 2\varepsilon n + 4/\varepsilon^2$. On the other hand, $|V(D)| =$

$|E(D)| \le \frac{\ell}{2} + |E(Q_1)| + |E(Q_0)| + |E(Q_2)| \le \frac{\ell}{2} + \frac{2mn}{\varepsilon\ell} + \frac{4mn}{\varepsilon\ell} + \frac{2mn}{\varepsilon\ell} = \frac{\ell}{2} + \frac{8mn}{\varepsilon\ell}$.

Therefore $2\varepsilon n + \frac{4}{\varepsilon^2} < |V(D)| \le \frac{\ell}{2} + \frac{8mn}{\varepsilon\ell} \le \varepsilon n + \frac{2}{\varepsilon^2} + \frac{8mn}{\varepsilon\ell} \le \varepsilon n + \frac{2}{\varepsilon^2} + \frac{16m}{\varepsilon^3}$, where the last inequality uses $\ell \ge (\varepsilon^2/2)n$. Simplifying gives $\varepsilon n < \frac{16m}{\varepsilon^3} - \frac{2}{\varepsilon^2} < \frac{16m}{\varepsilon^3}$, and this inequality is violated when $\varepsilon \ge (16m/n)^{1/4}$. □

Applying Theorem 1, we obtain the following corollary.

Corollary 2. *Let G be an n-vertex graph. If G is connected, then* $\mathrm{lpt}(G) \le 8n^{3/4}$*. If G is 2-connected, then* $\mathrm{lct}(G) \le 20n^{3/4}$*.*

Proof. When $R = P_2$, an R-transversal is a longest path transversal. It is well known that if G is connected, then the longest paths pairwise intersect. By Theorem 1, we have $\mathrm{lpt}(G) = \tau_R(G) \le 8n^{3/4}$.

Similarly, when $R = C_2$, an R-transversal is a longest cycle transversal. If G is 2-connected, then the longest cycles pairwise intersect. By Theorem 1, we have $\mathrm{lct}(G) = \tau_R(G) \le 8 \cdot 2^{5/4} \cdot n^{3/4} \le 20n^{3/4}$. □

We do not know whether the assumption in Theorem 1 that R is connected is necessary to obtain sublinear R-transversals. To obtain analogues of Corollary 2 for general R, we show that the maximum R-subdivisions pairwise intersect when the connectivity of G is sufficiently large. Recall that a graph G is *k-connected* if $|V(G)| > k$ and $G - S$ is connected for each $S \subseteq V(G)$ with $|S| < k$. Moreover, the *connectivity* of G, denoted $\kappa(G)$, is the maximum k such that G is k-connected.

Lemma 3. *Let R be a connected m-edge multigraph with $m \ge 1$. If $\kappa(G) > m^2$, then the maximum R-subdivisions in G are pairwise intersecting.*

Proof. Suppose for a contradiction that G has disjoint maximum R-subdivisions F_1 and F_2, and let $k = |V(F_1)| = |V(F_2)|$. By Menger's Theorem, there is an $(V(F_1), V(F_2))$-connector $\mathcal{P}$ with $|\mathcal{P}| = \min\{k, m^2 + 1\}$. If $|\mathcal{P}| = k$, then every vertex in F_1 is an endpoint of a path in $\mathcal{P}$, and we obtain an R-subdivision of size more than k by replacing an edge $uv \in E(F_1)$ with a path in $\mathcal{P}$ having u as an endpoint, a path in $\mathcal{P}$ having v as an endpoint, and an appropriate path in the connected subgraph F_2.

So we may assume $|\mathcal{P}| = m^2 + 1$. For each $e \in E(R)$, let $F_i(e)$ be the path in F_i corresponding to e. Since R has no isolated vertices, we may associate each $P \in \mathcal{P}$ with an ordered pair of edges $(e_1, e_2) \in (E(R))^2$ such that P has its endpoint in F_1 in $F_1(e_1)$ and its endpoint in F_2 in $F_2(e_2)$. Since $|\mathcal{P}| > m^2$, some pair (e_1, e_2) is associated with distinct paths $P, Q \in \mathcal{P}$. Let W_i be the subpath of $F_i(e_i)$ whose endpoints are in $V(P) \cup V(Q)$. If $|E(W_1)| \ge |E(W_2)|$, then we modify F_2 to obtain a larger R-subdivision by using P, W_1, and Q to bypass W_2. Similarly, if $|E(W_2)| \ge |E(W_1)|$, then we modify F_1 to obtain a larger R-subdivision by using P, W_2, and Q to bypass W_1. □

Corollary 4. *Let R be a connected m-edge multigraph. If G is an n-vertex graph with $\kappa(G) > m^2$, then $\tau_R(G) \le 8m^{5/4}n^{3/4}$.*

As it is not known whether there exists a connected graph G with $\mathrm{lpt}(G) > 3$, reducing the gap between our sublinear upper bound on $\mathrm{lpt}(G)$ and the constant lower bound remains a major open problem in the area of longest path transversals.

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