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APPLICATION NOTE 1142

Experimenting with the MAX6956 and MAX6957 SPI and I²C GPIO and LED Display Drivers from a PC

Jun 28, 2002

Abstract: This application note describes a PC program, downloadable free, to assist evaluation of the MAX6956 and MAX6957 LED display drivers and GPIO (port expanders).

The MAX6956 and MAX6957 are versatile 28-segment LED display drivers which allow any of the outputs to be configured as general purpose inputs/outputs (GPIO). Control is made through a high-speed SPI™ (MAX6957) or I²C (MAX6956) serial interface.

This application note describes a utility program which allows a MAX6957 or MAX6956 driver to be controlled from a PC. The utility can be used as a standalone to help an engineer become familiar with the registers and functions of the drivers. Moreover, it can be used to 'prove' an application board prototype by directly controlling the MAX6957 or MAX6956 registers before the equipment's software is designed.

Requirements

A PC running Windows® 95, 98, 98SE, ME, NT, or 2000 with a parallel printer port configured for either LPT1 or LPT2.

Description

The utility is a Visual Basic 5 program called MAX6957.EXE which requires the standard Visual Basic run time library MSVBVM50.DLL in order to run at all. The program uses the DriverLINX™ freeware parallel port driver DLPortIO.DLL which provides the Win32 DLL hardware I/O functions not available as standard in Visual Basic. Windows NT and 2000 users also require the DLPortIO.SYS kernel mode driver. Both of these drivers are copyright Scientific Software Tools, Inc. (<http://www.driverlinx.com>).

Installation

To install to a Windows 95, 98, 98SE, ME platform, download the [MAX6956-57.EXE file](#). This is a WinZIP self-extracting archive that contains ReadMe.txt, ReadMeSST.txt, MAX6957.EXE, DLPortIO.DLL, and MSVBVM50.DLL. The default download directory is C:\MAX6956. MSVBVM50.DLL may be deleted if the library is already registered on the computer.

To install to a Windows NT or 2000 platform, download the [MAX6956-NT.EXE file](#). This is a WinZIP self-

extracting archive that contains ReadMe.txt, ReadMeSST.txt, MAX6956.EXE, PORT95NT.EXE, and MSVBVM50.DLL. The default download directory is C:\MAX6956. PORT95NT.EXE is the install program for the DriverLINX drivers which installs and registers the DLPortIO.DLL library and DLPortIO.SYS driver. PORT95NT.EXE can be deleted after installation. Windows 95, 98, 98SE, ME users can also use this installation procedure if they wish.

Source Code

The source code for this application note is available at <http://www.maximintegrated.com/products/display/software/>.

Connecting a MAX6956 or MAX6957 to the Parallel Port

This utility uses 3 of the 8 parallel port printer output lines to simulate SPI serial interface activity, and another 2 output lines to simulate I²C serial interface activity. Parallel port control input lines are used to read back SPI data, I²C data, and interrupt status. Multiple (up to 16, daisy-chained) MAX6957s and/or multiple (up to 16, configured with different I²C addresses) MAX6956s may be operated at once. Either the LPT1 or LPT2 port may be selected from the software. The port can be a standard, ECP, or EPP type. The port connections are shown in **Figure 1**.

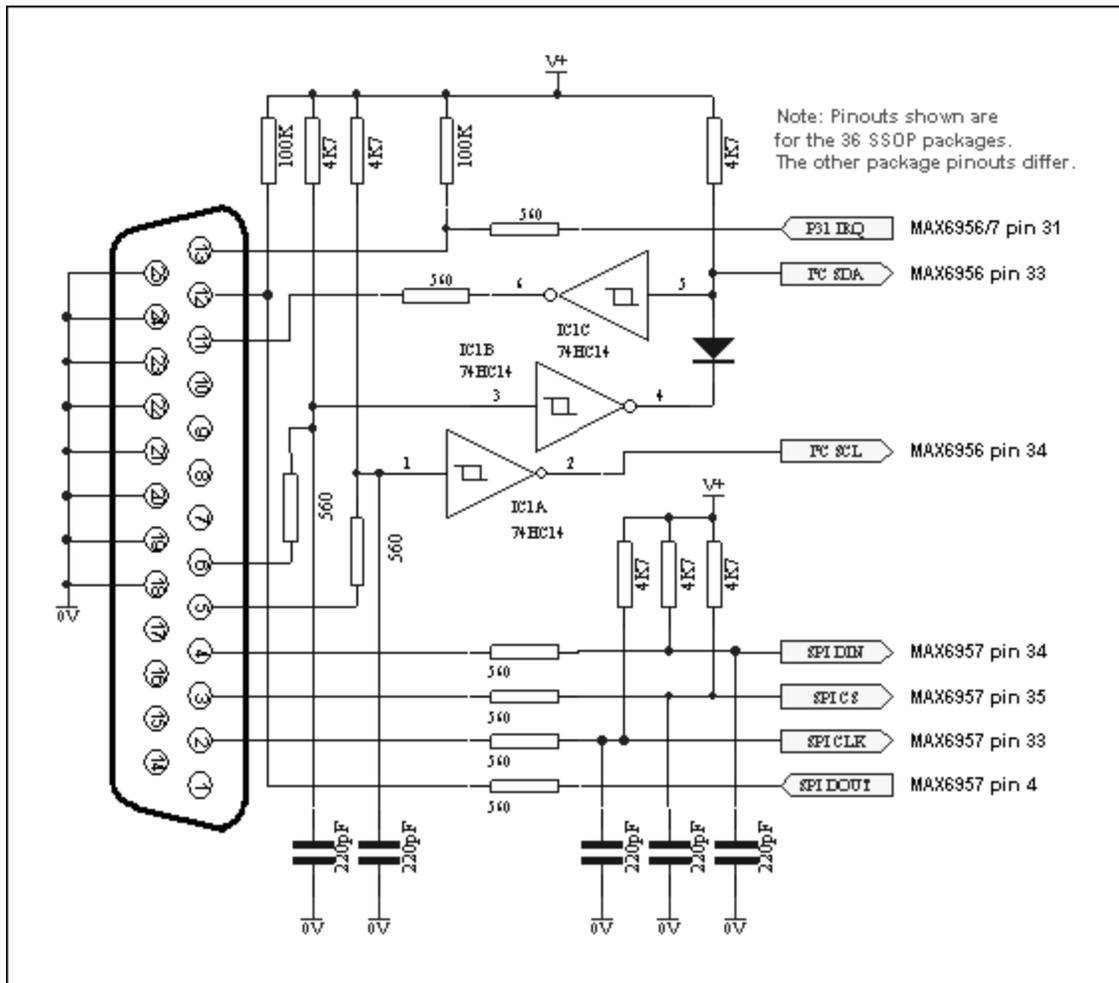


Figure 1. The MAX6956 and MAX6957 connections to the parallel port.

The program brings up 4 windows on startup. These are the main control, intensity control, I/O control,

and segment control windows. The register settings on start-up mirror the register power-up conditions of the MAX6956 and MAX6957.

The main control is shown in **Figure 2** below. The 'Driver type' radio buttons select whether the software will transmit to MAX6957 (using the SPI connection) or the MAX6956 (using the I²C connection).

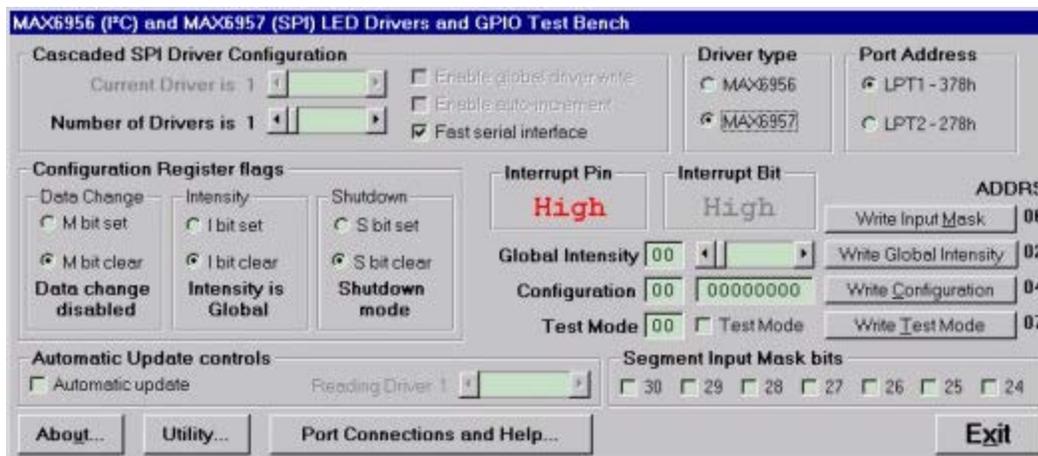


Figure 2. Program display on startup.

In SPI mode, the software controls up to 16 MAX6957 drivers. The drivers are presumed to be cascaded, (i.e., the DOUT pin of the first MAX6957 connects to the DIN pin of the second MAX6957, whose DOUT pin connects to the DIN pin of the third MAX6957, and so on). The total number of MAX6957 devices is set by the 'Number of Drivers' slider. When this is set to more than 1, the 'Enable global driver write' and 'Enable auto-increment' check boxes are available. When 'Enable global driver write' is clear, only the MAX6957 driver selected by the 'Current Driver' slider is written to when a write command is selected - the others receive the no-op instruction. When 'Enable global driver write' is checked, all the MAX6957 drivers are written to with the same data. When 'Enable auto-increment' is checked, the current driver number is automatically incremented after each write action. This allows the user to quickly send the same data for a series of MAX6957 drivers.

The SPI interface connection to the parallel port can be tested with the 'Test Stream' facility which can be found under 'Port Connections and Help...' when the program is running. The 'Test Stream' facility transmits the no-op instruction continuously to the MAX6957(s) (as set by the 'Number of Drivers' slider) allowing the interface connections to be verified without affecting register contents.

In I²C mode, the software controls up to 16 MAX6956 drivers. The first driver is presumed to be set to address 1000000x, with the addresses of subsequent devices increasing to 1001111x for the last device. To access, for example, a single MAX6956 driver at address 1001111x, simply set the 'Number of Drivers' slider to 16 and then the 'Current Driver' slider to 16, address 1001111x. The main form in I²C mode is shown in **Figure 3**.

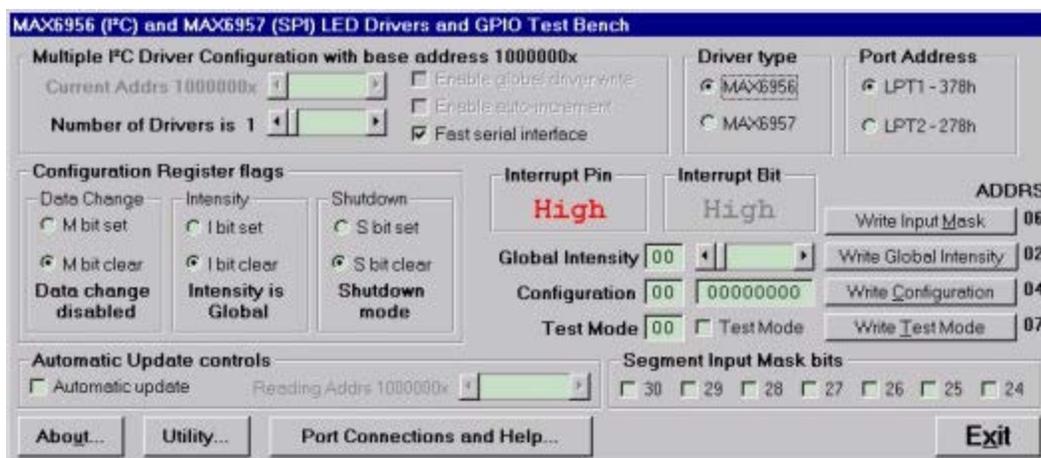


Figure 3. I²C program display.

The I²C interface connection to the parallel port can be tested with the 'Test Stream' facility which can be found under 'Port Connections and Help...' when the program is running. The 'Test Stream' facility transmits the no-op instruction continuously to all MAX6956(s) (as set by the 'Number of Drivers' slider) allowing the interface connections to be verified without affecting register contents.

The 'Fast serial interface' check box sets the serial interface speed for both SPI and I²C interface types. When checked, serial interface runs at machine-dependent full speed up to 1 Mbits/sec; unchecked, the speed is limited to 500 bits/sec maximum. The slow speed may be useful when connecting over very long cables.

The program will normally only communicate with the target driver (or drivers) when a 'Write' or 'Read' button is pressed. However, the program attempts to monitor an interrupt output pin presumed to be connected to the parallel port pin 13. This is displayed on the main window and displays status as High or Low.

The 'Automatic Update control' button, when checked, makes the program continually poll all 28 port input registers and the interrupt register bit. The reading rate depends on the setting of the 'Fast serial interface' check box, and is many times a second (Fast) or every many seconds (Slow). Note: slow mode is very slow! The 'Reading driver x' slider allows the user to set the device being automatically read independently to the driver(s) accessible through the 'Current driver' control.

The main window is the route to Exit the program. The Exit button, or pressing the Esc key on the main window, closes all 4 windows. Pressing the Esc key in one of the other 3 windows takes the user to the main window; therefore, pressing the Esc key twice will close the program quickly. Before closing, the program stores the last settings for device configuration in a file called MAX6956.ini in the same directory that the program was executed from. Nothing is written to Windows registry. The settings includes the positions of the 4 windows, and the interface settings on the main window. If the MAX6956.ini doesn't exist then it is created; otherwise it is overwritten. To restore program default settings, or if the MAX6956.ini is corrupted, simply delete the MAX6956.ini file.

Figures 4, 5, and 6 show snapshots of the other three windows.

Intensity Configuration				ADDRS				ADDRS			
Intensity 054	00	4	Write Intensity 054	12	Intensity 132	00	18	Write Intensity 132	19		
		5					19				
Intensity 076	00	6	Write Intensity 076	13	Intensity 154	00	20	Write Intensity 154	1A		
		7					21				
Intensity 098	00	8	Write Intensity 098	14	Intensity 176	00	22	Write Intensity 176	1B		
		9					23				
Intensity 0BA	00	10	Write Intensity 0BA	15	Intensity 198	00	24	Write Intensity 198	1C		
		11					25				
Intensity 0DC	00	12	Write Intensity 0DC	16	Intensity 1BA	00	26	Write Intensity 1BA	1D		
		13					27				
Intensity 0FE	00	14	Write Intensity 0FE	17	Intensity 1DC	00	28	Write Intensity 1DC	1E		
		15					29				
Intensity 110	00	16	Write Intensity 110	18	Intensity 1FE	00	30	Write Intensity 1FE	1F		
		17					31				

Figure 4. Intensity configuration window.

Input and Output Configuration							
Segment 7		Segment 6		Segment 5		Segment 4	
<input type="radio"/> LED driver	<input type="radio"/> Output	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Input	<input type="radio"/> Input & pullup	<input type="radio"/> LED driver	<input type="radio"/> Output	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Input	<input type="radio"/> Input & pullup
AA HEX		10101010 BINARY		AA HEX		10101010 BINARY	
Write Config 7 - 4, Addr 09							
Segment 11		Segment 10		Segment 9		Segment 8	
<input type="radio"/> LED driver	<input type="radio"/> Output	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Input	<input type="radio"/> Input & pullup	<input type="radio"/> LED driver	<input type="radio"/> Output	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Input	<input type="radio"/> Input & pullup
AA HEX		10101010 BINARY		AA HEX		10101010 BINARY	
Write Config 11 - 8, Addr 0A							
Segment 15		Segment 14		Segment 13		Segment 12	
<input type="radio"/> LED driver	<input type="radio"/> Output	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Input	<input type="radio"/> Input & pullup	<input type="radio"/> LED driver	<input type="radio"/> Output	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Input	<input type="radio"/> Input & pullup
AA HEX		10101010 BINARY		AA HEX		10101010 BINARY	
Write Config 15 - 12, Addr 0B							
Segment 19		Segment 18		Segment 17		Segment 16	
<input type="radio"/> LED driver	<input type="radio"/> Output	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Input	<input type="radio"/> Input & pullup	<input type="radio"/> LED driver	<input type="radio"/> Output	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Input	<input type="radio"/> Input & pullup
AA HEX		10101010 BINARY		AA HEX		10101010 BINARY	
Write Config 19 - 16, Addr 0C							
Segment 23		Segment 22		Segment 21		Segment 20	
<input type="radio"/> LED driver	<input type="radio"/> Output	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Input	<input type="radio"/> Input & pullup	<input type="radio"/> LED driver	<input type="radio"/> Output	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Input	<input type="radio"/> Input & pullup
AA HEX		10101010 BINARY		AA HEX		10101010 BINARY	
Write Config 23 - 20, Addr 0D							
Segment 27		Segment 26		Segment 25		Segment 24	
<input type="radio"/> LED driver	<input type="radio"/> Output	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Input	<input type="radio"/> Input & pullup	<input type="radio"/> LED driver	<input type="radio"/> Output	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Input	<input type="radio"/> Input & pullup
AA HEX		10101010 BINARY		AA HEX		10101010 BINARY	
Write Config 27 - 24, Addr 0E							
Segment 31		Segment 30		Segment 29		Segment 28	
<input type="radio"/> LED driver	<input type="radio"/> Output	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Input	<input type="radio"/> Input & pullup	<input type="radio"/> LED driver	<input type="radio"/> Output	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Input	<input type="radio"/> Input & pullup
AA HEX		10101010 BINARY		AA HEX		10101010 BINARY	
Write Config 31 - 28, Addr 0F							

Figure 5. I/O configuration window.

Segment Registers						
REGISTER	WRITE	ADDRS		READ	ADDRS	ADDRS
Segment 0	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 0	20	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 0	A0 Read 7 - 0 C0
Segment 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 1	21	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 1	A1 Read 8 - 1 C1
Segment 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 2	22	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 2	A2 Read 9 - 2 C2
Segment 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 3	23	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 3	A3 Read 10 - 3 C3
Segment 4	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 4	24	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 4	A4 Read 11 - 4 C4
Segment 5	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 5	25	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 5	A5 Read 12 - 5 C5
Segment 6	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 6	26	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 6	A6 Read 13 - 6 C6
Segment 7	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 7	27	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 7	A7 Read 14 - 7 C7
Segment 8	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 8	28	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 8	A8 Read 15 - 8 C8
Segment 9	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 9	29	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 9	A9 Read 16 - 9 C9
Segment 10	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 10	2A	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 10	AA Read 17 - 10 CA
Segment 11	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 11	2B	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 11	AB Read 18 - 11 CB
Segment 12	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 12	2C	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 12	AC Read 19 - 12 CC
Segment 13	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 13	2D	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 13	AD Read 20 - 13 CD
Segment 14	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 14	2E	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 14	AE Read 21 - 14 CE
Segment 15	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 15	2F	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 15	AF Read 22 - 15 CF
Segment 16	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 16	30	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 16	B0 Read 23 - 16 D0
Segment 17	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 17	31	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 17	B1 Read 24 - 17 D1
Segment 18	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 18	32	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 18	B2 Read 25 - 18 D2
Segment 19	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 19	33	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 19	B3 Read 26 - 19 D3
Segment 20	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 20	34	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 20	B4 Read 27 - 20 D4
Segment 21	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 21	35	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 21	B5 Read 28 - 21 D5
Segment 22	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 22	36	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 22	B6 Read 29 - 22 D6
Segment 23	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 23	37	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 23	B7 Read 30 - 23 D7
Segment 24	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 24	38	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 24	B8 Read 31 - 24 D8
Segment 25	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 25	39	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 25	B9 Read 32 - 25 D9
Segment 26	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 26	3A	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 26	BA Read 33 - 26 DA
Segment 27	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 27	3B	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 27	BB Read 34 - 27 DB
Segment 28	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 28	3C	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 28	BC Read 25 - 28 DC
Segment 29	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 29	3D	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 29	BD Read 26 - 29 DD
Segment 30	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 30	3E	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 30	BD Read 37 - 30 DE
Segment 31	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write Seg 31	3F	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read Seg 31	BF Read 38 - 31 DF

Figure 6. Segment registers window.

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Related Parts

[MAX6956](#)

2-Wire-Interfaced, 2.5V to 5.5V, 20-Port or 28-Port LED Display Driver and I/O Expander

[Free Samples](#)

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