Linear-Time Algorithms for Scattering Number and Hamilton-Connectivity of Interval Graphs ⋆

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Abstract. We show that for all $k \leq -1$ an interval graph is $-(k+1)$-Hamilton-connected if and only if its scattering number is at most k. We also give an $O(n+m)$ time algorithm for computing the scattering number of an interval graph with n vertices and m edges, which improves the $O(n^3)$ time bound of Kratsch, Kloks and Müller. As a consequence of our two results the maximum k for which an interval graph is k-Hamilton-connected can be computed in $O(n+m)$ time.

1 Introduction

The Hamilton Cycle problem is that of testing whether a given graph has a Hamilton cycle, i.e., a cycle passing through all the vertices. This problem is one of the most notorious NP-complete problems within Theoretical Computer Science and remains NP-complete on many graph classes. In contrast, for interval graphs, Keil [19] showed in 1985 that Hamilton Cycle can be solved in $O(n+m)$ time, thereby strengthening an earlier result of Bertossi [4] for proper interval graphs. Bertossi and Bonucelli [5] proved that Hamilton Cycle is NP-complete for undirected path graphs, double interval graphs and rectangle graphs, all three of which are classes of intersection graphs that contain the class of interval graphs. We examine whether the linear-time result of Keil [19] can be strengthened on interval graphs to hold for other connectivity properties, which are NP-complete to verify in general.

⋆ Paper supported by Royal Society Joint Project Grant JP090172.
⋆⋆ Author supported by the GraDR-EuroGIGA project GIG/11/E023 and by the project Kontakt LH12095.
⋆⋆⋆ Author supported by project P202/11/0196 of the Czech Science Foundation.
† Author supported by EPSRC (EP/G043434/1).

1.1 Terminology

We only consider undirected finite graphs with no self-loops and no multiple edges. Throughout the paper we let n and m denote the number of vertices and edges, respectively, of the input graph.

Let $G = (V, E)$ be a graph. If G has a *Hamilton cycle*, i.e., a cycle containing all the vertices of G, then G is *hamiltonian*. Recall that the corresponding NP-complete decision problem is called HAMILTON CYCLE. If G contains a *Hamilton path*, i.e., a path containing all the vertices of G, then G is *traceable*. In this case, the corresponding decision problem is called the HAMILTON PATH problem, which is also well known to be NP-complete (cf. [15]). The problems 1-HAMILTON PATH and 2-HAMILTON PATH are those of testing whether a given graph has a Hamilton path that starts in some given vertex u or that is between two given vertices u and v, respectively. Both problems are NP-complete by a straightforward reduction from HAMILTON PATH. The LONGEST PATH problem is to compute the maximum length of a path in a given graph. This problem is NP-hard by a reduction from HAMILTON PATH as well.

Let $G = (V, E)$ be a graph. If for each two distinct vertices $s, t \in V$ there exists a Hamilton path with end-vertices s and t, then G is *Hamilton-connected*. If $G - S$ is Hamilton-connected for every set $S \subset V$ with $|S| \leq k$ for some integer $k \geq 0$, then G is *k-Hamilton-connected*. Note that a graph is Hamilton-connected if and only if it is 0-Hamilton-connected. The HAMILTON CONNECTIVITY problem is that of computing the maximum value of k for which a given graph is k-Hamilton-connected. Dean [12] showed that already deciding whether $k = 0$ is NP-complete. Kužel, Ryjáček and Vrána [21] proved this for $k = 1$. A straightforward generalization of the latter result yields the same for any integer $k \geq 1$. As an aside, the HAMILTON CONNECTIVITY problem has recently been studied by Kužel, Ryjáček and Vrána [21], who showed that NP-completeness of the case $k = 1$ for line graphs would disprove the conjecture of Thomassen that every 4-connected line graph is hamiltonian, unless P = NP.

A *path cover* of a graph G is a set of mutually vertex-disjoint paths $P_1, \ldots, P_k$ with $V(P_1) \cup \cdots \cup V(P_k) = V(G)$. The size of a smallest path cover is denoted by $\pi(G)$. The PATH COVER problem is to compute this number, whereas the 1-PATH COVER problem is to compute the size of a smallest path cover that contains a path in which some given vertex u is an end-vertex. Because a Hamilton path of a graph is a path cover of size 1, PATH COVER and 1-PATH COVER are NP-hard via a reduction from HAMILTON PATH and 1-HAMILTON PATH, respectively.

We denote the number of connected components of a graph $G = (V, E)$ by $c(G)$. A subset $S \subset V$ is a *vertex cut* of G if $c(G - S) \geq 2$, and G is called *k-connected* if the size of a smallest vertex cut of G is at least k. We say that G is *t-tough* if $|S| \geq t \cdot c(G - S)$ for every vertex cut S of G. The *toughness* $\tau(G)$ of a graph $G = (V, E)$ was defined by Chvátal [10] as $\tau(G) = \min\left\{\frac{|S|}{c(G-S)} \;:\; S \subset V \text{ and } c(G - S) \geq 2\right\}$, where we set $\tau(G) = \infty$ if G is a complete graph. Note that $\tau(G) \geq 1$ if G is hamiltonian.

The *scattering number* of a graph $G = (V, E)$ was defined by Jung [18] as $\mathrm{sc}(G) = \max\{c(G - S) - |S| \;:\; S \subset V \text{ and } c(G - S) \geq 2\}$, where we set $\mathrm{sc}(G) = -\infty$ if G is a complete graph. We call a set S on which $\mathrm{sc}(G)$ is attained a *scattering set*. Note that $\mathrm{sc}(G) \leq 0$ if G is hamiltonian. Shih, Chern and Hsu [25] show that $\mathrm{sc}(G) \leq \pi(G)$ for all graphs G. Hence, $\mathrm{sc}(G) \leq 1$ if G is traceable. The Scattering Number problem is to compute $\mathrm{sc}(G)$ for a graph G.

A set of p internally vertex-disjoint paths $P_1, \ldots, P_p$, all of which have the same end-vertices u and v of a graph G, is called a *stave* or *p-stave* of G, which is *spanning* if $V(P_1) \cup \cdots \cup V(P_p) = V(G)$. Given an integer $p \geq 1$ and two vertices u and v of a general input graph G, deciding whether there exists a spanning p-stave between u and v is clearly an NP-complete problem: for $p = 1$ the problem is equivalent to 2-Hamilton Path; for $p = 2$ the problem is equivalent to the NP-complete problem of deciding whether a graph is hamiltonian; for $p \geq 3$, the NP-completeness follows easily by induction and by considering the graph obtained after adding one vertex adjacent to u and v. We call a spanning stave between two vertices u and v of a graph *optimal* if it is a p-stave and there does not exist a spanning $(p+1)$-stave between u and v.

A graph G is an *interval graph* if it is the intersection graph of a set of closed intervals on the real line, i.e., the vertices of G correspond to the intervals and two vertices are adjacent in G if and only if their intervals have at least one point in common. An interval graph is *proper* if it has a closed interval representation in which no interval is properly contained in some other interval.

1.2 Known Results

We first discuss the results on testing hamiltonicity properties for proper interval graphs. Besides giving a linear-time algorithm for solving Hamilton Cycle on proper interval graphs, Bertossi [4] also showed that a proper interval graph is traceable if and only if it is connected. His work was extended by Chen, Chang and Chang [9] who showed that a proper interval graph is hamiltonian if and only if it is 2-connected, and that a proper interval graph is Hamilton-connected if and only if it is 3-connected. In addition, Chen and Chang [8] showed that a proper interval graph has scattering number at most $2-k$ if and only if it is k-connected.

Below we survey the results on testing hamiltonicity properties for interval graphs that appeared after Keil [19] solved the Hamilton Cycle problem on interval graphs.

Testing for Hamilton cycles and Hamilton paths. The $O(n+m)$ time algorithm of Keil [19] makes use of an interval representation. One can find such a representation by executing the $O(n+m)$ time interval recognition algorithm of Booth and Lueker [6]. If an interval representation is already given, Manacher, Mankus and Smith [24] showed that Hamilton Cycle and Hamilton Path can be solved in $O(n \log n)$ time. In the same paper, they ask whether the time bound for these two problems can be improved to $O(n)$ time if a so-called sorted interval representation is given. Chang, Peng and Liaw [7] answered this question in the affirmative. They showed that this even holds for Path Cover.

When no Hamilton path exists. In this case, LONGEST PATH and PATH COVER are natural problems to consider. Ioannidou, Mertzios and Nikolopoulos [17] gave an $O(n^4)$ algorithm for solving LONGEST PATH on interval graphs. Arikati and Pandu Rangan [1] and also Damaschke [11] showed that PATH COVER can be solved in $O(n+m)$ time on interval graphs. Damaschke [11] posed the complexity status of 1-HAMILTON PATH and 2-HAMILTON PATH on interval graphs as open questions. The latter question is still open, but Asdre and Nikolopoulos [3] answered the former question by presenting an $O(n^3)$ time algorithm that solves 1-PATH COVER, and hence 1-HAMILTON PATH. Li and Wu [22] announced an $O(n+m)$ time algorithm for 1-PATH COVER on interval graphs. Deogun, Kratsch and Steiner [13] show that for all $k \geq 1$ any cocomparability graph, and hence also any interval graph, has a path cover of size at most k if and only if its scattering number is at most k. [7] They also prove that a cocomparability graph G is hamiltonian if and only if $\mathrm{sc}(G) \leq 0$. Recall that the latter condition is equivalent to $\tau(G) \geq 1$. Hung and Chang [16] gave an $O(n+m)$ time algorithm that finds a scattering set of an interval graph G with $\mathrm{sc}(G) \geq 0$.

1.3 Our Results

When a Hamilton path does exist. In this case, HAMILTON CONNECTIVITY is a natural problem to consider. However, the results of Deogun, Kratsch and Steiner [13] suggest that trying to characterize k-Hamilton-connectivity in terms of the scattering number of an interval graph may be more appropriate than doing this in terms of its toughness. We confirm this by showing that for all $k \geq 0$ an interval graph is k-Hamilton-connected if and only if its scattering number is at most $-(k+1)$. Together with the results of Deogun, Kratsch and Steiner [13] this leads to the following theorem.

Theorem 1. *Let G be an interval graph. Then $\mathrm{sc}(G) \leq k$ if and only if*

(i) G has a path cover of size at most k when $k \geq 1$
(ii) G has a Hamilton cycle when $k = 0$
(iii) G is $-(k+1)$-Hamilton-connected when $k \leq -1$.

Moreover, we give an $O(n+m)$ time algorithm for solving SCATTERING NUMBER that also produces a scattering set. This improves the $O(n^3)$ time bound of a previous algorithm due to Kratsch, Kloks and Müller [20]. Combining this result with Theorem 1 yields that HAMILTON CONNECTIVITY can be solved in $O(n+m)$ time on interval graphs. For proper interval graphs we combine Theorem 1 with the result of Chen and Chang [8] to state that for all $k \geq 0$, a proper interval graph is k-Hamilton-connected if and only if it is $(k+3)$-connected.

Damaschke's algorithm [11] for solving PATH COVER on interval graphs, which is based on the approach of Keil [19], actually solves the following problem in $O(n+m)$ time: given an interval graph G and an integer p, does G have a spanning p-stave between the vertex u_1 corresponding to the leftmost interval of

[7] This has also been shown by Lehel in an unpublished manuscript [23].

an interval model of G and the vertex u_n corresponding to the rightmost one? We extend Damaschke's algorithm in Section 2 to an $O(n+m)$ time algorithm that takes as input only an interval graph G and finds an optimal stave of G between u_1 and u_n, unless it detects that it is not hamiltonian. Hence, $\mathrm{sc}(G) \geq 1$ as shown by Deogun, Kratsch and Steiner [13]. Therefore, the $O(n+m)$ time algorithm by Hung and Chang [16] for computing a scattering set may be applied. If there is an optimal stave between u_1 and u_n, we show how this enables us to compute a scattering set of G in $O(n+m)$ time. We then conclude that G contains a spanning p-stave between u_1 and u_n if and only if $\mathrm{sc}(G) \leq 2-p$.

In Section 3 we prove Theorem 1 (iii), i.e., the case when $k \leq -1$. In particular, for proving the subcase $k = -1$, we show that an interval graph G is Hamilton-connected if it contains a spanning 3-stave between the vertex corresponding to the leftmost interval of an interval model of G and the vertex corresponding to the rightmost one.

2 Spanning Staves and the Scattering Number

In order to present our algorithm we start by giving the necessary terminology and notations.

A set $D \subseteq V$ *dominates* a graph $G = (V, E)$ if each vertex of G belongs to D or has a neighbor in D. We will usually denote a path in a graph by its sequence of distinct vertices such that consecutive vertices are adjacent. If $P = u_1 \dots u_n$ is a path, then we denote its *reverse* by $P^{-1} = u_n \dots u_1$. We may concatenate two paths P and P' whenever they are vertex-disjoint except for the last vertex of P coinciding with the first vertex of P'. The resulting path is then denoted by $P \circ P'$.

A *clique path* of an interval graph G with vertices $u_1, \dots, u_n$ is a sequence $C_1, \dots, C_s$ of all maximal cliques of G, such that each edge of G is present in some clique C_i and each vertex of G appears in consecutive cliques only. This yields a specific interval model for G that we will use throughout the remainder of this paper: a vertex u_i of G is represented by the interval $I_{u_i} = [\ell_i, r_i]$, where $\ell_i = \min\{j : u_i \in C_j\}$ and $r_i = \max\{j : u_i \in C_j\}$, which are referred to as the *start point* and the *end point* of u_i, respectively. By definition, C_1 and C_s are maximal cliques. Hence both C_1 and C_s contain at least one vertex that does not occur in any other clique. We assume that u_1 is such a vertex in C_1 and that u_n is such a vertex in C_s. Note that $I_{u_1} = [1, 1]$ and $I_{u_n} = [s, s]$ are single points.

Damaschke made the useful observation that any Hamilton path in an interval graph can be reordered into a monotone one, in the following sense.

Lemma 1 ([11]). *If the interval graph G contains a Hamilton path, then it contains a Hamilton path from u_1 to u_n.*

We use Lemma 1 to rearrange certain path systems in G into a single path as follows. Let P be a path between u_1 and u_n and let $\mathcal{Q} = (Q_1, \dots, Q_k)$ be a collection of paths, each of which contains u_1 or u_n as an end-vertex. Furthermore, P and all the paths of $\mathcal{Q}$ are assumed to be vertex-disjoint except for possible intersections at u_1 or u_n. Consider the path Q_1. By symmetry, it may be assumed to contain u_1. We apply Lemma 1 to $P \circ (Q_1 - u_n)$ and obtain a path P' between u_1 and u_n containing all the vertices of $P \cup Q_1$. Proceeding in a similar way for the paths $Q_2, \ldots, Q_k$, we obtain a path between u_1 and u_n on the same vertex set as $P \cup \bigcup_{j=1}^{k} Q_j$. We denote the resulting path by $\mathrm{merge}(P, Q_1, \ldots, Q_k)$ or simply by $\mathrm{merge}(P, \mathcal{Q})$.

Let G be an interval graph with all the notation as introduced above. In particular, the vertices of G are $u_1, \ldots, u_n$, we consider a clique path $C_1, \ldots, C_s$, and the start point and the end point of each u_i are $\ell_i = \min\{j : u_i \in C_j\}$ and $r_i = \max\{j : u_i \in C_j\}$, respectively, where $I_{u_1} = [1, 1]$ and $I_{u_n} = [s, s]$. We can obtain this representation of G by first executing the $O(n+m)$ time recognition algorithm of interval graphs due to Booth and Lueker [6] as their algorithm also produces a clique path $C_1, \ldots, C_s$ for input interval graphs.

Algorithm 1 is our $O(n+m)$ time algorithm for finding an optimal spanning stave between u_1 and u_n if it exists. It gradually builds up a set $\mathcal{P}$ of internally disjoint paths starting at u_1 and passing through vertices of $C_t \setminus C_{t+1}$ before moving to $C_t \cap C_{t+1}$ for $t = 1, \ldots, s-1$. It is convenient to consider all these paths ordered from u_1 to their (temporary) end-vertices that we call *terminals*, and to use the terms *predecessor*, *successor*, and *descendant* of a fixed vertex v in one of the paths with the usual meaning of a vertex immediately before, immediately after, and somewhere after v in one of these paths, respectively.

We note that the path system $\mathcal{P}$ provided by Algorithm 1 is a valid stave. A routine check confirms that the following loop invariant holds at line 6: *the last vertices of paths from $\mathcal{P}$ all belongs to the clique C_t*. This is guaranteed by the computations at lines 10–18. At line 20 it also holds that *all vertices of $C_t \setminus C_{t+1}$ appear in the current $\mathcal{P} \cup \mathcal{Q}$*, as they have been included at line 8. When the loop terminates, the remaining vertices are incorporated at line 22. Thus the resulting path system $\mathcal{P}$ is a spanning stave.

In Theorem 2 we show that no spanning stave may consist of more than $2 - \mathrm{sc}(G)$ paths. On the other hand, we will also show that the k-stave found by Algorithm 1 can be supplied with a scattering set witnessing that $k \geq 2 - \mathrm{sc}(G)$. In other words this is an optimal scattering set whose existence also proves the optimality of the spanning stave. For this goal, we first develop some auxiliary terminology related to our algorithm.

We say that a vertex v has been *added to a path*, if, at some point in the execution of Algorithm 1, some path $R \in \mathcal{P}$ such that $v \notin V(R)$ has been extended to a longer path containing v (and possibly some other new vertices). If u_i has been processed by the algorithm and added to a path at lines 8 or 11 of Algorithm 1, we say that u_i has been *activated* at time a_i, and we assign a_i the current value of the variable t. Thus, we think of time steps $t = 1, \ldots, t = s$ during the execution of the algorithm. When at the same or a later stage a vertex u_j has been added as a successor of u_i to a path, we say that u_i has been *deactivated* at time d_i, and assign $d_i = a_j$. Hence, as soon as a_i and d_i have

Input: A clique-path $C_1, \ldots, C_s$ in an interval graph G.
Output: An optimal spanning stave $\mathcal{P}$ between u_1 and u_n, if it exists.

1 **begin**
2 let $p = \deg(u_1)$;
3 let $R_i = u_1$ for all $i = 1, \ldots, p$;
4 let $\mathcal{P} = \{R_1, \ldots, R_p\}$;
5 let $\mathcal{Q} = \emptyset$;
6 **for** $t := 1$ *to* $s - 1$ **do**
7 choose a $P \in \mathcal{P}$ whose terminal has the smallest end point among all terminals;
8 **if** $C_t \setminus (C_{t+1} \cup \bigcup(\mathcal{P} \cup \mathcal{Q})) \neq \emptyset$ **then** extend P by attaching vertices of $C_t \setminus (C_{t+1} \cup \bigcup(\mathcal{P} \cup \mathcal{Q}))$ in an arbitrary order
9 **for** *every path* $R \in \mathcal{P}$ **do**
10 **if** *the terminal of* R *is not in* C_{t+1} **then**
11 try to extend R by a new vertex u from $(C_t \cap C_{t+1}) \setminus \bigcup(\mathcal{P} \cup \mathcal{Q})$ with the smallest end point;
12 **if** *such* u *does not exist* **then**
13 remove R from $\mathcal{P}$;
14 insert R into $\mathcal{Q}$;
15 decrement p;
16 **if** $p = 0$ **then** report that G has no spanning 1-stave between u_1 and u_n and **quit**
17 **end**
18 **end**
19 **end**
20 **end**
21 choose any $P \in \mathcal{P}$;
22 extend P by attaching vertices of $C_s \setminus \bigcup(\mathcal{P} \cup \mathcal{Q})$ in an arbitrary order;
23 let $P = \text{merge}(P, \mathcal{Q})$;
24 **for** *every path* $R \in \mathcal{P} \setminus P$ **do** extend R by u_n;
25 report the optimal spanning p-stave $\mathcal{P}$.
26 **end**

Algorithm 1: Finding an optimal spanning stave.

assigned values, we have $\ell_i \leq a_i \leq d_i \leq r_i$. Furthermore, any of the implied inequalities holds whenever both of its sides are defined. Note that any of these inequalities may be an equality; in particular, a vertex can be activated and deactivated at the same time.

If the involved parameters have assigned values, we consider the open (time) intervals (ℓ_i, a_i), (a_i, d_i) and (d_i, r_i), and we say that u_i is *free* during (ℓ_i, a_i) if this interval is nonempty, *active* during (a_i, d_i) if this interval is nonempty, and *depleted* during (d_i, r_i) if this interval is nonempty. In particular, note that the vertices that are added to a path at line 8 (if any) are from $C_t \setminus C_{t+1}$, so they satisfy $r_i = t$ and $a_i = t$. Such vertices will not be active or depleted during any (nonempty) time interval, but they are free during the time interval (ℓ_i, r_i) if this interval is nonempty.

For $1 \leq j \leq k \leq s$, we define $C_{j,k} = \left(\bigcup_{i=j}^{k} C_i\right)$.

The following lemma is crucial. (Its proof is omitted due to space restrictions.)

Lemma 2. *Suppose that Algorithm 1 terminates at line 16 or finishes an iteration of the loop at lines 6–20. Let the current value of the variable t be also denoted by t. If there is at least one depleted vertex during the interval $(t, t+1)$, then there exists an integer $t' < t$ with the following properties:*

(i) $C_{t'+1,t} \setminus (C_{t'} \cup C_{t+1}) \neq \emptyset$,

(ii) a unique vertex $u_i \in C_{t'} \cap C_{t+1}$ is active during $(t', t'+1)$ and is depleted during $(t, t+1)$,

(iii) all vertices that are active during $(t, t+1)$ are also active during $(t', t'+1)$, with the only possible exception of the last descendant of u_i (which we denote by v) that can be free during $(t', t'+1)$,

(iv) all vertices that are depleted during $(t, t+1)$ and distinct from u_i are also depleted during $(t', t'+1)$,

(v) all vertices that are active during $(t', t'+1)$ are also active during $(t, t+1)$, with the only exception of u_i, and

(vi) all vertices that are free during $(t', t'+1)$ are also free during $(t, t+1)$, with the only possible exception of v if it is active during $(t, t+1)$.

Now we are ready to state and prove the main structural result.

Theorem 2. *An interval non-complete graph G contains a spanning p-stave between u_1 and u_n if and only if* $\mathrm{sc}(G) \leq 2 - p$.

Proof. Let us first assume that $\mathcal{P} = (R_1 \ldots, R_p)$ is a spanning p-stave between u_1 and u_n. If G is complete, then the claim is trivial. Otherwise, let $S \subset V(G)$ be a scattering set. We claim that $u_1, u_n \notin S$. Suppose the contrary. Since the vertex u_1 is simplicial, i.e. its neighborhood induces a clique, we get that $c(G - S) \leq c(G - (S - \{u_1\}))$ and therefore $c(G - S) - |S| < c(G - (S - \{u_1\})) - |S - \{u_1\}|$, a contradiction with the choice of S. The argument for u_n is symmetric.

Since each path in $\mathcal{P}$ connects u_1 and u_n, the union of intervals corresponding to the internal vertices of such a path is the interval $[1, s]$. In other words, the internal vertices of each path in $\mathcal{P}$ dominate G. Hence, the vertex cut S contains an internal vertex from each path of $\mathcal{P}$. From each path R_i of $\mathcal{P}$, we choose a vertex $s_i \in S$ and set $S' = \{s_1, \ldots, s_p\}$.

Consider the spanning subgraph G' of G induced by the edges of $\mathcal{P}$. Observe that $G' - S'$ has two components. If we remove the remaining vertices of $S \setminus S'$ one by one, then with each vertex we remove, the number of components of the remaining graph can increase by at most one as $u_1, u_n \notin S$. Hence $c(G - S) \leq c(G' - S) \leq 2 + |S| - p$ and $\mathrm{sc}(G) \leq 2 - p$, proving the forward implication of the statement.

For the other direction, let us assume that G does not have a spanning p-stave between u_1 and u_n. If $\deg(u_1) < p$, then let S be the set of neighbors of u_1. Because G is not a complete graph, $u_n \notin S$, i.e., S is a vertex cut and $c(G - S) \geq 2$. Then $\mathrm{sc}(G) \geq c(G - S) - |S| \geq 2 - |S| > 2 - p$. Otherwise, if

$\deg(u_1) \geq p$, then during the execution of Algorithm 1, at some stage the value set at line 15 becomes smaller than p. Suppose t_1 is the value of the variable t at this moment. We will complete the proof by constructing a scattering set S and showing that for this set $c(G - S) - |S| > 2 - p$.

We repeatedly use Lemma 2 and find a finite sequence $t_1, t_2, \ldots, t_k$, such that $t_{i+1} = (t_i)'$ as long as there are depleted vertices during $(t_i, t_i + 1)$ for $i < k$. Notice that there are no depleted vertices during $(1, 2)$, i.e., this process stops and we have no depleted vertices during $(t_k, t_k + 1)$. We choose $S = \bigcup_{i=1}^{k} (C_{t_i} \cap C_{t_{i+1}})$ and prove that $G - S$ has at least $|S| - p + 3$ components.

The subgraphs $G[C_{1,t_k}] - S$ and $G[C_{t_1+1,s}] - S$ contain u_1 and u_n, respectively; in particular, they have at least one component each. By property (i) in Lemma 2, $G[C_{t_{i+1}+1,t_i}] - S$ has at least one component for each $i \in \{1, \ldots, k-1\}$. Since all these components are distinct components of $G - S$, the graph $G - S$ has at least $k + 1$ components.

By properties (ii), (v) and (vi) in Lemma 2, $(C_{t_{i+1}} \cap C_{t_{i+1}+1}) \setminus (C_{t_i} \cap C_{t_i+1})$ contains only vertices that are depleted during $(t_{i+1}, t_{i+1} + 1)$ for each $i \in \{1, \ldots, k-1\}$. Further, $C_{t_1} \cap C_{t_1+1}$ has no vertices that are free during $(t, t+1)$, because at least one path is not extendable at time t_1. Also this set has at most $p - 1$ vertices that are active during $(t, t + 1)$. Hence, the remaining vertices are depleted. By properties (ii) and (iv) in Lemma 2, for each $i \in \{1, \ldots, k-1\}$, exactly one vertex that is depleted during (t_i, t_{i+1}) has a different status during $(t_{i+1}, t_{i+1} + 1)$ and is active. It follows that $|S| \leq (p - 1) + (k - 1) = k + p - 2$ as required. □

Recall that the scattering number can be determined in $O(n + m)$ time by an algorithm of Hung and Chang [16] if the scattering number is positive. Then, by analyzing Algorithm 1, we get the following result:

Corollary 1. *The scattering number as well as a scattering set of an interval graph can be computed in $O(n + m)$ time.*

The only operation whose time complexity has not been discussed is merge$(P, \mathcal{Q})$ at line 23. We refer to Damaschke's proof of Lemma 1 to verify that this can be implemented in $O(n+m)$ time. Our proof of Theorem 2 provides a construction of a scattering set that can be straightforwardly implemented in linear time.

3 Hamilton-connectivity

In this section we prove our contribution to Theorem 1, which is the following.

Theorem 3. *For all $k \geq 0$, an interval graph G is k-Hamilton-connected if and only if* $\mathrm{sc}(G) \leq -(k + 1)$.

Proof. Let $k \geq 0$ and G be an interval graph with leftmost and rightmost vertices u_1 and u_n as defined before. The statement of Theorem 3 is readily seen to hold when G is a complete graph. Hence we may assume without loss of generality that G is not complete.

First suppose that G is k-Hamilton-connected. Then G has at least $k+3$ vertices. We claim that $G-R$ is traceable for every subset $R \subset V(G)$ with $|R| \leq k+2$. In order to see this, suppose that $R \subseteq V(G)$ with $|R| \leq k+2$. We may assume without loss of generality that $|R| = k+2$. Let s and t be two vertices of R. By definition, $G^* = G - (R \setminus \{s,t\})$ has a Hamilton path with end-vertices s and t. Hence $G - R = G^* - \{s,t\}$ is traceable. Below we apply this claim twice.

Because G is not complete, G has a scattering set S. By definition, S is a vertex cut. Hence $S = \{s_1, \ldots, s_\ell\}$ for some $\ell \geq k+3$, as otherwise $G-S$ would be traceable, and thus connected, due to our claim. Let $T = \{s_1, \ldots, s_{k+2}\}$ and let $U = \{s_{k+3}, \ldots, s_\ell\}$. By our claim, $G' = G - T$ is traceable implying that $\mathrm{sc}(G') \leq 1$ [25]. Because $c(G'-U) = c(G-S) \geq 2$, we find that U is a vertex cut of G'. We use these two facts to derive that $1 \geq \mathrm{sc}(G') \geq c(G'-U) - |U| = c(G-T-U) - |T| - |U| + |T| = c(G-S) - |S| + |T| = \mathrm{sc}(G) + |T| = \mathrm{sc}(G) + k + 2$, implying that $\mathrm{sc}(G) \leq 1 - (k+2) = -(k+1)$, as required.

Now suppose that $\mathrm{sc}(G) \leq -(k+1)$. First let $k = 0$. By Theorem 2, there exists a spanning 3-stave $\mathcal{P} = (P, Q, R)$ between u_1 and u_n. Let v, w be an arbitrary pair of vertices of G. We distinguish four cases in order to find a Hamilton path between v and w.

Case 1: $v = u_1$ and $w = u_n$. In this case, $\mathrm{merge}(P, Q, R)$ is the desired Hamilton path.

Case 2: $v = u_1$ and $w \neq u_n$. Assume without loss of generality that $w \in R$. We split R before w into the subpaths R_1 and R_2, i.e., w becomes the first vertex of R_2 and it does not belong to R_1. Then $\mathrm{merge}(P, Q, R_1) \circ R_2^{-1}$ is the desired path. The case with $v \neq u_1$ and $w = u_n$ is symmetric.

Case 3: $v \neq u_1$ and $w \neq u_n$ belong to different paths, say $v \in Q$ and $w \in R$. We split Q after v into Q_1 and Q_2, and we also split R before w, as above. Then $Q_1^{-1} \circ \mathrm{merge}(P, Q_2, R_1) \circ R_2^{-1}$ is the desired path.

Case 4: $v \neq u_1$ and $w \neq u_n$ belong to the same path, say Q. Without loss of generality, assume that both $v \neq u_1$ and $w \neq u_n$ appear in this order on Q. We split Q after v and before w into three subpaths Q_1, Q_2, Q_3. If v and w are consecutive on Q, i.e., when Q_2 is empty, then $Q_1^{-1} \circ \mathrm{merge}(P, R) \circ Q_3^{-1}$ is the desired path. Otherwise, let z be any vertex on R that is a neighbor of the first vertex of Q_2. Such z exists since the path R dominates G. We split R after z into R_1 and R_2. By the choice of z, R_1 and Q_2 can be combined through z into a valid path R' containing exactly the same vertices as R_1 and Q_2 and starting at u_1. Then we choose $Q_1^{-1} \circ \mathrm{merge}(P, R', R_2) \circ Q_3^{-1}$.

Now let $k \geq 1$. Let S be a set of vertices with $|S| \leq k$. We need to show that $G-S$ is Hamilton-connected. Let T be a scattering set of $G-S$ and let $S^* = S \cup T$. Because T is a scattering set of $G-S$, we find that S^* is a vertex cut of G. We use this to derive that $\mathrm{sc}(G-S) = c(G-S-T) - |T| = c(G-S^*) - |S^*| + |S^*| - |T| \leq \mathrm{sc}(G) + k - 0 \leq -1$. Then, by returning to the case $k=0$ with $G-S$ instead of G, we find that $G-S$ is Hamilton-connected, as required. This completes the proof of Theorem 3. $\square$

4 Future Work

We conclude our paper by posing a number of open problems. We start with recalling two open problems posed in the literature. First of all, Damaschke's question [11] on the complexity status of the 2-Hamilton Path problem is still open. Our results imply that we may restrict ourselves to interval graphs with scattering number equal to 0 or 1. This can be seen as follows. Let G be an interval graph that together with two of its vertices u and v forms an instance of 2-Hamilton Path. We apply Corollary 1 to compute $\mathrm{sc}(G)$ in $O(n+m)$ time. If $\mathrm{sc}(G) < 0$, then G is Hamilton-connected by Theorem 1. Then, by definition, there exists a Hamilton path between u and v. If $\mathrm{sc}(G) > 1$, then G is not traceable, also due to Theorem 1. Hence, there exists no Hamilton path between u and v.

Second, Asdre and Nikolopoulos [3] asked about the complexity status of the ℓ-Path Cover problem on interval graphs. This problem generalizes 1-Path Cover and is to determine the size of a smallest path cover of a graph G subject to the additional condition that every vertex of a given set T of size ℓ is an end-vertex of a path in the path cover. The same authors show that both ℓ-Path Cover and 2-Hamilton Path can be solved in $O(n+m)$ time on proper interval graphs [2].

The Spanning Stave problem is that of computing the minimum value of p for which a given graph has a spanning p-stave. Because a Hamilton path of a graph is a spanning 1-stave and Hamilton Path is NP-complete, this problem is NP-hard. What is the computational complexity of Spanning Stave on interval graphs?

Kratsch, Kloks and Müller [20] gave an $O(n^3)$ time algorithm for solving Toughness on interval graphs. Is it possible to improve this bound to linear on interval graphs just as we did for Scattering Number?

Finally, can we extend our $O(n+m)$ time algorithms for Hamilton Connectivity and Scattering Number to superclasses of interval graphs such as circular-arc graphs and cocomparability graphs? The complexity status of Hamilton Connectivity is still open for both graph classes, although Hamilton Cycle can be solved in $O(n^2 \log n)$ time on circular-arc graphs [25] and in $O(n^3)$ time on cocomparability graphs [14]. It is known [20] that Scattering Number can be solved in $O(n^4)$ time on circular-arc graphs and in polynomial time on cocomparability graphs of bounded dimension.

Acknowledgement We thank referees for valuable references to related works.

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