Internet Engineering Task Force

"Rough Consensus and Running Code"

ANSI
American National Standards Institute

In partnership with:

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, DC

GW LAW

Washington, DC | April 15, 2016

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General IETF Experiences

Open Source code is used in our management software with code sprints at IETF meetings.

Open Source projects are a common source of input material. ACME, for example, grew in part out of Let's Encrypt.

Open Source projects are also a common source of interoperability testing (e.g. SIPit)

Patent Licensing

IETF IPR rules require disclosure but do not mandate specific licenses.

Historically, advancement on the standards track required that any required license be exercised twice independently.

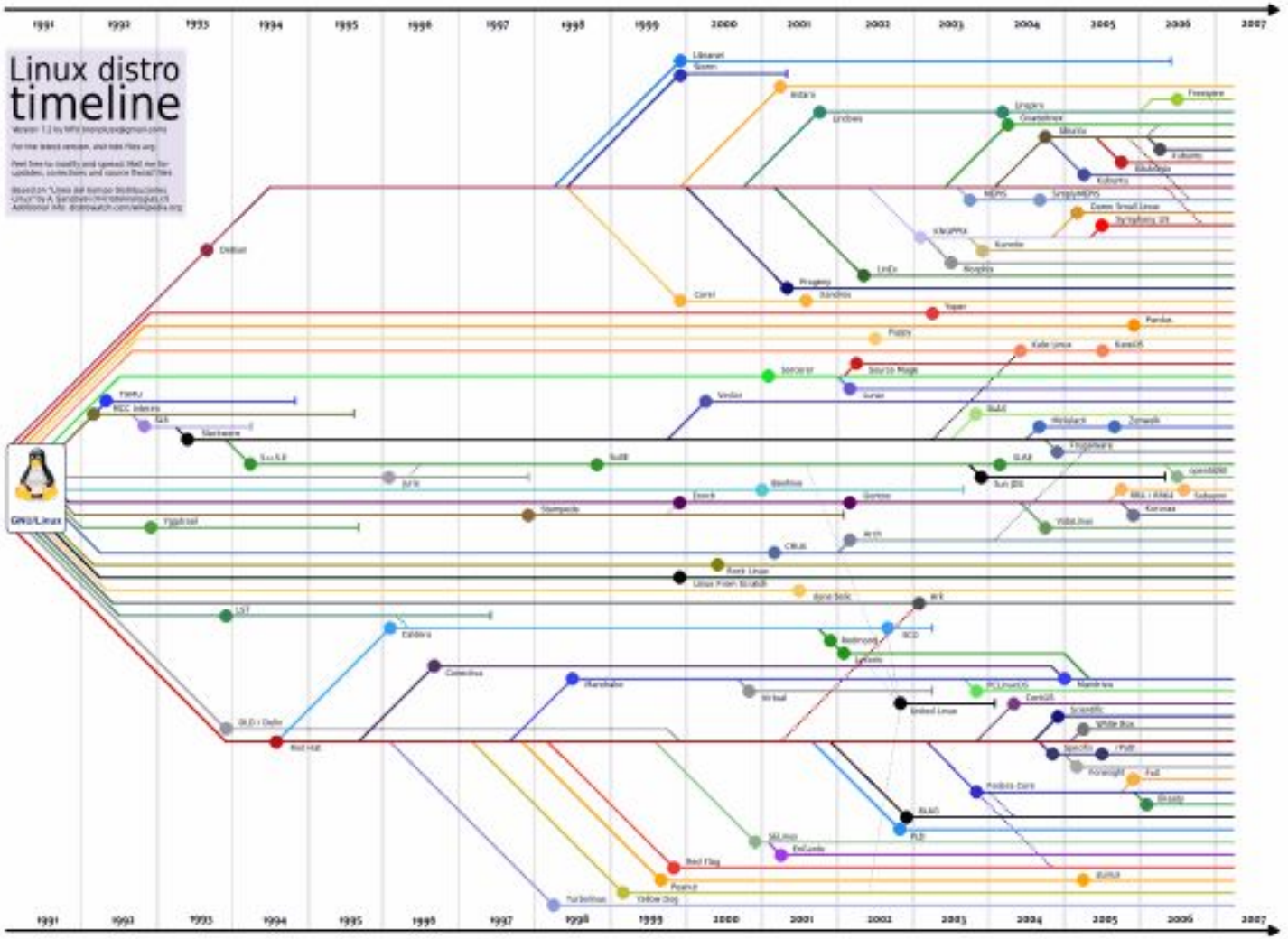
Now approval as a standard with a license that could not be used by Open Source projects would cause debate.

Copyright

IETF RFCs have a copyright by the IETF Trust, as well as the authors. The license for the text is very permissive with regards to republication, extraction, and translation--but not for modification.

Why?

Forking



Standards Outcomes

The fork dies.

The fork re-merges with the source.

The original dies.

They both survive.

One way of looking at this is that this is an open source method to assess “rough consensus”.

But if both survive, which one is standard for what is muddy until adaptive radiation is done.

Using this method for a standard seems pretty much unworkable.

It's hard to prevent forking while allowing broad re-use.

That's why IETF generally simply doesn't allow broad re-use outside the standards process.

That has occasionally caused conflict with Open Source distributions that want to include RFCs within their packages, as the copyright doesn't permit broad modification.

There are exceptions

For the OPUS Codec, the IETF created special terms that says any re-use that doesn't claim to be from the IETF or an RFC is permitted.

The approval history goes through the issues in detail, but note especially that appendix A is base-64 encoded source code for the codec.

Appendix

Standard RFC Copyright

Additional OPUS Codec Clause

The licenses granted by the IETF Trust to this RFC under Section 3.c of the Trust Legal Provisions shall also include the right to extract text from Sections 1 through 8 and Appendix A and Appendix B of this RFC and create derivative works from these extracts, and to copy, publish, display and distribute such derivative works in any medium and for any purpose, provided that no such derivative work shall be presented, displayed or published in a manner that states or implies that it is part of this RFC or any other IETF Document.