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Citation for final published version:

Eblabla, A. , Li, X., Alathbah, M., Wu, Z. , Lees, J. and Elgaid, K. 2019. Multi-channel AlGa_N/Ga_N lateral schottky barrier diodes on low-resistivity silicon for sub-THz integrated circuits applications. IEEE Electron Device Letters 40 (6) , pp. 878-880. 10.1109/LED.2019.2912910

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1109/LED.2019.2912910>

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Multi-channel AlGaIn/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 AlGaIn/GaN on Low Resistivity (LR) ($\sigma = 0.02 \Omega \cdot \text{cm}$) 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 $\Omega \cdot \text{mm}$) 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 ($I_R < 38 \mu\text{A}/\text{mm}$), 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 AlGaIn/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 AlGaIn/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 AlGaIn/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, $R_{ON} = 0.97 \Omega \cdot \text{mm}$, $V_{BV} > 30$ 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 AlGaIn/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 $\sim 50, 41, 89$ nm and $2 \mu\text{m}$, respectively. The Anode length (L_A) and anode head length (L_{AH}) were $0.550 \mu\text{m}$ and $1.1 \mu\text{m}$, respectively, whereas the junction length (L_j) was $4.28 \mu\text{m}$. The total physical anode

Manuscript received January 16, 2019; revised April 6, 2019; accepted April 14, 2019. This work was supported by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council under Grants EP/N014820/2 and EP/P006973/1.

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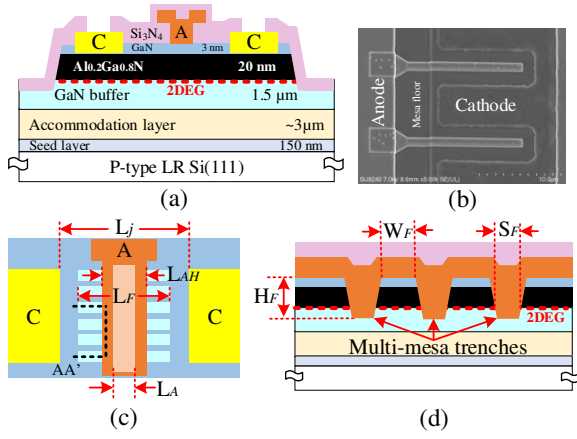


Fig. 1: (a) Cross-sectional view, (b) Scanned-electron microscope (SEM) image and (c) Top-view of the multi-channel SBDs. (d) Cross-sectional representation of the tri-anode along line AA'.

width was $2 \times 10 \mu\text{m}$, while the effective anode width for the fin-like anode structure was $2 \times 5.829 \mu\text{m}$.

The epitaxy material used in this work was grown on LR Si (111) ($\sigma = 0.02 \Omega\cdot\text{cm}$) provided by Nexperia. The epilayer consists of $4.65 \mu\text{m}$ buffer, 20 nm $\text{Al}_{0.2}\text{Ga}_{0.8}\text{N}$ barrier and 3 nm GaN cap layer. A sheet carrier density of $5.9 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ and electron mobility of $1713 \text{ cm}^2/\text{Vs}$ 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 $790 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ in N_2 environment to form the cathode. Next, a $\sim 150 \text{ nm}$ 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 $\sim 50 \text{ nm}$. 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 is 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 ($\Omega\cdot\text{mm}$) of conventional and multi-channel structures are normalized by the total physical anode width ($2 \times 10 \mu\text{m}$) and effective anode width ($2 \times 5.829 \mu\text{m}$), respectively. Fig. 2a reveals that incorporating a multi-channel anode structure reduced V_{ON} from 1.34 to 0.84 V

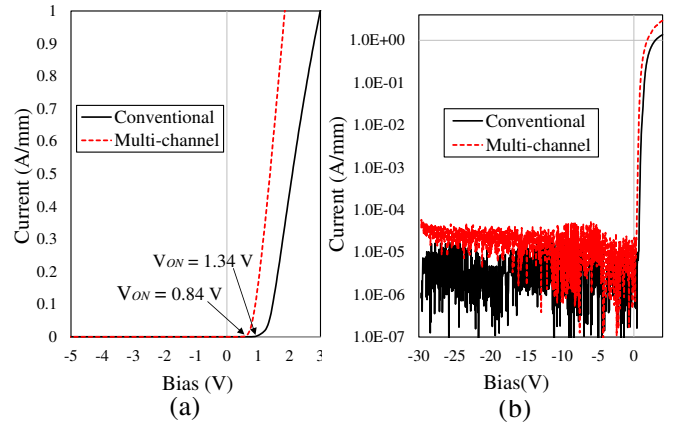


Fig. 2: I - V characteristics of a fabricated SBD plotted in (a) Linear and (b) Logarithm scale.

together with improved R_{ON} from 1.52 to $0.97 \Omega\cdot\text{mm}$. This attributes to the direct anode contact to the 2DEG, where the anode is wrapped around the narrow AlGaN/GaN bodies.

To further analyze these findings, the semilog I - V plot (shown in Fig. 2b) is used, which allows the extraction of η_n and ϕ_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 $I_R < 38 \mu\text{A}/\text{mm}$ 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

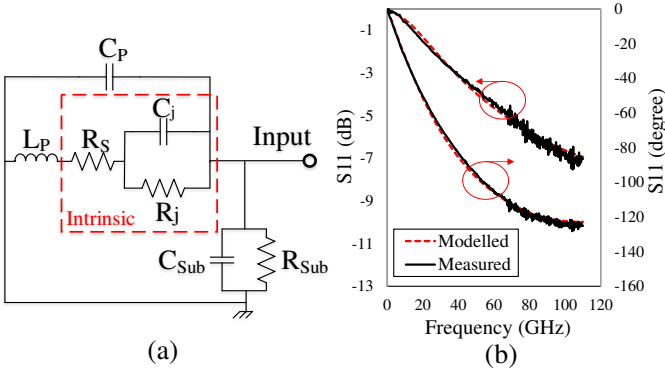


Fig. 3: (a) Schematic of the proposed small-signal equivalent circuit model and (b) measured versus modelled S -parameters of the fabricated multi-channel AlGaIn/GaN SBDs on LR Si at 0 V bias.

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 (k Ω)	L_p (pH)	C_p (fF)	C_{sub} (fF)	R_{sub} (k Ω)
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 % (from 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 from 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. 4b. 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].

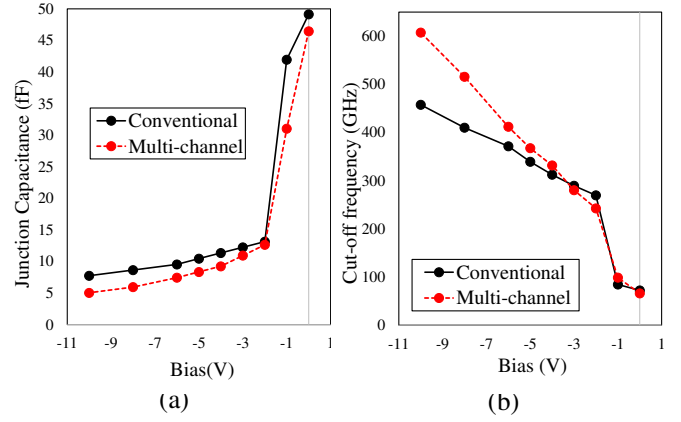


Fig. 4: Junction capacitance (C_j) versus voltage, and (b) Cut-off frequency (f_c) versus voltage of the fabricated conventional and multi-channel SBDs.

IV. CONCLUSION

A newly developed multi-channel RF lateral AlGaIn/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 $\Omega\cdot\text{mm}$ 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 $\mu\text{A}/\text{mm}$. 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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