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White Paper

Redefining LDO Limits for Fast-Changing Loads in AI and High-Performance Digital Systems

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June, 2026 − Rev. 0

Publication Order Number:
TND6523/D

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Introduction

Modern AI accelerators, high-performance ADCs and DACs, FPGAs, and advanced multi-core digital processors are imposing increasingly aggressive requirements on power delivery networks. Rapid workload changes, dynamic clock gating, and fine-grained power management lead to abrupt current transients that must be handled on sub-microsecond timescales. At the same time, system-level efficiency and thermal constraints drive designers to minimize voltage headroom between successive power-conversion stages.

In battery-powered or tightly optimized multi-rail architectures, linear regulators are often forced to operate only tens of millivolts above the regulated output voltage. Under these conditions, many conventional low-dropout regulators begin to exhibit degraded transient behavior. Control-loop bandwidth is reduced, output impedance rises, and supply droop during fast load steps becomes increasingly difficult to predict. For AI and data-conversion systems, where timing margins, numerical accuracy, and deterministic behavior are critical, such effects directly limit achievable performance.

This article shows that the T30LMPSR131 and T30LMPSR165 linear regulators avoid this traditional tradeoff. Both devices are designed to maintain fast, predictable transient response even when operating extremely close to dropout. Measured results demonstrate that these regulators preserve dynamic performance under conditions where many competing solutions begin to fail, making them well suited for powering AI compute rails, high-speed data converters, and other digitally intensive loads.

Device Overview and Target Applications

The systems driving next-generation LDO requirements share a common theme: highly dynamic loads combined with strict constraints on noise, voltage accuracy, and PCB area. AI accelerators and NPUs draw large and rapidly varying currents as processing units are activated or gated. Similarly, modern ADCs and DACs impose fast, clock synchronous load steps on their supply rails, while remaining extremely sensitive to voltage disturbance. FPGA core rails and auxiliary digital domains exhibit similar behavior, particularly when operating with aggressive dynamic voltage and frequency scaling. To address these requirements, **onsemi** has developed two complementary devices targeting different segments of the same problem space: the high current T30LMPSR131 and the ultra fast, compact T30LMPSR165.

T30LMPSR131: High-Current NMOS LDO for Advanced Digital Rails

The T30LMPSR131 is a 1 A LDO regulator based on an NMOS pass transistor and a separate bias supply rail. This dual rail architecture is particularly well suited for low voltage, high current digital loads common in AI and signal processing systems. By providing the internal control circuitry and gate drive from a dedicated bias rail, the regulator maintains strong loop gain even when the voltage difference between input and output becomes very small.

As a result, the device achieves a typical dropout voltage of approximately 25 mV at 1 A while maintaining fast transient response and high power supply rejection. Unlike many single rail LDOs, the T30LMPSR131 does not suffer from a gradual loss of dynamic performance as dropout is approached. This behavior is especially valuable for digital core rails, where even small voltage perturbations can directly impact timing margins and functional reliability.

T30LMPSR165: Ultra-Fast Compact LDO for Low-Current High-Speed Rails

The T30LMPSR165 targets lower current rails but is no less demanding in terms of dynamic performance. With a maximum output current of 300 mA and a typical dropout voltage of 26 mV, this device is ideal for powering ADC and DAC cores, PLLs, SerDes blocks, and auxiliary digital domains that require rapid response and low noise in a very small footprint.

Despite its compact size, the T30LMPSR165 delivers exceptionally fast transient behavior, supporting load steps from zero to full current with rise times on the order of 100 ns and settling times below one microsecond. The regulator is stable with only 1 μF of effective output capacitance, making it particularly attractive in space constrained designs where capacitor derating must be carefully managed.

Transient Performance Under Low-Headroom Conditions

Fast transient response under low headroom is one of the most critical—and most difficult—requirements in modern AI and high-speed digital systems. Large current steps often occur while the regulator is operating very close to dropout due to upstream DC/DC optimization. In such cases, any reduction in loop bandwidth or gate-drive strength quickly manifests as excessive voltage droop and prolonged recovery time.

For digital compute blocks, this droop reduces available timing margin and may lead to intermittent faults under worst-case conditions. In high-speed data converters, supply perturbations can degrade linearity, increase jitter, or reduce effective resolution. Ensuring tight regulation during these events is therefore essential.

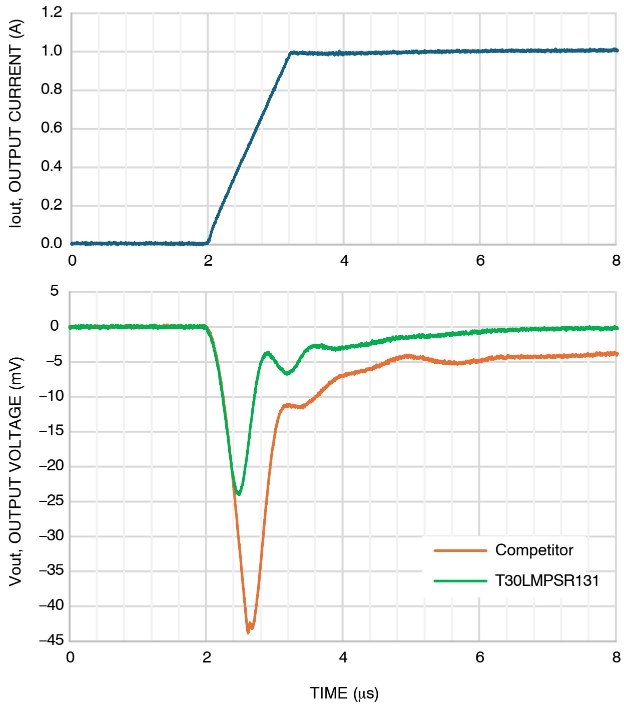

Figure 1. T30LMPSR131 vs. Competitor Part

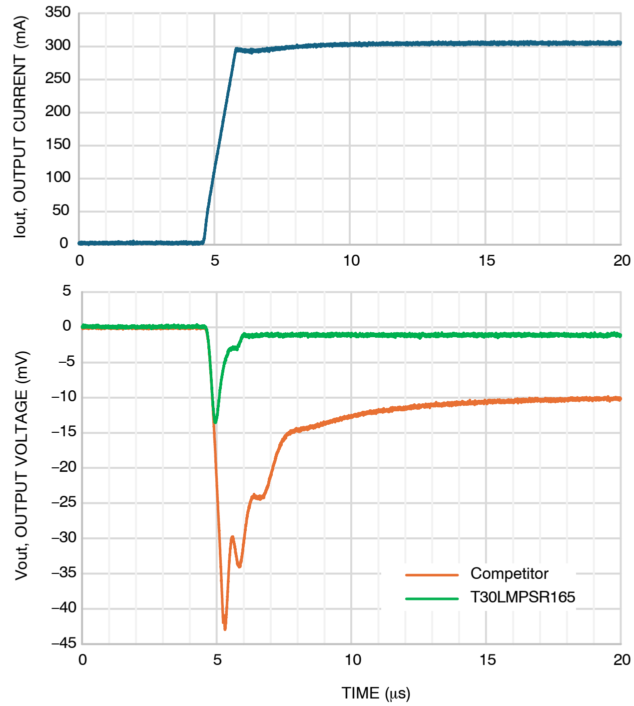

Figure 2. T30LMPSR165 vs. Competitor Part

Measured waveforms show that both **onsemi** devices exhibit smaller peak undershot and faster settling than the competing solutions, particularly as available headroom is reduced to 100 mV in that case. While the competing regulators show clear degradation in transient response near dropout, the T30LMPSR131 and T30LMPSR165 maintain consistent behavior across the entire operating range. This confirms that their architecture is inherently well suited to near-dropout operation, rather than merely optimized for nominal conditions.

Dropout Performance Without Dynamic Penalty

In many LDO designs, achieving very low dropout voltage comes at the expense of dynamic performance. As the voltage across the pass device decreases, the regulator's ability to modulate current rapidly is compromised, reducing loop bandwidth and slowing transient response. This creates a hidden operating region near dropout where performance may no longer meet system requirements.

The T30LMPSR131 and T30LMPSR165 are explicitly designed to avoid this failure mode. In the T30LMPSR131, the separate bias rail ensures that the NMOS gate is always driven with sufficient voltage to maintain control authority, even when VIN is only marginally higher than VOUT. In the T30LMPSR165, internal control loop optimization preserves dynamic behavior across the full operating range.

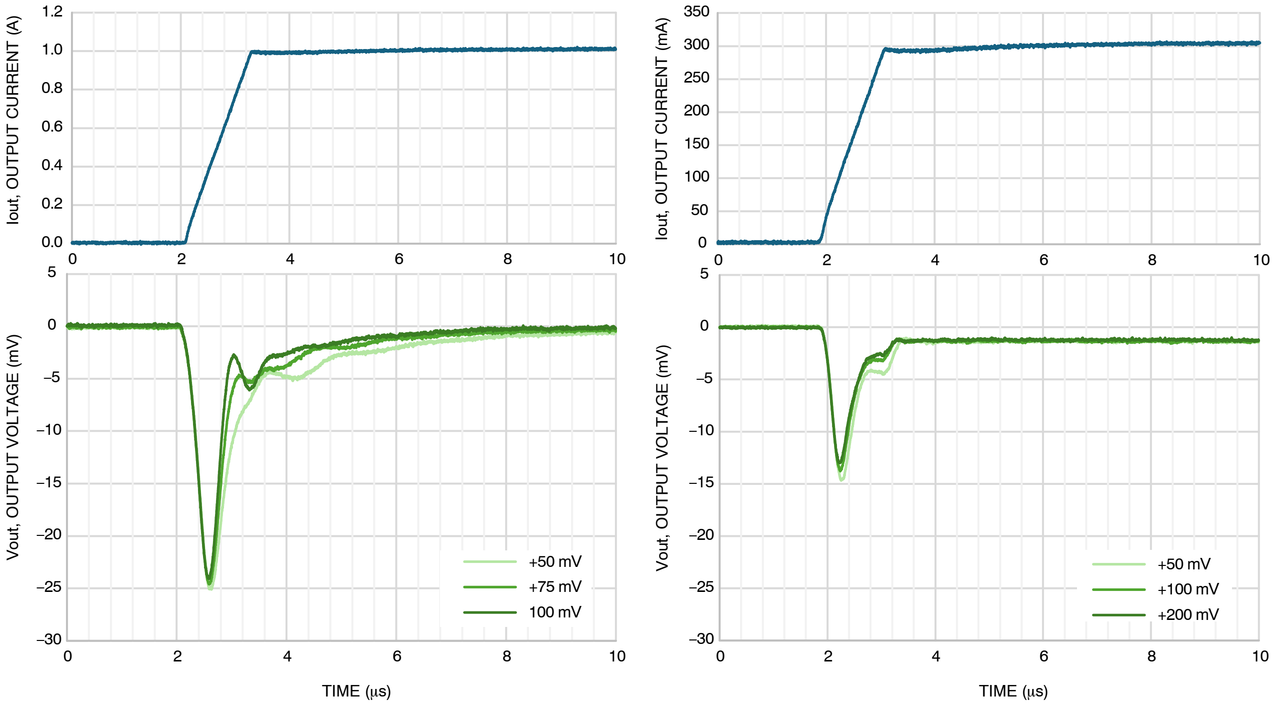

Figure 3. T30LMPSR131(left) and T30LMPSR165(right) Load Transient Performance vs. Voltage Headroom

Experimental results confirm that transient response remains effectively unchanged as headroom is reduced. Both peak voltage deviation and settling time show minimal dependence on V_{IN}–V_{OUT} differential, demonstrating that ultralow dropout operation does not impose a dynamic penalty.

System-Level Benefits in AI and Converter Applications

Maintaining fast and predictable transient response at low headroom provides tangible system-level advantages. Designers can reduce output-capacitance requirements, saving board area and cost while simplifying capacitor derating analysis. Voltage margins in the power-distribution network can be tightened, improving overall efficiency without sacrificing robustness.

For AI accelerators and high-speed data converters, the result is improved supply stability under real workload conditions. This directly supports higher operating frequencies, improved numerical accuracy, and more deterministic system behavior across temperature, load, and process variation.

Key Differentiators Summary

The fundamental differentiator of the T30LMPSR131 and T30LMPSR165 is their ability to deliver fast, application relevant transient performance at ultralow dropout. Their behavior near dropout is consistent and predictable, with no hidden degradation modes. Rather than relying on nominal datasheet conditions, these devices are optimized for the real load profiles found in modern AI and high performance digital systems.

Conclusion

As AI processors, high-speed data converters, and advanced digital platforms continue to push the limits of performance density, power delivery networks must meet increasingly demanding requirements. Regulators must respond rapidly to fast-load transients while operating with minimal voltage headroom and limited output capacitance.

The T30LMPSR131 and T30LMPSR165 demonstrate that ultralow dropout operation no longer requires sacrificing dynamic performance. By maintaining fast and predictable transient behavior even under near dropout conditions, these regulators enable designers to operate closer to theoretical efficiency limits while preserving system stability, performance, and reliability.

REVISION HISTORY

Revision	Description of Changes	Date
0	Initial document release.	6/11/2026

PUBLICATION ORDERING INFORMATION

LITERATURE FULFILLMENT:
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