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Multi-channel AlGaN/GaN Lateral Schottky Barrier Diodes on Low Resistivity Silicon for Sub-THz Integrated Circuits Applications

A. Eblabla, X. Li, M. Alathbah, Z. Wu, J. Lees and K. Elgaid

***Abstract*— This work presents novel multi-channel RF lateral Schottky-barrier diodes (SBDs) based on AlGaN/GaN on Low Resistivity (LR) ($\sigma = 0.02$ Ω.cm) silicon substrates. The developed technology offers a reduction of 37 % in onset voltage, V_{ON} (from 1.34 to 0.84 V), and 36 % in ON-resistance, R_{ON} (1.52 to 0.97 to Ω.mm) as a result of lowering the Schottky barrier height, ϕ_n, when compared to conventional lateral SBDs. No compromise in reverse-breakdown voltage and reverse-bias leakage current performance was observed as both multi-channel and conventional technologies exhibited V_{BV} of ($V_{BV} > 30$ V) and I_R of ($I_R < 38$ µA/mm), respectively. Furthermore, a precise small-signal equivalent circuit model was developed and verified for frequencies up to 110 GHz. The fabricated devices exhibited cut-off frequencies of up to 0.6 THz, demonstrating the potential use of lateral AlGaN/GaN SBDs on LR silicon for high-efficiency high-frequency Integrated Circuits applications.**

***Index Terms*— GaN, RF diodes, lateral Schottky barrier diode, sub-THz applications, fin-FET, GaN on silicon.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Due to the superior electrical properties of III nitride semiconductors, lateral AlGaN/GaN Schottky-barrier diodes (SBDs) grown on LR silicon substrates are emerging as a promising device technology for fast switching speed, high-power, low-cost and compact-size communications and radar applications, such as mixers, frequency multipliers, detectors and tunable filters operating at millimeter wave frequencies [1] [2]. GaN-based SBDs with low onset voltage (V_{ON}), high reverse-breakdown (V_{BV}) voltage, and low reverse-current leakage (I_R), high-switching speed (R_{ON}) and high cutoff frequency (f_c) are essentially required to compete with current III-V technologies [3]. Conventional GaN-based SBD DC and RF performance is still limited to their large V_{ON}, switching loss and RF leakage when utilizing LR Si substrates. Several researchers have recently proposed low V_{ON} along with low I_R and high V_{BV} technologies, including recessed anode, dual-filed plates, regrowth cathodes, and dual- channel field-effect rectifier (LFER) [4] [5] [6]. However, these approaches require accurate control of anode etching to the 2DEG and a complicated fabrication process, which incorporates reliability issues and extra processing cost. Nevertheless, a 3-D SBDs integrated with a tri-gate MOS structure has shown outstanding DC characteristics at the expense of RF performance owing to the inherently large junction capacitance (C_j) and series resistance (R_S) [7]. Therefore, these techniques are only limited to low-frequency applications. To date, most of the research effort into GaN-based SBDs on silicon is predominantly focused on power electronics, with limited literature targeting RF operation. However, achieving high f_c while maintaining low I_R and superior V_{BV} remains a challenge [1].

In this letter, an optimized multi-channel RF AlGaN/GaN SBDs on LR Si structure is demonstrated using a cost-effective (GaN on LR Si) which is fully compatible with III-V THz monolithic integrated circuit (THz-MIC) technology. In contrast to conventional SBDs, the newly developed devices significantly enhanced the turn-on characteristics, switching loss, ideality factor (η_n) and f_C, where a $V_{ON} = 0.84$ V, $R_{ON} = 0.97$ Ω.mm, $V_{BV} > 30$ V, $\eta_n = 1.69$ and $f_C = 0.6$ THz were achieved. This attributes to the direct contact of Schottky anode to 2DEG at the sidewalls of the multi-mesa trenches along with proper design geometries to suppress substrate coupling effects.

II. DEVICE DESIGN AND FABRICATION

Fig. 1 indicates a cross-section of the fabricated AlGaN/GaN SBDs on LR Si using a multi-channel structure, which was simultaneously fabricated with conventional SBDs on the same substrate to allow precise comparison. A combination of multi-mesa and T-shaped structures was adopted to form the anode to reduce Schottky barrier height and anode resistivity, respectively. The height (H_F), width (W_F), spacing (S_F) and length (L_F) of the nanowires were ~ 50, 41, 89 nm and 2 µm, respectively. The Anode length (L_A) and anode head length (L_{AH}) were 0.550 µm and 1.1 µm, respectively, whereas the junction length (L_j) was 4.28 µm. The total physical anode

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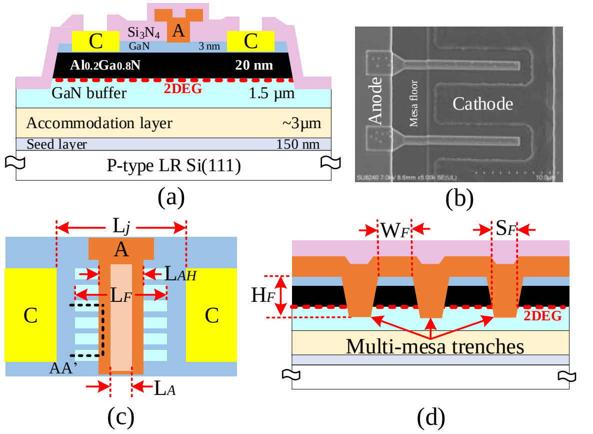


Fig. 1: (a) Cross-sectional view, (b) Scanned-electron microscope (SEM) image and (c) Top-view of the multi-channel SBDs. (d) Cross-sectional representation of the tri-anode along line AA'.

width was 2 × 10 µm, while the effective anode width for the fin-like anode structure was 2 × 5.829 µm.

The epitaxy material used in this work was grown on LR Si (111) (σ = 0.02 Ω.cm) provided by Nexperia. The epilayer consists of 4.65 µm buffer, 20 nm $Al_{0.2}Ga_{0.8}N$ barrier and 3 nm GaN cap layer. A sheet carrier density of 5.9 × 10^{12} cm^{-2} and electron mobility of 1713 cm^2/Vs are determined using Hall measurements. The device fabrication started with defining the Ti/Pt markers, followed by the deposition of Ti/Al/Ni/Au ohmic contacts and rapid thermal annealing at 790 ^{0}C in N_2 environment to form the cathode. Next, a ~150 nm depth mesa isolation was performed through Cl_2/Ar-based inductively-coupled plasma (ICP). Then, multi-mesa trenches were defined by e-beam lithography and subsequently etched using Cl_2/Ar-based ICP with an etch depth of ~ 50 nm. A 100 nm Si_3N_4 passivation layer was then deposited using a low-stress inductively-coupled plasma chemical vapour deposition (ICP-CVD) at room temperature. To form the T-shaped anode, E-beam lithography was used to define anode-foot trenches through the Si_3N_4 passivation layer using a low-damage SF_6/N_2 gas mixture reactive-ion etching (RIE), which was followed by Ni/Au metal stack evaporation to finish the T-shaped anode. Windows in the Si_3N_4 at the cathode areas were etched prior to the deposition of Ti/Au bond pads and 160 nm Si_3N_4 layer as a final passivation layer. Device fabrication was finalized by Si_3N_4 etching in the measurement pad regions. SEM image of the fabricated devices in shown in Fig.1b.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *DC Characteristics*

Fig. 2 indicates the typical *I-V* characteristics of the fabricated conventional and multi-channel structures at room temperature using both linear and logarithm scales. The diode current (A/mm) and resistance (Ω.mm) of conventional and multi-channel structures are normalized by the total physical anode width (2 × 10 µm) and effective anode width (2 × 5.829 µm), respectively. Fig. 2a reveals that incorporating a multi-channel anode structure reduced V_{ON} from 1.34 to 0.84 V together with improved R_{ON} from 1.52 to 0.97 to Ω.mm. This attributes to the direct anode contact to the 2DEG, where the anode is wrapped around the narrow AlGaN/GaN bodies.

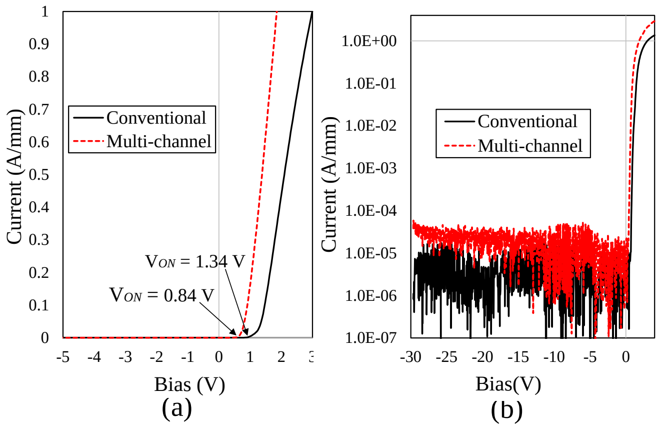


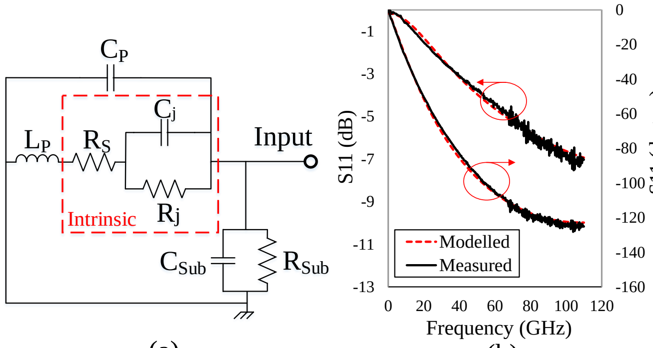
Fig. 2: *I-V* characteristics of a fabricated SBD plotted in (a) Linear and (b) Logarithm scale.

To further analyze these findings, the semilog *I-V* plot (shown in Fig. 2b) is used, which allows the extraction of η_n and $\phi_{n.}$ based on the analytical equations indicated in [8]. Both device structures exhibited η_n between 1 and 2, which indicates the presence of conduction mechanism besides a thermionic emission mechanism [9]. An improvement of 14.28 % in η_n (from 1.97 to 1.69) was obtained by the developed multi-channel structure as compared to conventional SBDs. Furthermore, the observed reduction in V_{ON} when using the new structure corresponds to a reduction of 17.5 % in ϕ_n (from 0.78 to 0.64 eV). However, I_R was slightly increased with the multi-channel structure, where I_R < 38 µA/mm was performed at a reverse voltage of up to 30 V. This attributes to the additional anode length where the anode is in direct contact to the GaN buffer in the multi-mesa floor regions. The achieved results are comparable to that of SBDs on semi-insulating (SI)-SiC with recessed anode and regrowth cathode technologies, with better V_{BV} and I_R [1]. This enhancement is mainly attributed to the scale of anode-to-cathode spacing and the use of T-shaped anode, owing to the reduction in peak electric field of Schottky junction [5].

B. *RF Characteristics*

On-wafer small-signal *S*-parameters measurements were performed in the frequency range 0.1 to 110 GHz using an Agilent PNA network analyzer (E8361A) and frequency extenders (N5260A). The system was calibrated with an off-wafer calibration impedance standard substrate (ISS), using a Short-Open-Load-Thru (SOLT) calibration technique.

Fig. 3a shows the extracted small-signal circuit model of the devices, which was validated by the good agreement between modelled and measured *S*-parameters up to 110 GHz, as shown in Fig. 3b. This allows the extraction of SBD intrinsic elements; junction resistance (R_j), C_j and R_s, which used to determine f_c of the fabricated devices. As indicated in Fig. 3a, unlike SI-substrates, substrate parasitics (S_{sub} and R_{sub}) are incorporated into the standard SBD circuit model when considering lossy Si



(a) (b)

Fig. 3: (a) Schematic of the proposed small-signal equivalent circuit model and (b) measured versus modelled *S*-parameters of the fabricated multi-channel AlGaN\GaN SBDs on LR Si at 0 V bias.

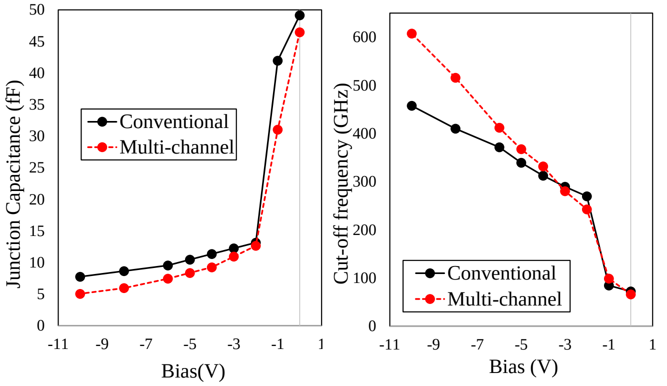
Table I
EXTRACTED PARAMETERS FOR THE EQUIVALENT CIRCUIT MODEL FOR THE FABRICATED LATERAL SBDs AT 0 V BIAS.

SBD structure	**Intrinsic**			***Extrinsic***			
	C_j (fF)	R_s (Ω)	R_j (KΩ)	L_p (pH)	C_p (fF)	C_{sub} (fF)	R_{sub} (KΩ)
Conventional	49.1	44.9	11.6	40.3	26.4	3.1	10.3
Multi-channel	46.4	51.9	11.6				

as a substrate. Furthermore, C_p and L_P represents pad parasitics. However, the external parasitic elements have a significant influence on the model at frequencies beyond 20 GHz.

Table I shows the extracted circuit element values of conventional and multi-channel structures at 0 V bias. In contrast to conventional SBDs, an increase in R_S by 15.6 % (44.9 to 51.9 Ω) and a slight reduction in C_j by 5.5 % (form 49.1 to 46.4 fF) were observed for the newly developed fin-type technology. This attributes to the additional anode length in the multi-mesa trenches and reduction in ϕ_n, respectively. In addition, the low value of C_{sub} and high value of R_{sub} indicates that substrate coupling effect could be neglected in both design structures. This was a result of the proper design geometries where the anode-to-cathode separation (2.415 µm) is less than the buffer thickness (4.65 µm) [10].

The extracted values of C_j as a function of the applied voltage of the fabricated devices are shown in Fig. 4a. It can be seen that C_j was inversely proportional to the applied reverse voltage, where a sharp drop in C_j was obtained when changing the voltage form 0 to -2 V. Furthermore, owing to the direct anode contact to 2DEG for multi-channel SBDs, C_j was significantly reduced at reverse biases beyond -2 V, as compared to conventional SBDs. This reflected a dramatic enhancement in f_C which can be calculated from R_s and C_j [1]. Therefore, f_C was improved by 32.7 % (from 0.457 to 0.607 THz), as shown in Fig. 4.b. However, the achieved f_C of the fabricated lateral SBDs on LR Si is still limited to their larger R_S, which mainly depends on material growth quality and cathode contact resistivity, as compared to SBDs realized on GaN-on-SI-SiC substrates [1].



(a) (b)

Fig. 4: Junction capacitance (C_j) versus voltage, and (b) Cut-off frequency (f_C) versus voltage of the fabricated conventional and multi-channel SBDs.

IV. CONCLUSION

A newly developed multi-channel RF lateral AlGaN/GaN SBD on LR Si technology has been realized in this work. A V_{ON} of 0.84 V along with R_{ON} of 0.97 Ω.mm and η_n of 1.69 were achieved as a result of the direct Schottky anode contact to the 2DEG resulting in a ϕ_n of 0.64 eV. The fabricated devices exhibited V_{BV} of greater than 30 V along with I_R of less than 38 µm/mm. In addition, a newly proposed small-signal circuit model was introduced up to 110 GHz. An f_c of 0.6 THz at a reverse bias of -10 V was achieved as a result of the optimized SBD design structure and geometries. These findings enable an effective pathway for the realization of high-performance sub-THz-MIC topologies.

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