

# Applying Semiconductor Sensors to Bar Graph Pressure Gauges

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## INTRODUCTION

Bar Graph displays are noted for their ability to very quickly convey a relative sense of how much of something is present. They are particularly useful in process monitoring applications where quick communication of a relative value is more important than providing specific data.

Designing bar graph pressure gauges based upon semiconductor pressure sensors is relatively straightforward. The sensors can be interfaced to bar graph display drive IC's,

microcomputers and MC33161 voltage monitors. Design examples for all three types are included.

## BAR GRAPH DISPLAY DRIVER

Interfacing semiconductor pressure sensors to a bar graph display IC such as an LM3914 is very similar to microcomputer interface. The same 0.5 to 4.5 V analog signal that a microcomputer's A/D converter wants to see is also quite suitable for driving an LM3914. In Figure 1, this interface is provided by dual op amp U2 and several resistors.

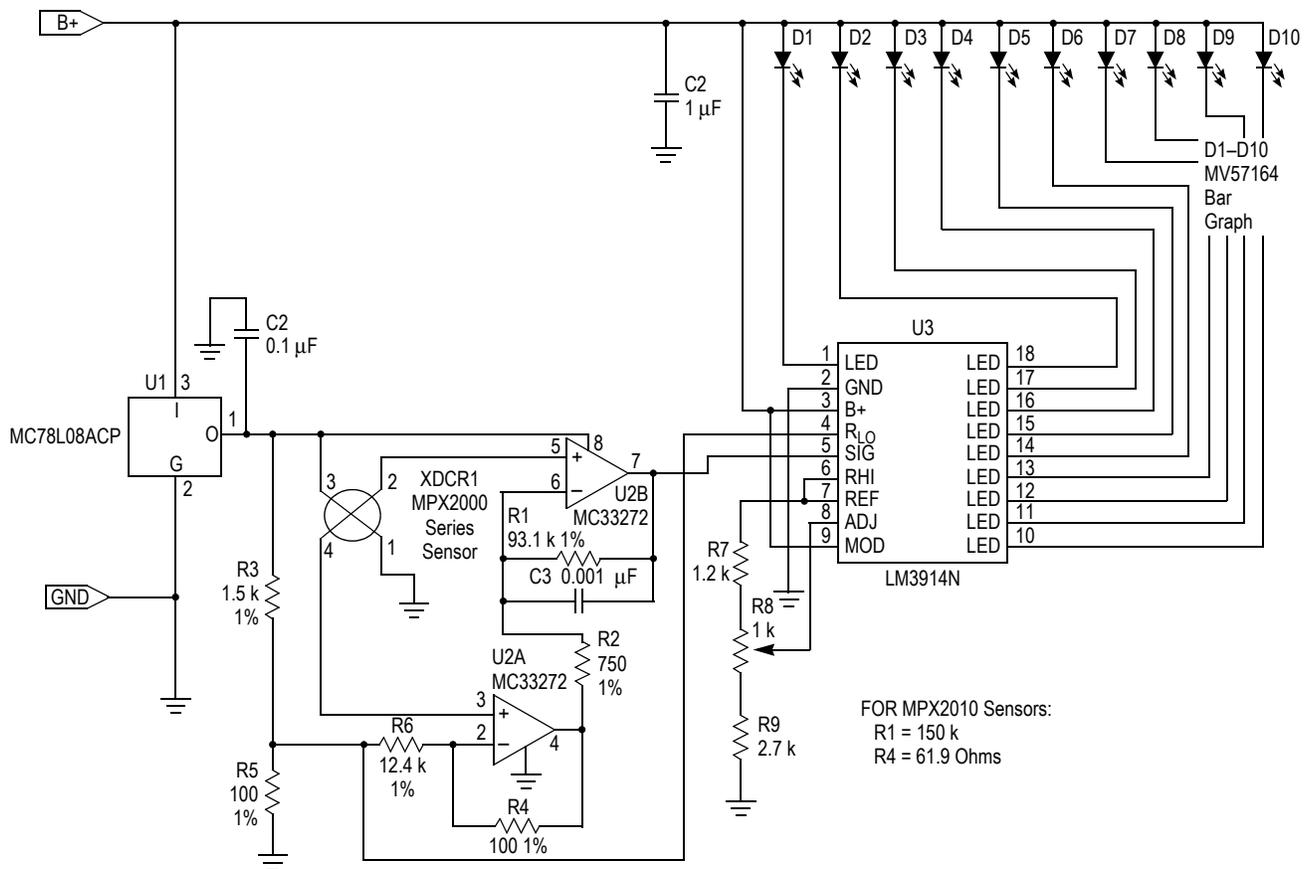
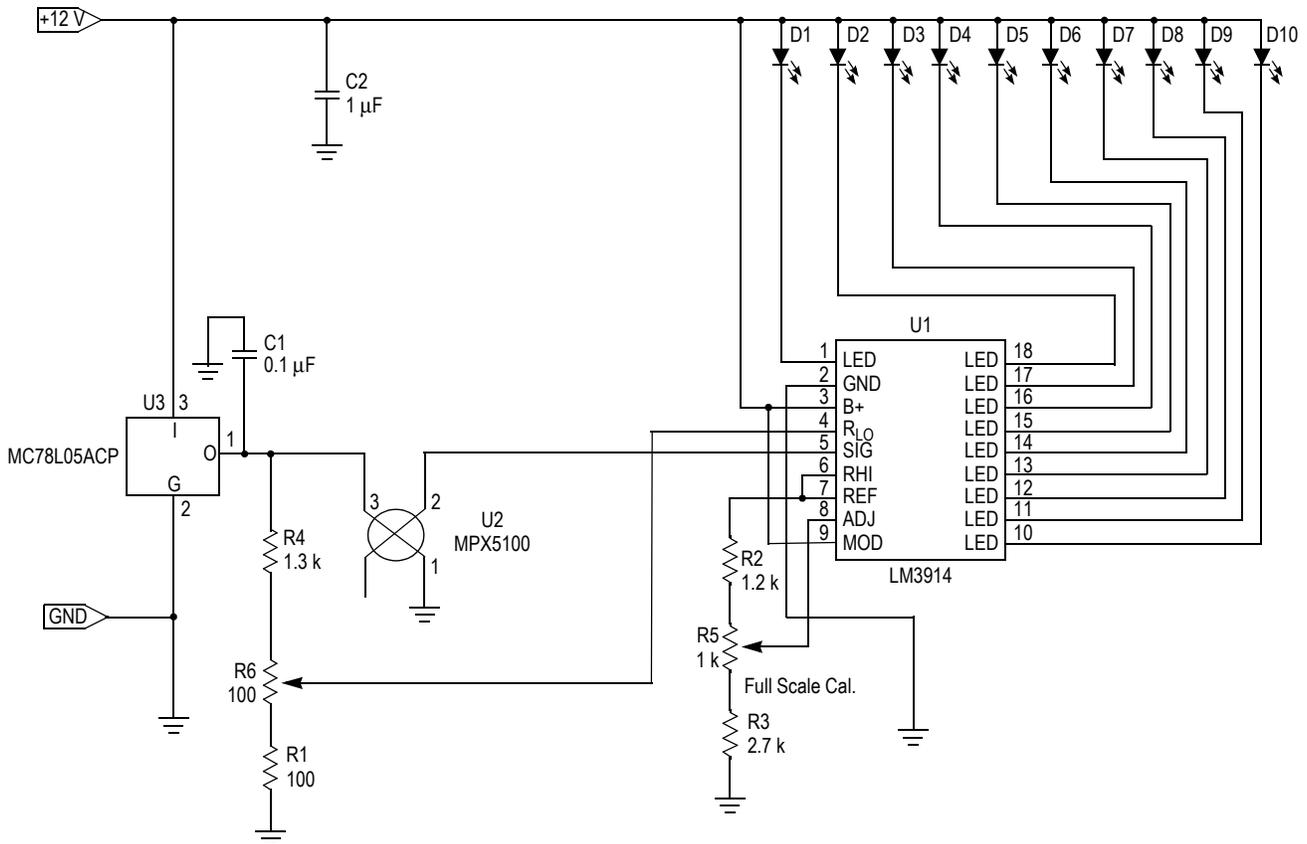


Figure 1. Compensated Sensor Bar Graph Pressure Gauge





**Figure 3. MPX5100 Bar Graph Pressure Gauge**

Over a zero to 50°C temperature range combined accuracy for the sensor, interface, and driver IC are  $\pm 10\%$ . Given a 10 segment display total accuracy for the bar graph readout is approximately  $\pm (10 \text{ kPa} + 10\%)$ .

This circuit can be simplified by substituting an MPX5100 integrated sensor for the MPX2100 and the op amp interface. The resulting schematic is shown in Figure 3. In this case zero reference for the bar graph is provided by dividing down the 5 V regulator with R4, R1 and adjustment pot R6. The voltage at the wiper of R6 is adjusted to match the sensor's zero pressure offset voltage. It is connected to R<sub>LO</sub> to zero the bar graph.

### MICROCOMPUTER BAR GRAPH

Microcomputers with internal A/D converters such as an MC68HC05B5 lend themselves to easily creating bar graphs. Using the A/D converter to measure the sensor's analog output voltage and output ports to individually switch LED's

makes a relatively straightforward pressure gauge. This type of design is facilitated by a new MDC4510A gated current sink. The MDC4510A takes one of the processor's logic outputs and switches 10 mA to an LED. One advantage of this approach is that it is very flexible regarding the number of segments that are used, and has the availability through software to independently adjust scaling factors for each segment. This approach is particularly useful for process monitoring in systems where a microprocessor is already in place.

Figure 4 shows a direct connection from an MPX5100 sensor to the microcomputer. Similar to the previous example, an MPX2000 series sensor with the op amp interface that is shown in Figure 1 can be substituted for the MPX5100. In this case the op amp interface's output at pin 7 ties to port PD5, and its supply needs to come from a source greater than 6.5 V.

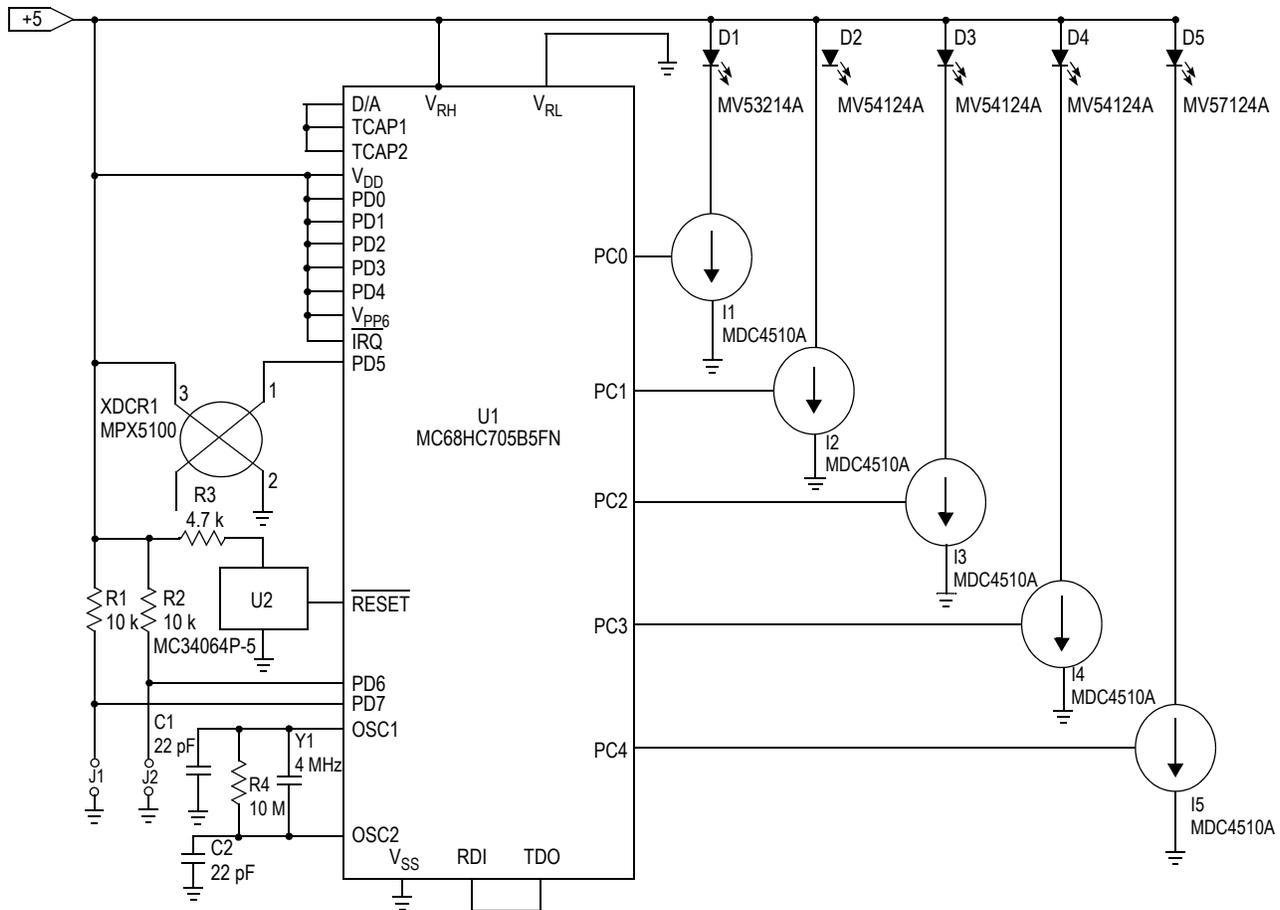


Figure 4. Microcomputer Bar Graph Pressure Gauge

## PROCESS MONITOR

For applications where an inexpensive HIGH-LOW-OK process monitor is required, the circuit in Figure 5 does a good job. It uses an MC33161 Universal Voltage Monitor and the same analog interface previously described to indicate high, low or in-range pressure.

A block diagram of the MC33161 is illustrated in Figure 6. By tying pin 1 to pin 7 it is set up as a window detector. Whenever input 1 exceeds 1.27 V, two logic ones are placed at the inputs of its exclusive OR gate, turning off output 1. Therefore this output is on unless the lower threshold is exceeded. When 1.27 V is exceeded on input 2, just the opposite occurs. A single logic one appears at its exclusive OR gate, turning on output 2. These two outputs drive LED's through MDC4010A 10 mA current sources to indicate low pressure and high pressure.

Returning to Figure 5, an in-range indication is developed by turning on current source I1 whenever both the high and

low outputs are off. This function is accomplished with a discrete gate made from D1, D2 and R7. Its output feeds the input of switched current source I1, turning it on with R7 when neither D1 nor D2 is forward biased.

Thresholds are set independently with R8 and R9. They sample the same 4.0 V full scale span that is used in the other examples. However, zero pressure offset is targeted for 1.3 V. This voltage was chosen to approximate the 1.27 V reference at both inputs, which avoids throwing away the sensor's analog output signal to overcome the MC33161's input threshold. In addition, R10 and R11 are selected such that at full scale output, i.e., 5.3 V on pin 7, the low side of the pots is nominally at 1.1 V. This keeps the minimum input just below the comparator thresholds of 1.27 V, and maximizes the resolution available from adjustment pots R8 and R9. When level adjustment is not desired, R8 - R11 can be replaced by a simpler string of three fixed resistors.

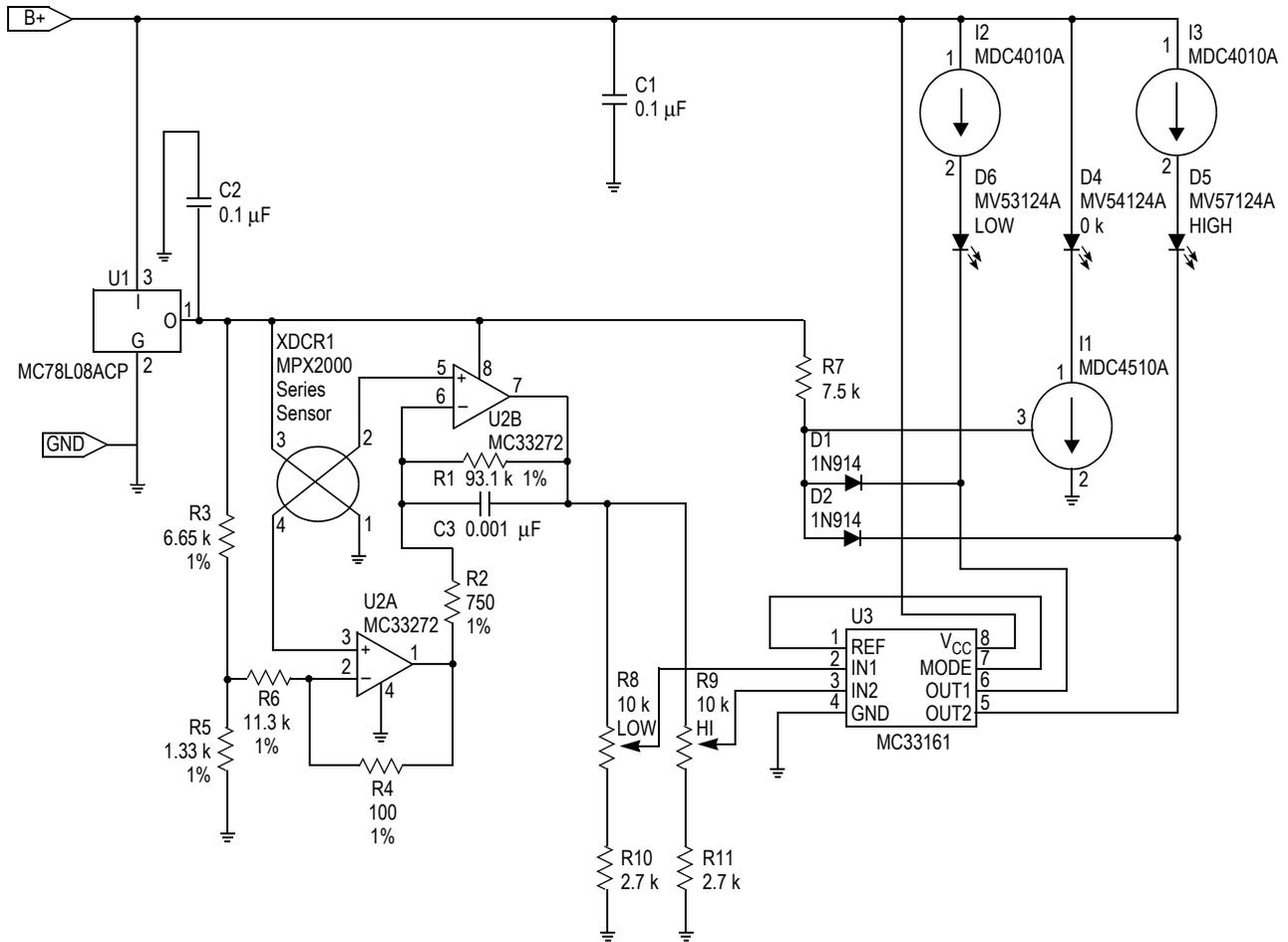


Figure 5. An Inexpensive Three-Segment Processor Monitor

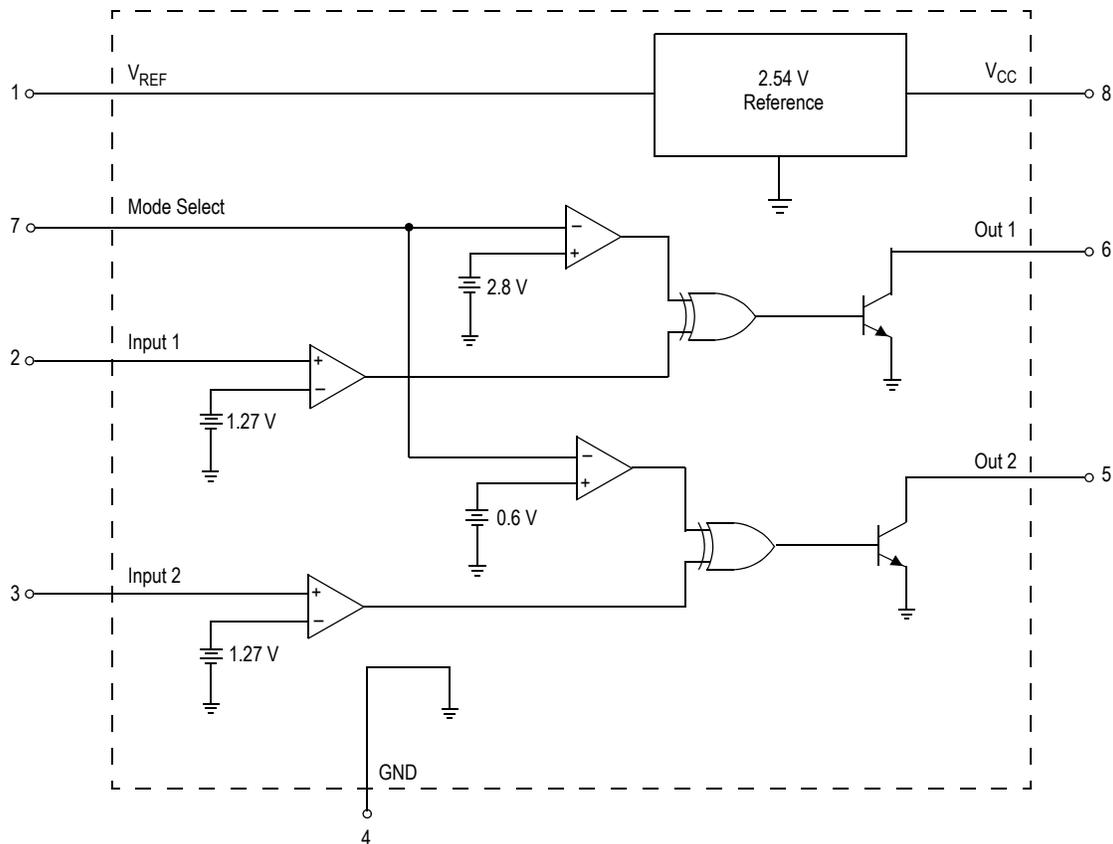


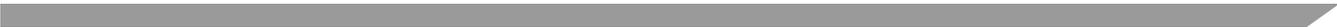
Figure 6. MC33161 Block Diagram

## CONCLUSION

The circuits that have been shown here are intended to make simple, practical and cost effective bar graph pressure gauges. Their application involves a variety of trade-offs that can be matched to the needs of individual applications. In general, the most important trade-offs are the number of segments required and processor utilization. If the system in which the bar graph is used already has a microprocessor with unused A/D channels and I/O ports, tying MDC4510A current sources to the unused output ports is a very cost effective solution. On a stand-alone basis, the MC33161 based process monitor is the most cost effective where only 2 or 3 segments are required. Applications that require a larger number of segments are generally best served by one of the circuits that uses a dedicated bar graph display.

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