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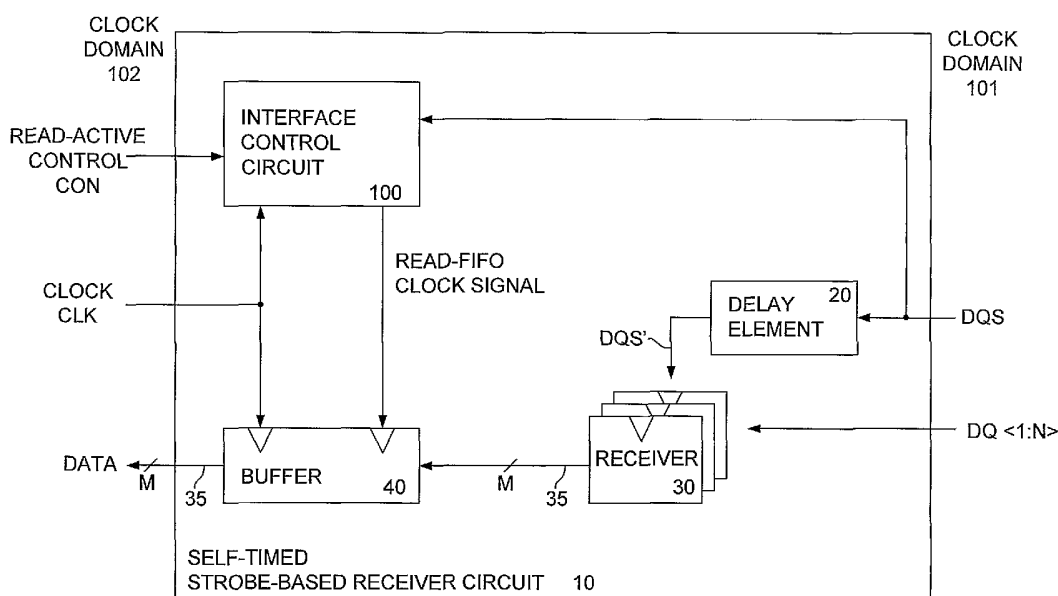
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(54) **Title:** SELF-TIMED INTERFACE FOR STROBE-BASED SYSTEMS



(57) **Abstract:** Self-timed interfaces and methods are provided for interfacing different timing domains. These self-timed interfaces receive a strobe signal from a component operating under a first clock domain. A first signal path of the self-timed interface couples the strobe signal to a receiver that samples data of data line under control of the strobe signal. A second signal path of the self-timed interface couples the strobe signal to an interface circuit through a hysteresis-based element. The interface circuit, under control of an output of the hysteresis-based element along with a clock signal that originates under a second clock domain, generates an interface enable signal for use in controlling data transfers between the different clock domains.

Self-Timed Interface for Strobe-Based Systems

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Technical Field

The disclosure herein relates generally to strobe-based data receiver circuits, systems and methods. In particular, this disclosure relates to systems and methods for generating a self-timed read-enable signal for strobe-based data receiver circuits.

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Background

Strobe-based data signaling is common in many memory systems, such as “Double Data Rate Synchronous DRAM” (DDR-SDRAM) and its related variants. In such systems, reception or sampling of data under control of a strobe signal involves use of the strobe signal to generate sample clock signals that control sampling instants of a receiver associated with a data line or pin of the memory component. Once the data transmitted by the DRAM during a “read” operation (i.e., the read-data) is sampled by the receiver circuitry on the memory controller, that data must be reliably transferred into the core of the memory controller, for continued processing. While the core-clock of the memory controller and the clock of the memory channel are typically the same frequency, the arriving data-strobe signal is of arbitrary phase with respect to the core-clock of the memory controller.

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Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a block diagram of a self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit that includes an interface control circuit for generating a self-timed read-enable signal, under an embodiment.

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Figure 2 is a flow diagram for transferring data between different clock domains using an interface control circuit, under an embodiment.

Figure 3 is a block diagram of an interface control circuit, under an embodiment.

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Figure 4 is a schematic of a hysteresis buffer element that includes a Schmitt trigger circuit, under an embodiment.

Figure 5 is a block diagram of an interface control circuit that includes a hysteresis element with a reset control, under an embodiment.

Figure 6 is a self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit that includes an interface control circuit for generating read-FIFO clock signals for data read operations, under an embodiment.

Figure 7 is an example signal timing diagram that includes signals of the self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit, under an embodiment.

Figure 8 is a self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit that includes an interface control circuit for generating interface enable signals for data sampling operations, under an embodiment.

In the drawings, the same reference numbers identify identical or substantially similar elements or acts. To easily identify the discussion of any particular element or act, the most significant digit or digits in a reference number refer to the Figure number in which that element is first introduced (e.g., element 100 is first introduced and discussed with respect to Figure 1).

Detailed Description

In an embodiment, a “clock-domain crossing” circuit may be required to reliably bridge an interface between a memory controller core, and a memory interface circuit which operate in different clock domains. One approach may utilize a “First-In, First-Out” (“FIFO”) buffer. Because the memory-interface circuit and the associated strobe and data signals are bi-directional between the memory controller and the DRAM, it becomes necessary to gate the FIFO buffer so that it is only active during “read” operations (i.e., when data is being transmitted from the DRAM and sampled by receiver circuits whose timing instants are controlled by the strobe signal). The signal which controls the FIFO operation may be referred to as the “read-enable signal” – when it is active, data from the input receiver circuitry will be transferred into the buffer under control of the data-sampling signal. Once data is stored in the FIFO, it can be transferred out and into the memory-controller core using a clock synchronous with the memory-controller core logic circuitry.

Self-timed data-receiver systems and methods for strobe-based data interfaces are provided below. These systems and methods, referred to herein as “self-timed interface circuits” or “self-timed interfaces”, receive a strobe signal (also referred to as “DQS”, “sample signal”, and “data strobe”) from a component operating under a first clock domain. A first signal path of the self-timed interface couples the strobe signal DQS to a receiver or input sampler through a strobe-delay element. The receiver samples data

received on a pin or data line, where the signal of the data line corresponds to the strobe signal DQS and operates under the same clock domain as the strobe signal DQS. A second signal path of the self-timed interface couples the strobe signal DQS to an interface control circuit through a hysteresis-buffer element. The interface control circuit, which receives (as input) the output of the hysteresis-buffer element (referred to as a buffered strobe signal), a read-active signal that originates under a second clock domain, and a clock signal that originates under a second clock domain, generates a read-enable signal. The read-enable signal gates the buffered strobe signal to generate a read-FIFO clock signal for use in controlling data transfers into the FIFO buffer which interfaces the first and second clock domains.

The interface control circuit of an embodiment includes a counter circuit that couples to receive the buffered strobe signal. The counter circuit also couples to receive the clock signal gated by a control signal (i.e., the read-active signal) that originates in the same clock domain as the clock signal. Edge transitions of each of the buffered strobe signal and the gated clock signal control a count of the counter. The counter circuit generates the read-enable signal in response to the count being at a pre-specified count value. As above, the read-enable signal gates the buffered strobe signal to generate the read-FIFO clock signal.

The gating of signals by the self-timed interfaces of an embodiment (gating the clock signal with a control signal, and gating the buffered strobe signal with the read-enable signal) each involve signals that originate in the same clock domain. This gating of signals originating in the same clock domain therefore eliminates the uncertainty and inaccuracy associated with gating a first clock signal with a control signal generated in a second clock domain.

The self-timed interface is for use in strobe-based systems that include strobe-based memory systems for example. The strobe-based memory systems may include double data rate (DDR) systems like DDR SDRAM as well as DDR2 SDRAM and other DDR SDRAM variants, such as reduced latency DRAM (RLDRAM), RLDRAM2, Graphics DDR (GDDR) and GDDR2, GDDR3, to name a few, but are not limited to these memory systems.

In the following description, numerous specific details are introduced to provide a thorough understanding of, and enabling description for, embodiments of the self-timed interface. One skilled in the relevant art, however, will recognize that these embodiments can be practiced without one or more of the specific details, or with other

components, systems, etc. In other instances, well-known structures or operations are not shown, or are not described in detail, to avoid obscuring aspects of the disclosed embodiments. As an example, the self-timed interface embodiments described herein are presented in the context of transferring individual data bits $DQ\langle X \rangle$ (where $DQ\langle X \rangle$ represents any one of a number of data lines $DQ\langle 1:N \rangle$, where X is any of data lines 1, 2 ... N) using corresponding strobe signals DQS with the understanding that the disclosed concepts apply to all data transfers for all bits $DQ\langle 1 \rangle$ thru $DQ\langle N \rangle$.

Figure 1 is a block diagram of a self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit 10 that includes an interface control circuit 100 for generating a read-FIFO clock signal, under an embodiment. The interface control circuit 100 is a component of and/or coupled to one or more systems or devices (not shown) as appropriate to a system/device hosting the self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit 10. The self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit 10 transfers data between first 101 and second 102 clock domains of the host system.

The self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit 10 includes one or more receivers (or data-samplers) 30, a strobe-delay circuit 20, one or more FIFO buffers 40, and the interface control circuit 100, but is not limited to these components. Each of the receivers 30 couple to sample one of the data signals $DQ\langle 1:N \rangle$ of individual data pins or lines originating from one or more components (not shown) in the first clock domain 101, but are not so limited. The receivers 30 sample data of the pins/lines under control of a delayed strobe signal DQS' . The self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit 10 of an embodiment includes a delay element 20 that couples to receive the input strobe signal DQS and in turn generates a delayed strobe signal DQS' , where an amount of the delay is as appropriate to the relative timing between the data signal DQ and the corresponding strobe signal DQS (typically 90-degrees, or one-quarter of the memory-clock cycle).

The M-bit side FIFO buffer 40 couples to the M outputs of the receivers 30 to transfer the sampled data from the receivers 30 to a component in the second clock domain 102 via data lines 35. In typical strobe-based memory systems, $M=2*N$, but other embodiments are not limited to this relationship. Read data is loaded into the FIFO buffer 40 under control of the read-FIFO clock signal, which is generated by the interface control circuit 100. Read data is transmitted to one or more components (not shown) operating in the second clock domain 102 under control of clock signal CLK.

The interface control circuit 100 couples to receive the strobe signal DQS, the clock signal CLK which embodies the timing of the second clock domain 102, and a

read-active control signal (“CON”), where the control signal CON couples to the interface control circuit 100 from a component operating under the second clock domain 102. The interface control circuit 100 generates the read-FIFO clock signal using information of the strobe signal DQS, the clock signal CLK, and the control signal CON, as described below, and couples the read-FIFO clock signal to the FIFO buffer 40.

Figure 2 is a flow diagram 200 for transferring data between different clock domains using a self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit, under an embodiment. Components of the self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit detect the active-state of the read-active signal CON, as well as an edge-transition of the clock signal CLK at block 202. This detection controls a count in a first direction (e.g., the count increments) within the self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit, at block 204. The self-time strobe-based receiver circuit then detects a strobe signal DQS, at block 206. The detection includes hysteresis-based detection that generates a buffered output signal in response to transitions of the strobe signal across at least one of a first voltage threshold and a second threshold voltage, but is not so limited. The self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit controls a count in a second direction (e.g., the count decrements) in response to the detected strobe signal edge-transition, at block 208. The self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit generates the read-FIFO clock signal in response to a determination the count is at a pre-specified count value (e.g., the count is non-zero), at block 210. The read-FIFO clock signal couples to the read buffer for use in controlling transfers of sampled data into the read buffer from one or more receivers.

Figure 3 is a block diagram of an interface control circuit 300 that generates read-FIFO clock signals, under an embodiment. The interface control circuit 300 includes a hysteresis element 302, a counter circuit 304, a comparator circuit 306, a delay element 308, and multiple logic circuits 310/320, as described below. The hysteresis element 302 couples to receive the strobe signal DQS into the interface control circuit 300 from the first clock domain 101. The hysteresis element 302 of an embodiment is a comparator or detector (e.g., a “Schmitt trigger”) that uses hysteresis in order to better detect valid regions of the strobe signal DQS, thereby improving tolerance of the interface control circuit 300 to noise during high-impedance (inactive) states of the strobe signal DQS. The use of hysteresis improves tolerance to noise by changing the “trip-point” voltage thresholds at the input which would cause a signal transition at the output, where the signal which controls the “trip-point” change is typically the output signal itself. Consequently the hysteresis-based comparator 302 detects a valid region of

a strobe signal DQS and generates a buffered strobe signal in response to transitions of the strobe signal DQS that place the voltage of the strobe signal DQS reliably above or below a voltage range bounded by the first and second voltage thresholds.

As an example of a hysteresis element 302, **Figure 4** is a schematic of a
5 hysteresis element 402 that includes a Schmitt trigger circuit 412, under an embodiment. In a strobe-based signaling system such as DDR-SDRAM, when the DQS signal is not active, it is in a high-impedance state. During this state, the voltage seen by an input receiver at the DQS pin will be approximately one-half of the power-supply voltage (i.e., “VDD” in **Figure 4**) of the receiver circuit. This combination of high-impedance and
10 half-VDD biasing would cause traditional input buffer circuits to become very sensitive to spurious noise signals.

To prevent noise events from causing unwanted state changes during the inactive state, the Schmitt trigger circuit 412 conditions the strobe signal DQS through the use of two input voltage thresholds, or “trip points”. When the output of the Schmitt trigger is
15 high (e.g., at VDD), for example, the input voltage threshold is adjusted to a low threshold value. In order to produce an output transition from high-to-low, an input signal’s voltage would have to fall below this low threshold value. Similarly, when the output of the Schmitt trigger is low (e.g., at VSS), the input voltage threshold is adjusted to a second voltage threshold which is relatively higher than the first threshold value. In
20 this condition, in order to produce an output transition from low-to-high, an input signal’s voltage would have to rise above this high threshold. Such a “state-dependant input threshold” scheme generally provides immunity to unwanted state changes due to noise as long as the peak-to-peak amplitude of the noise is less than the difference between the threshold voltages.

25 The interface control circuit of an alternative embodiment includes a hysteresis element having a reset control. The interface control circuit couples a read-enable signal to the hysteresis element reset control in order to ensure the hysteresis element output is in a known state at the first instance of an active DQS signal. **Figure 5** is a block diagram of a interface control circuit 500 that includes a hysteresis element 502 with a
30 reset (“RESET”) control, under an embodiment. The hysteresis element 502 includes an active-low reset that resets the hysteresis element output in response to an asserted read-enable signal, but the embodiment is not limited to an active-low reset or to resetting in response to an active read-enable signal.

Returning to **Figure 3**, the interface control circuit 300 couples the counter circuit 304 to receive the buffered strobe signal from the hysteresis element 302. The counter circuit 304 also couples to receive a clock signal CLK and a control signal CON through a logic circuit 310. Both the clock signal CLK and the control signal CON originate in the second clock domain 102. The first logic circuit 310 includes an AND gate, but alternative embodiments may use any combination of logic circuits to generate AND gate functionality. The clock signal CLK couples to a first input of the AND gate 310 and the control signal CON couples to a second input of the AND gate 310. Via this embodiment, the AND gate 310 outputs a buffered version of clock signal CLK whenever the control signal CON is in an active-high state.

During initialization of the interface control circuit 300 and/or a system hosting the interface control circuit 300, the counter circuit 304 is initialized at a pre-specified count value (referred to as the “initial count value”), possibly via a global reset signal (not shown). In one embodiment the counter circuit 304 uses an initial count value of zero (0), but is not so limited. The initial count value may be stored in a register or other memory area (not shown) that is included in and/or coupled to the counter circuit 304. During subsequent operations of the interface control circuit 300, edge transitions of each of the buffered strobe signal and the gated clock signal affect the count value of the counter circuit 304. An edge transition of the buffered strobe signal generally causes the counter value to adjust in one direction (first direction) while an edge transition of the gated clock signal generally causes the counter value to adjust in an opposite direction (second direction). Therefore, as an example, an edge transition of the buffered strobe signal may decrement the counter value of an embodiment while an edge transition of the gated clock signal increments the counter value. The edge transitions may be rising and/or falling edge transitions as appropriate to the host system.

The counter circuit 304 of an embodiment includes and/or couples to a count comparator circuit 306, also referred to as a count comparator 306. The count comparator circuit 306 receives information of the count value, and continually compares the count value with the initial count value; alternative embodiments may compare the count value with other values as appropriate to the system configuration. The count comparator circuit 306 generates the read-enable signal as an output signal in response to comparison results that satisfy a pre-defined condition or relation between the count value and the initial count value. As an example, for a system in which the initial count value is zero (count = 0), the count comparator circuit 306 of an embodiment generates

the read-enable signal in response to comparison results in which the count value is a non-zero value (count $\neq$ 0). However, alternative embodiments may use other pre-defined conditions.

The interface control circuit 300 couples the read-enable signal output of the count comparator circuit 306 to a second logic circuit 320. The second logic circuit 320 also couples to receive the buffered strobe signal. The second logic circuit 320 of an embodiment includes an AND gate 320, but alternative embodiments may use any combination of logic circuits to generate AND gate functionality. The read-enable signal couples to a first input of the AND gate 320 and the buffered strobe signal couples to a second input of the AND gate 320. Via this embodiment, the AND gate 320 outputs a buffered version of the buffered strobe signal whenever the read-enable signal is in an active-high state.

The interface control circuit 300 of an embodiment includes a delay element 308 that couples to receive the gated, buffered strobe signal from the output of the second logic circuit 320. The delay element 308 applies a delay to the gated strobe signal. The delay applied by the delay element 308, which is set or controlled as described below, is approximately in a range of one-quarter clock cycle (90 degrees) to three-quarters of a clock cycle (270 degrees) of the clock signal CLK as appropriate to the host system signal timing, but is not so limited. The delay element 308 outputs a delayed version of the gated strobe signal as the read-FIFO clock signal. The read-FIFO clock signal couples to one or more components of the host system for use in data transfer operations between different timing domains.

Use of the read-FIFO clock signal in data transfer operations includes use of the read-FIFO clock signal to control data transfers into the FIFO buffer during read operations of a strobe-based memory system. For example, **Figure 6** is a self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit 600 that includes an interface control circuit 6300 for generating read-FIFO clock signals for use in data read operations, under an embodiment. The self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit 600 is a component of a strobe-based memory system for example. The strobe-based memory systems may include double data rate systems like DDR SDRAM as well as other variants, but are not limited to these memory systems.

The interface control circuit 6300 is a component of and/or coupled to one or more systems or devices (not shown) as appropriate to the self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit 600. In this example, the receiver circuit 600 includes one or more

receivers 630, one or more read FIFOs 640, and the interface control circuit 6300. Each of the receivers 630 couple to sample data signals $DQ<1:N>$ of individual data pins or lines originating from one or more components (not shown) of the memory system in the first clock domain 101, but are not so limited. The data signals $DQ<1:N>$ may be
5 transmitted from a memory component in a read operation, for example.

Each receiver 630 operates as an input sampler and receives as a sample-clock signal a delayed strobe signal DQS' from a strobe delay element 620. The delayed strobe signal DQS' is generated by the strobe delay element 620, and each strobe delay element 620 outputs a signal DQS' to the receivers used in sampling/receiving data
10 signals $DQ<1:N>$. While a delayed strobe signal DQS' couples to a receiver of one data bit of an N-bit wide data byte, the self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit of various alternative embodiments may couple the delayed strobe signal DQS' to any number and/or combination of receivers, for example.

The amount of offset or delay of each strobe delay element 620 is as appropriate
15 to the signaling protocol as well as the relative signal propagation delays of the data signal $DQ<X>$ and the corresponding strobe signal DQS . The delay value may be calibrated or adjusted, for example, to optimally edge-align the data signal $DQ<X>$ and corresponding strobe signal DQS , where the optimal edge-alignment can be with respect to the rising edge and/or falling edge of the data $DQ<X>$ and strobe DQS signals, but is
20 not so limited. The delay of a typical embodiment is approximately one-quarter cycle (i.e., approximately 90 degrees) of the clock signal CLK , but is not so limited. The receiver 630 outputs the sampled/received data on a number "M" of data lines 635.

The read FIFO 640 couples to one or more of the receivers 630 via the data lines 635. The read FIFO 640 stores the sampled data from the receivers 630, where this
25 storage or 'writing' is under control of a clock signal originating from the interface control circuit 6300. The FIFOs contents are transmitted or "read" to other components (not shown) under control of a clock signal CLK originating from the second clock domain 102. While the read FIFO 640 of this embodiment is a FIFO-type buffer, alternative embodiments can use any type of buffer or device for transferring data
30 between two clock domains.

As described above with reference to **Figures 1-5**, the interface control circuit 6300 generates the read-FIFO clock signal. The interface control circuit 6300 includes a counter circuit 6304 that couples to a hysteresis element 6302 and multiple logic circuits 6310/6320. The hysteresis element 6302, as described above in reference to **Figure 4**,

couples to receive the strobe signal DQS from the first clock domain into the interface control circuit 6300. The interface control circuit 6300 operates as described above in reference to the interface control circuit 300 of **Figure 3**.

As an example of interface control circuit 6300 operation, **Figure 7** is an example
5 signal timing diagram 700 that includes signals of the self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit 600, under an embodiment. With reference to **Figure 6**, the signals include the clock signal CLK, read-active control signal CON, read-enable signal REN, strobe signal DQS, gated strobe signal, and read-FIFO clock signal. The count value is also shown. The relative timing 700 of these signals is provided for purposes of this example and is
10 not to limit relative signal timing of the receiver circuit 600.

This example assumes the interface control circuit 6300 includes an initial count value of zero (0) prior to data read operations. The counter circuit 6304 increments the count to a value of one (1) in response to a first rising edge 702 of the clock signal CLK that occurs while the control signal CON is asserted 712, and the count comparator
15 circuit 6306 asserts the read-enable signal REN in response to the non-zero count value. The counter circuit 6304 increments the count to a value of two (2) in response to a second rising edge 704 of the clock signal CLK while the count comparator circuit 6306 continues to assert the read-enable signal REN in response to the non-zero count value.

The hysteresis element 6302, as described above, is a comparator or detector that
20 improves tolerance to noise of the strobe signal DQS (in a high-impedance or inactive state 720) during high-speed operations through the use of first 732 and second 734 voltage thresholds. Voltage levels of the strobe signal DQS therefore trigger detection of a valid region 724 of the strobe signal when falling below both the first 732 and second 734 voltage thresholds. Consequently, the falling-edge transition that corresponds to the
25 valid region 724 of strobe signal DQS triggers an output signal (buffered strobe signal) from the hysteresis element 6302.

The interface control circuit 6300 couples the buffered strobe signal to the second logic circuit 6320 along with the asserted read-enable signal REN from the counter circuit 6304. As the read-enable signal REN is asserted, the second logic circuit 6320
30 outputs the buffered strobe signal as the gated strobe signal. The receiver circuit 600 couples the gated strobe signal to the read FIFO 640 thru an interface delay element 6308 as described above. In response to the output of the interface delay element 6308, the read FIFO 640 stores the sampled data from the receivers 630.

The counter circuit 6304 decrements the count to a value of one (1) (from the current value of two (2)) in response to a first falling edge 726 of the buffered strobe signal DQS, and the count comparator circuit 6306 continues to assert the read-enable signal REN in response to the non-zero count value. The counter circuit 6304 further
5 decrements the count to a value of zero (0) in response to a second falling edge 728 of the buffered strobe signal DQS, and the count comparator circuit 6306 de-asserts the read-enable signal REN in response to this zero (0) count value. The second logic circuit 6320 ceases output of the gated strobe signal upon de-assertion of the read-enable signal REN and the read FIFO 640 ceases storing the sampled data from the receivers 630.

10 The self-timed strobe-based receiver circuit of an alternative embodiment may use the read-enable signal of an embodiment to gate the delayed strobe signal DQS' coupling to the receivers. **Figure 8** is a receiver circuit 800 that includes an interface control circuit 810 for generating read-FIFO clock signals for use in data sampling operations, under an embodiment. The receiver circuit 800 couples to the read-active
15 control signal CON and clock CLK signals of the second domain 102, and the strobe signal DQS and data signals DQ<1:N> of the first domain 101, as described above. The interface control circuit 810 generally functions as described above with reference to **Figures 1-7**. However, instead of using the read-FIFO clock signal to control receipt of data into the read FIFO 840, the receiver circuit 800 couples the delayed strobe signal
20 DQS' to a logic circuit 850 along with the read-FIFO clock signal from the interface control circuit 810. Thus, the receivers 830 sample or receive data of the data signals DQ<1:N> in response to the delayed strobe signal DQS' as gated by the read-FIFO clock signal.

The delay elements described above may include any number of circuits that
25 generate/control delay elements and/or apply delays or offsets to a received signal in order to produce a delayed signal, as described above. As one example the delay circuit includes a number of delay elements that couple to receive a clock signal (e.g., clock signal CLK) and are slaved to a delay-locked loop ("DLL"). Components of the delay circuit select one of the delayed signals for use in generating an appropriate delay. The
30 selection/adjustment of an amount of delay to be applied to a received signal is performed in response to information of signal parameters of the host system and/or the self-timed interface. Examples of the signal parameters include one-way signal propagation delays, round-trip propagation delays, the intrinsic cycle-based delays of the

system, the signal propagation time between components of the host system, as well as intrinsic delays of devices of the various system components and circuits, to name a few.

The delay elements of an embodiment also control the respective delays or offsets within a pre-specified range in response to variations in operating and/or environmental parameters of the host system and/or self-timed interface circuit. The operating or process parameters include, for example, the speed of operation, but can include numerous other parameters as appropriate. The environmental parameters include, for example temperature and/or power supply voltage, but can include numerous other parameters as appropriate.

The components of the self-timed interfaces described above include any collection of computing components and devices operating together. The components of the self-timed interfaces can also be components or subsystems within a larger computer system or network. Components of the self-timed interfaces can also be coupled among any number of components (not shown), for example other buses, controllers, memory devices, and data input/output (I/O) devices, in any number of combinations. Many of these system components may be soldered to a common printed circuit board (for example, a graphics card or game console device), or may be integrated in a system that includes several printed circuit boards that are coupled together in a system, for example, using connector and socket interfaces such as those employed by personal computer motherboards and dual inline memory modules ("DIMM"). In other examples, complete systems may be integrated in a single package housing using a system in package ("SIP") type of approach. Integrated circuit devices may be stacked on top of one another and utilize wire bond connections to effectuate communication between chips or may be integrated on a single planar substrate within the package housing.

Further, functions of the self-timed interfaces can be distributed among any number/combination of other processor-based components. The self-timed interfaces described above include, for example, various dynamic random access memory (DRAM) systems. As examples, the DRAM memory systems can include double data rate ("DDR") systems like DDR SDRAM as well as DDR2 SDRAM and other DDR SDRAM variants, such as Graphics DDR ("GDDR") and further generations of these memory technologies, i.e., GDDR2, and GDDR3, but is not limited to these memory systems.

Aspects of the self-timed interfaces described herein may be implemented as functionality programmed into any of a variety of circuitry, including programmable

logic devices (PLDs), such as field programmable gate arrays (FPGAs), programmable array logic (PAL) devices, electrically programmable logic and memory devices and standard cell-based devices, as well as application specific integrated circuits (ASICs). Some other possibilities for implementing aspects of the self-timed interfaces include:

5 microcontrollers with memory (such as electronically erasable programmable read only memory (EEPROM)), embedded microprocessors, firmware, software, etc. Furthermore, aspects of the self-timed interfaces may be embodied in microprocessors having software-based circuit emulation, discrete logic (sequential and combinatorial), custom devices, fuzzy (neural) logic, quantum devices, and hybrids of any of the above device

10 types. Of course the underlying device technologies may be provided in a variety of component types, e.g., metal-oxide semiconductor field-effect transistor (MOSFET) technologies like complementary metal-oxide semiconductor (CMOS), bipolar technologies like emitter-coupled logic (ECL), polymer technologies (e.g., silicon-conjugated polymer and metal-conjugated polymer-metal structures), mixed analog and

15 digital, etc.

It should be noted that the various circuits disclosed herein may be described using computer aided design tools and expressed (or represented), as data and/or instructions embodied in various computer-readable media, in terms of their behavioral, register transfer, logic component, transistor, layout geometries, and/or other

20 characteristics. Formats of files and other objects in which such circuit expressions may be implemented include, but are not limited to, formats supporting behavioral languages such as C, Verilog, and HDL, formats supporting register level description languages like RTL, and formats supporting geometry description languages such as GDSII, GDSIII, GDSIV, CIF, MEBES and any other suitable formats and languages.

25 Computer-readable media in which such formatted data and/or instructions may be embodied include, but are not limited to, non-volatile storage media in various forms (e.g., optical, magnetic or semiconductor storage media) and carrier waves that may be used to transfer such formatted data and/or instructions through wireless, optical, or wired signaling media or any combination thereof. Examples of transfers of such

30 formatted data and/or instructions by carrier waves include, but are not limited to, transfers (uploads, downloads, e-mail, etc.) over the Internet and/or other computer networks via one or more data transfer protocols (e.g., HTTP, FTP, SMTP, etc.).

When received within a computer system via one or more computer-readable media, such data and/or instruction-based expressions of the above described circuits

may be processed by a processing entity (e.g., one or more processors) within the computer system in conjunction with execution of one or more other computer programs including, without limitation, netlist generation programs, place and route programs and the like, to generate a representation or image of a physical manifestation of such circuits.

5 Such representation or image may thereafter be used in device fabrication, for example, by enabling generation of one or more masks that are used to form various components of the circuits in a device fabrication process.

Unless the context clearly requires otherwise, throughout the description and the claims, the words "comprise," "comprising," and the like are to be construed in an
10 inclusive sense as opposed to an exclusive or exhaustive sense; that is to say, in a sense of "including, but not limited to." Words using the singular or plural number also include the plural or singular number respectively. Additionally, the words "herein," "hereunder," "above," "below," and words of similar import refer to this application as a whole and not to any particular portions of this application. When the word "or" is used
15 in reference to a list of two or more items, that word covers all of the following interpretations of the word: any of the items in the list, all of the items in the list and any combination of the items in the list.

The above description of illustrated embodiments of the self-timed interfaces is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the self-timed interfaces to the precise form
20 disclosed. While specific embodiments of, and examples for, the self-timed interfaces are described herein for illustrative purposes, various equivalent modifications are possible within the scope of the self-timed interfaces, as those skilled in the relevant art will recognize. The teachings of the self-timed interfaces provided herein can be applied to other processing systems and methods, not only for the systems and methods
25 described above.

The elements and acts of the various embodiments described above can be combined to provide further embodiments. These and other changes can be made to the self-timed interfaces and methods in light of the above detailed description.

In general, in the following claims, the terms used should not be construed to
30 limit the self-timed interfaces and methods to the specific embodiments disclosed in the specification and the claims, but should be construed to include all processing systems that operate under the claims. Accordingly, the self-timed interfaces are not limited by the disclosure, but instead the scope of the self-timed interfaces is to be determined entirely by the claims.

While certain aspects of the self-timed interfaces are presented below in certain claim forms, the inventor contemplates the various aspects of the self-timed interfaces in any number of claim forms. For example, while only one aspect of the self-timed interfaces is recited as embodied in machine-readable media, other aspects may likewise
5 be embodied in machine-readable media. Accordingly, the inventor reserves the right to add additional claims after filing the application to pursue such additional claim forms for other aspects of the self-timed interfaces.

Claims

What is claimed is:

- 1 1. A receiver circuit comprising:
2 a first signal path that couples a strobe signal of a first timing domain to at least
3 one receiver; and
4 a second signal path that couples the strobe signal to a hysteresis element, the
5 hysteresis element detecting transitions of the strobe signal with hysteresis-based
6 detection, wherein a hysteresis element output signal controls an interface circuit that
7 interfaces the first timing domain to a second timing domain.
- 1 2. The circuit of claim 1, wherein the interface circuit comprises at least one of a
2 counter circuit, a comparator circuit, and a logic circuit.
- 1 3. The circuit of claim 2, wherein the counter circuit receives the hysteresis element
2 output signal and a clock signal of the second timing domain.
- 1 4. The circuit of claim 3, wherein the counter circuit controls a count in a first
2 direction in response to the hysteresis element output signal and controls a count in a
3 second direction in response to the clock signal.
- 1 5. The circuit of claim 3, wherein the logic circuit includes a first logic gate that
2 receives the clock signal and an enable signal of the second timing domain, wherein the
3 counter circuit receives an output of the first logic gate.
- 1 6. The circuit of claim 2, wherein the comparator circuit couples to the counter
2 circuit and generates a comparator output signal in response to detecting a pre-specified
3 count value from the counter circuit.
- 1 7. The circuit of claim 6, wherein the logic circuit includes a second logic gate that
2 receives the comparator output signal and the hysteresis element output signal, wherein
3 the second logic gate couples an output signal to control data transfers between the first
4 and second timing domains.

1 8. The circuit of claim 1, wherein the hysteresis element includes a Schmitt trigger
2 circuit.

1 9. The circuit of claim 1, wherein the first timing domain operates under a first
2 phase of a clock signal and the second timing domain operates under a second phase of
3 the clock signal.

1 10. A circuit comprising:
2 a trigger circuit to receive a strobe signal of a first timing domain; and
3 a counter circuit that counts in a first direction in response to a trigger circuit
4 output signal and counts in a second direction in response to a clock signal of a second
5 timing domain, wherein a counter circuit output signal gates the trigger circuit output
6 signal for use in controlling data transfers between the first and second timing domains.

1 11. The circuit of claim 10, wherein the trigger circuit generates the trigger circuit
2 output signal in response to transitions of the strobe signal across at least one of a first
3 voltage threshold and a second threshold voltage.

1 12. The circuit of claim 10, further comprising a comparator circuit that couples to
2 receive an output of the counter circuit and generate a comparator output in response to
3 detecting a pre-specified count value.

1 13. The circuit of claim 10, further comprising a first logic circuit that couples to
2 receive the clock signal and an enable signal of the second timing domain, wherein the
3 counter circuit couples to receive an output of the first logic circuit.

1 14. The circuit of claim 10, further comprising:
2 a second logic circuit that gates the trigger circuit output signal using the counter
3 circuit output; and
4 a delay element that couples to receive the gated trigger circuit output signal from
5 the second logic circuit and generate a delayed output signal for use in controlling the
6 data transfers.

1 15. The circuit of claim 10, wherein the data transfers include data of read operations
2 during which a component operating in the first timing domain reads information of a
3 component operating in the second timing domain.

1 16. A circuit comprising:
2 circuitry to perform hysteresis-based detection of a strobe signal that originates in
3 a first clock domain;
4 circuitry to control a count in response to information of the hysteresis-based
5 detection and information of a clock signal that originates in a second clock domain; and
6 circuitry to control data transfers between the first and second clock domains in
7 response to the count.

1 17. The circuit of claim 16, wherein the circuitry to perform hysteresis-based
2 detection generates an output signal in response to transitions of the strobe signal across
3 at least one of a first voltage threshold and a second threshold voltage.

1 18. The circuit of claim 16, wherein the circuitry to control a count drives a counter
2 in a first direction in response to an edge transition of the strobe signal and drives the
3 counter in a second direction in response to an edge transition of the clock signal.

1 19. The circuit of claim 16, wherein the circuitry to control data transfers generates a
2 delayed output signal by gating information of the hysteresis-based detection using
3 information of the count and couples the delayed output signal to control the data
4 transfers.

1 20. A system comprising:
2 a hysteresis circuit that couples to a strobe signal of a first clock domain;
3 a counter circuit that couples to a hysteresis circuit output and a clock signal of a
4 second clock domain;
5 a receiver that couples to the strobe signal and a data signal corresponding to the
6 strobe signal; and
7 a buffer that couples to the receiver, the counter circuit, and the clock signal.

1 21. The system of claim 20, wherein the hysteresis circuit generates an output in
2 response to transitions of the strobe signal across at least one of a first voltage threshold
3 and a second threshold voltage.

1 22. The system of claim 20, wherein the counter circuit decrements a counter in
2 response to a transition of the hysteresis circuit output and increments a counter in
3 response to a transition of the clock signal.

1 23. The system of claim 20, wherein the counter circuit generates a read-enable
2 signal in response to a pre-specified count value, the read-enable signal controlling data
3 transfers between the first and second clock domains using at least one of the receiver
4 and the buffer.

1 24. The system of claim 23, wherein the data transfers include read operations.

1 25. The system of claim 20, further comprising a memory component operating in
2 the first clock domain, wherein the memory component generates the strobe signal and
3 the data signal, wherein the receiver samples the data signal using the strobe signal.

1 26. The system of claim 20, further comprising an integrated circuit that couples to
2 the buffer and operates in the second clock domain, wherein the buffer synchronizes
3 transfer of sampled data of the data signal to the integrated circuit under control of at
4 least one of a counter circuit output signal and the clock signal.

1 27. The system of claim 20, further comprising a memory controller that couples to
2 the counter circuit and one or more of the hysteresis circuit, the receiver, and the buffer,
3 wherein the memory controller controls data transfers across the first and second clock
4 domains using a counter circuit output signal.

1 28. A method comprising:
2 detecting an edge-transition of a strobe signal using hysteresis, the strobe signal
3 originating in a first clock domain;
4 controlling a count in a first direction in response to the detected edge-transition;

5 controlling the count in a second direction in response to an edge-transition of a
6 clock signal, the clock signal originating in a second clock domain; and
7 interfacing data between the first and second clock domains in response to the
8 count.

1 29. The method of claim 28, further comprising gating the clock signal with an
2 enable signal of the second clock domain.

1 30. The method of claim 28, further comprising comparing the count to a pre-
2 specified count value and generating a read-enable signal in response to satisfaction of a
3 condition of the comparing.

1 31. The method of claim 30, further comprising:
2 gating a signal representing a detected edge-transition of the strobe signal with
3 the read-enable signal to generate a gated strobe signal; and
4 interfacing data in response to a state of a delayed version of the gated strobe
5 signal.

1 32. A circuit comprising:
2 means for detecting transitions of a strobe signal using hysteresis, the strobe
3 signal originating in a first timing domain;
4 means for controlling a count in response to a clock signal and information of the
5 hysteresis, the clock signal originating in a second timing domain;
6 means for interfacing data between the first and second clock domains in
7 response to the count.

1 33. Machine-readable media including information that represents an apparatus, the
2 represented apparatus comprising:
3 a trigger circuit to receive a strobe signal of a first timing domain; and
4 a counter circuit that counts in a first direction in response to a trigger circuit
5 output signal and counts in a second direction in response to a clock signal of a second
6 timing domain, wherein a counter circuit output signal gates the trigger circuit output
7 signal for use in controlling data transfers between the first and second timing domains.

1 34. The media of claim 33, wherein the trigger circuit generates the trigger circuit
2 output signal in response to transitions of the strobe signal across at least one of a first
3 voltage threshold and a second threshold voltage.

1 35. The media of claim 33, wherein the apparatus further comprises a comparator
2 circuit that couples to receive an output of the counter circuit and generate a comparator
3 output in response to detecting a pre-specified count value.

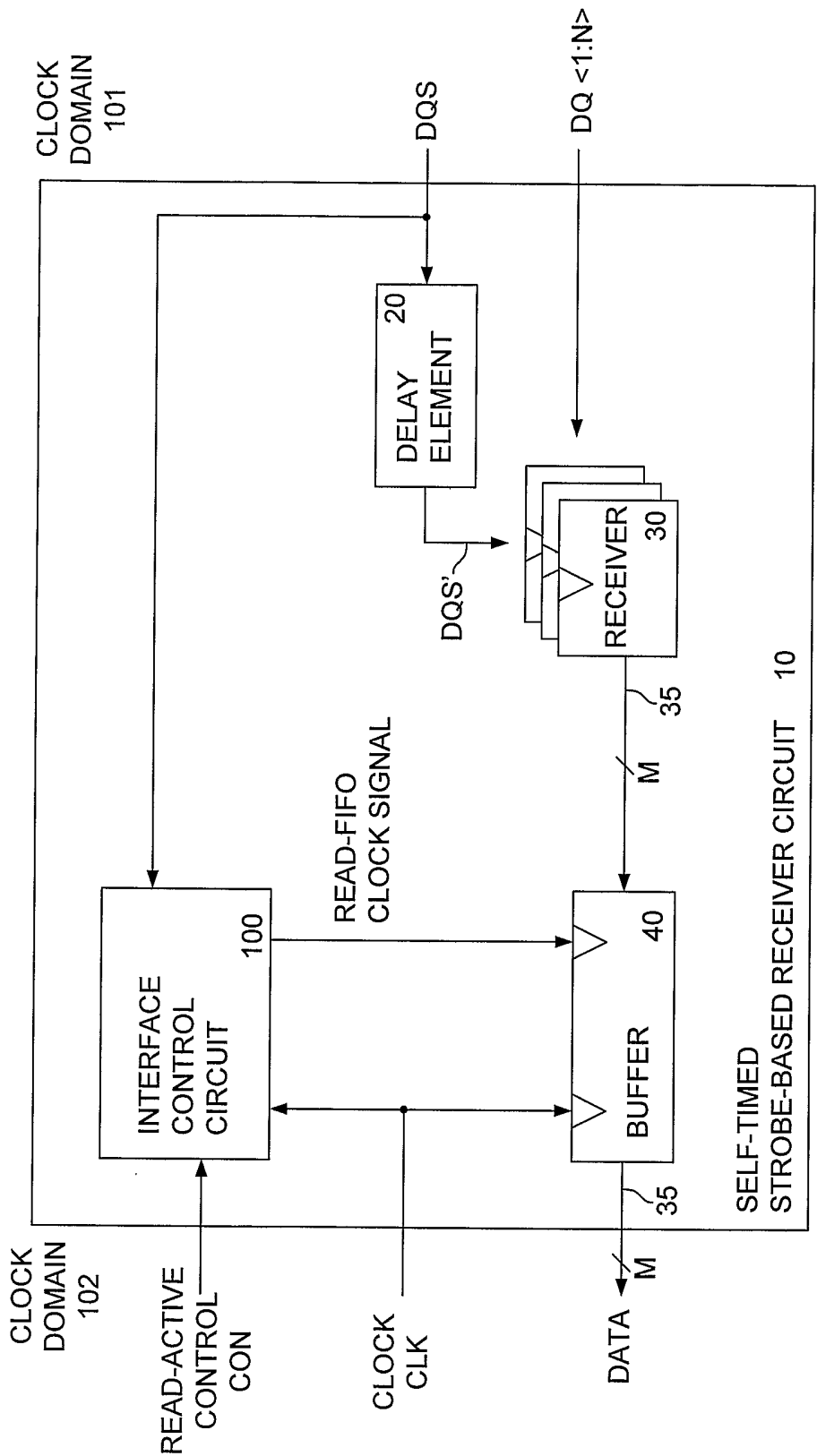


FIG. 1

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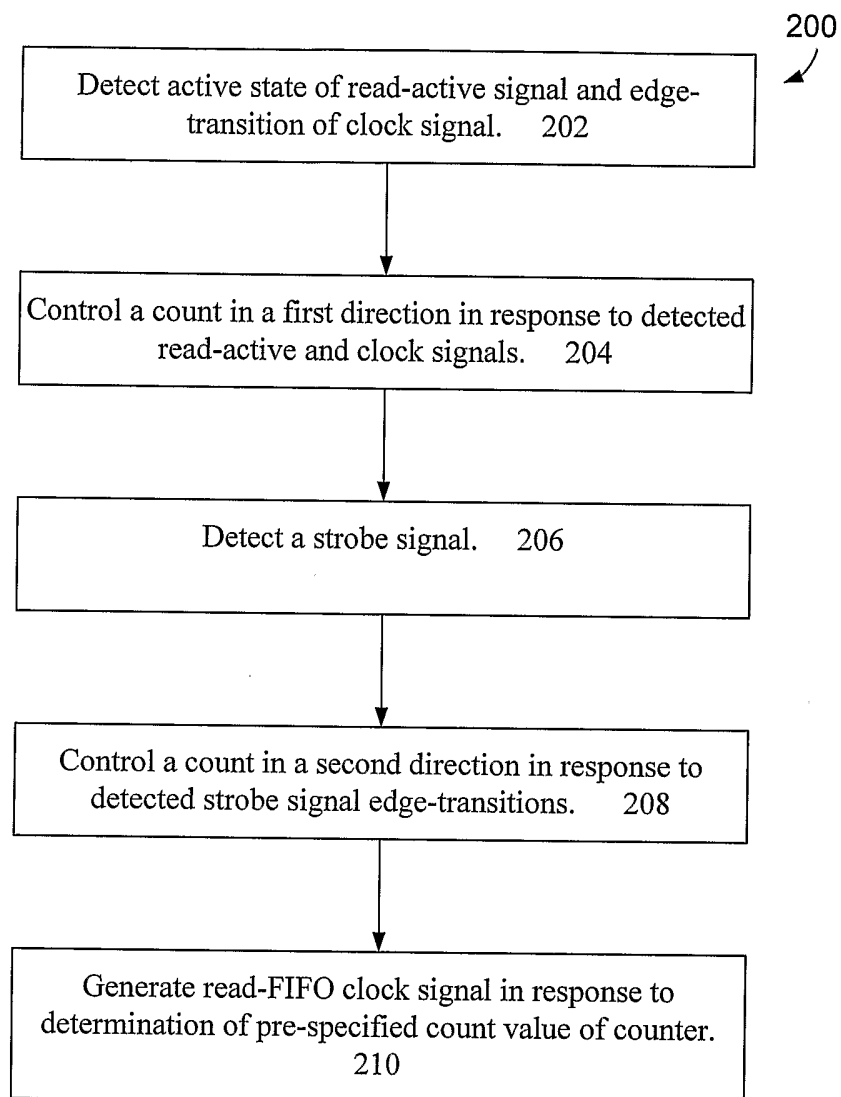


FIG. 2

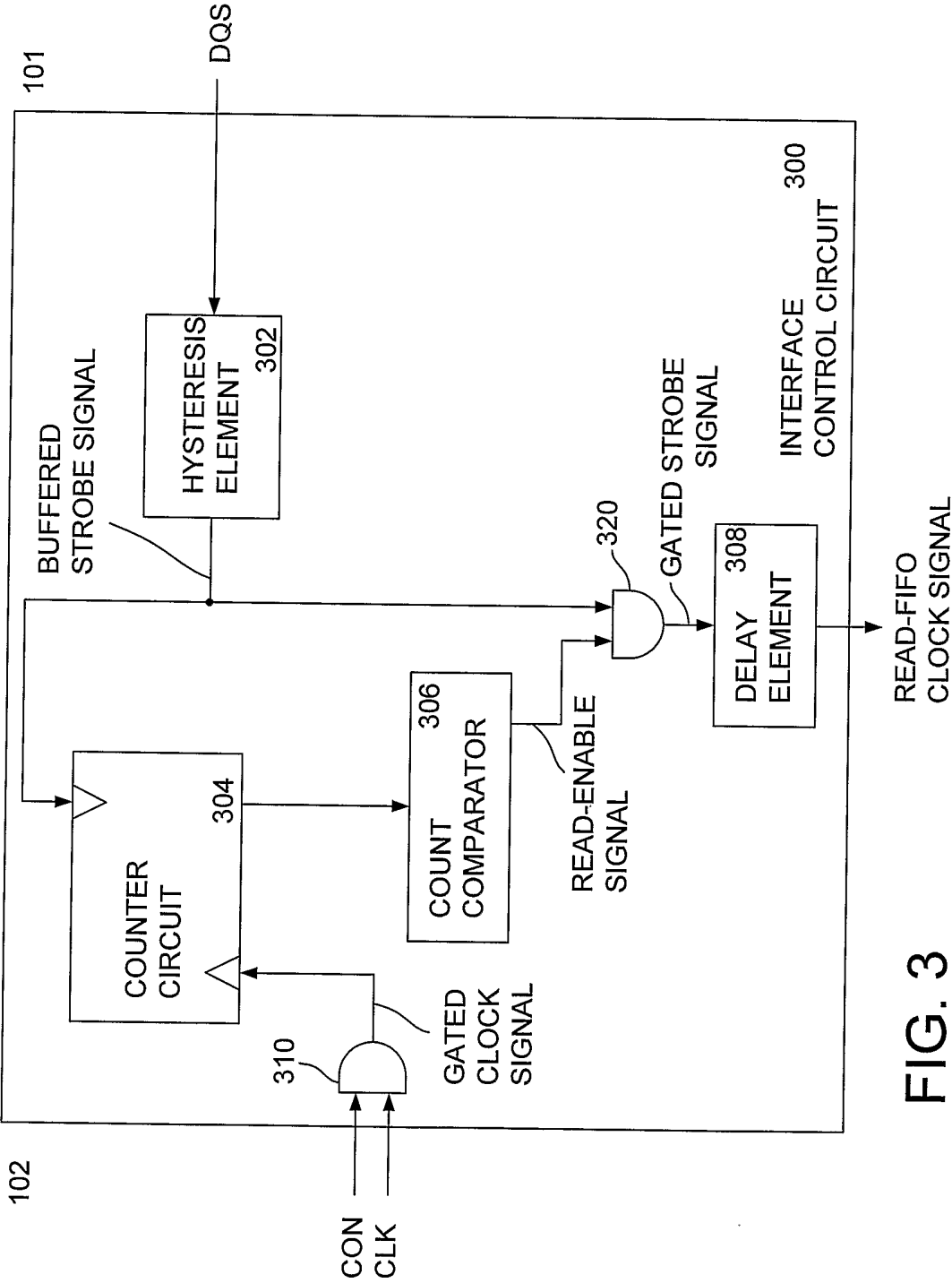


FIG. 3

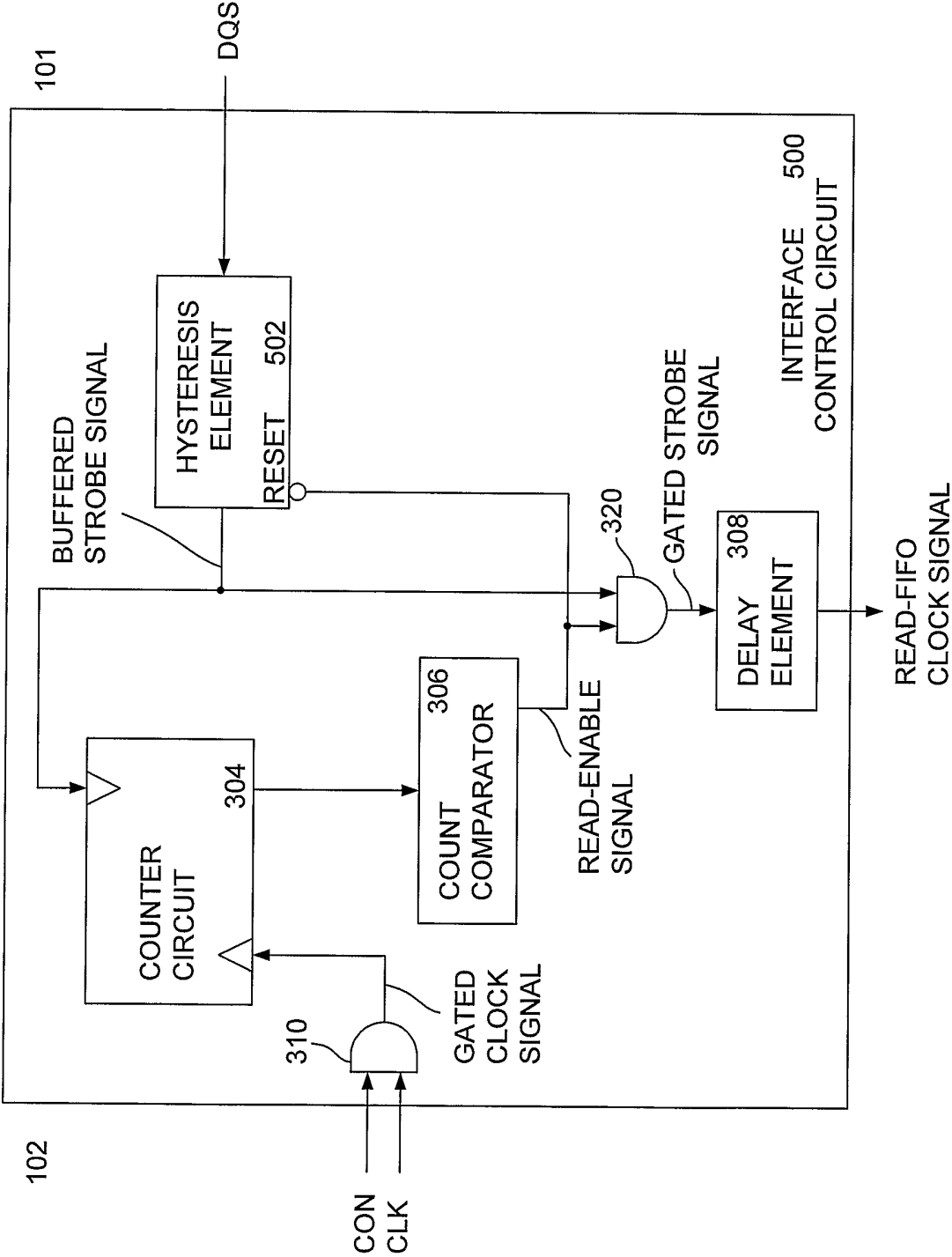


FIG. 5

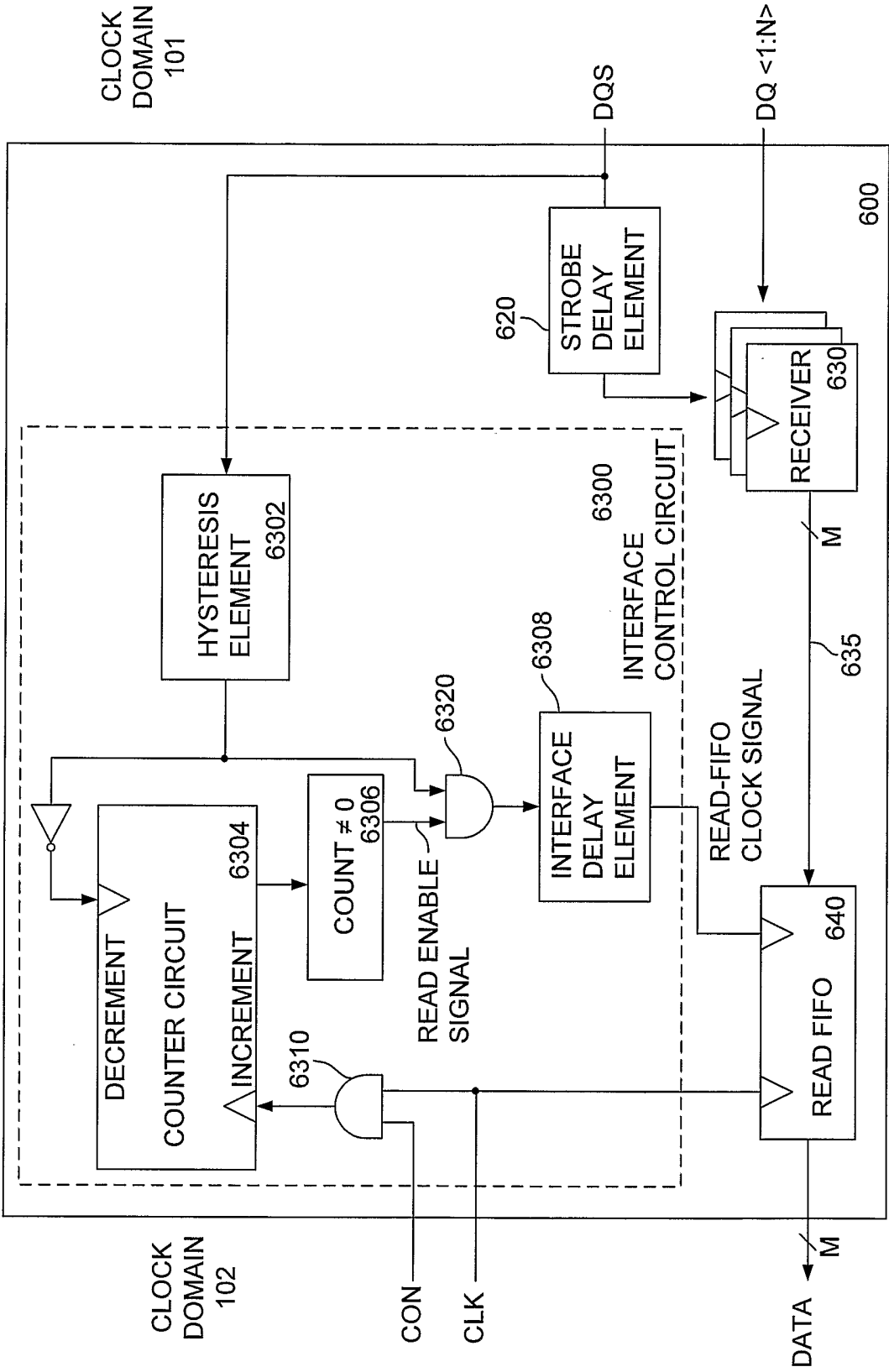


FIG. 6

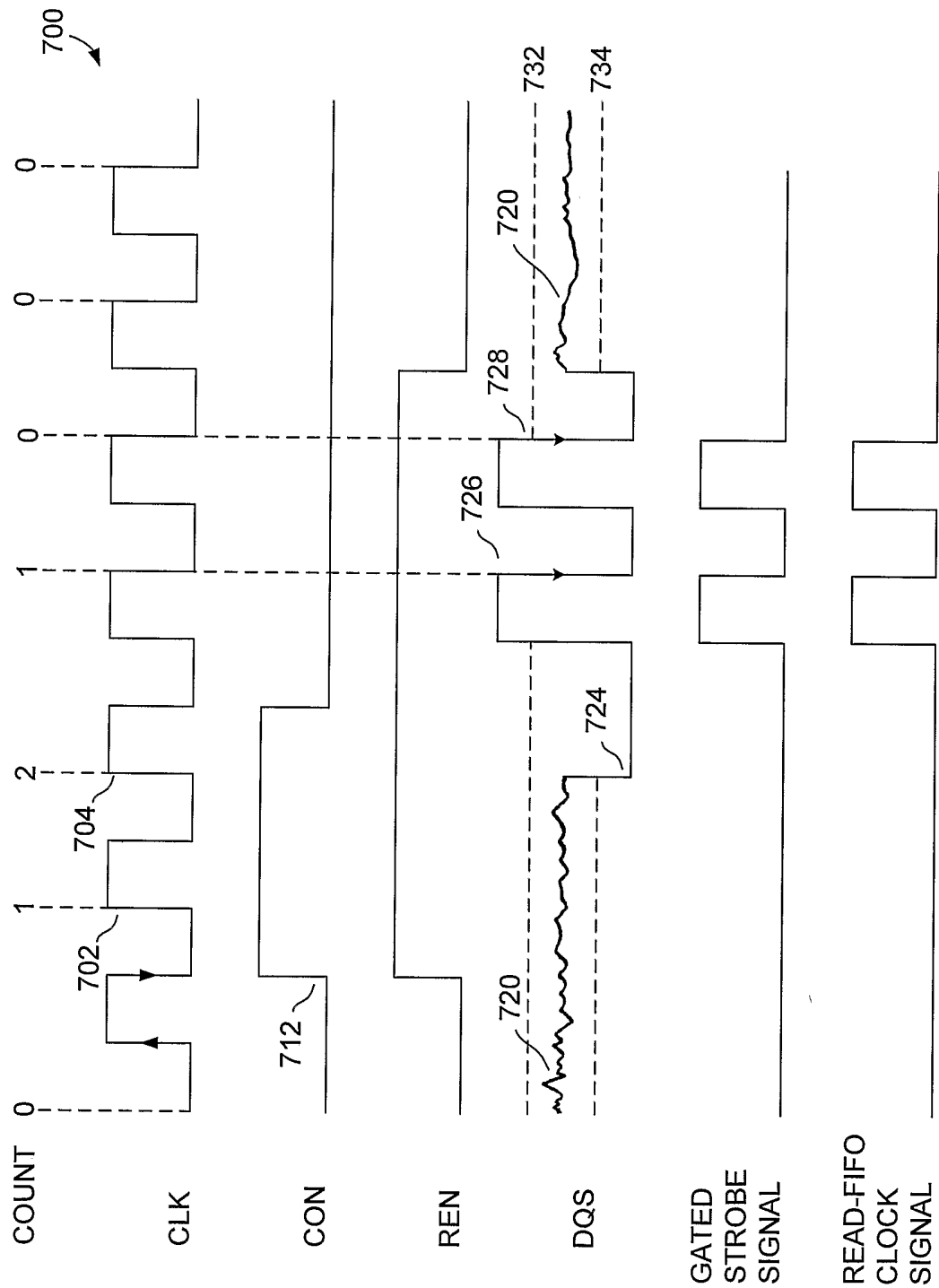


FIG. 7

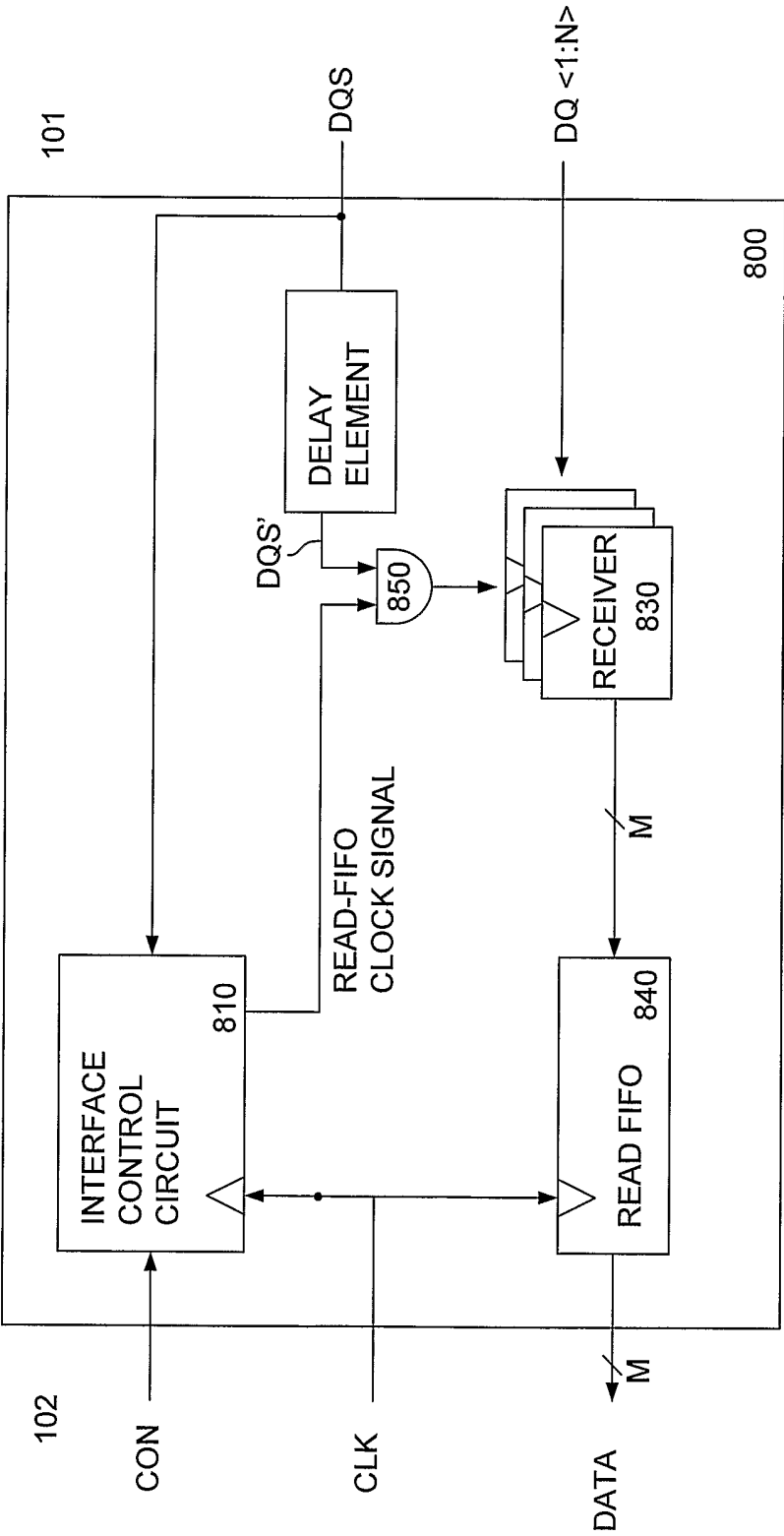


FIG. 8

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/US2006/008610

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

INV. G06F13/40 G06F13/38 G06F5/06

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

G06F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	AJANTA CHAKRABORTY: "Efficient Self-Timed Interfaces for Crossing Clock Domains" [Online] August 2003 (2003-08), , BHOPAL ENGINEERING COLLEGE , XP002386201 Retrieved from the Internet: URL: http://www.cs.ubc.ca/grads/resources/thesis/Nov03/Ajanta_Chakraborty.pdf [retrieved on 2006-06-20] the whole document	1-27, 29-35
X		28
Y	HOROWITZ, HILL: "The art of electronics (second Edition)" 1989, CAMBRIDGE , XP002386202 ISBN: 0-521-37095-7 [retrieved on 2006-06-20] page 231 - page 232	1-27, 29-35
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☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

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"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

20 June 2006

Date of mailing of the international search report

07/07/2006

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/US2006/008610

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	JENS MUTTERSBACH, THOMAS VILLIGER, WOLFGANG FICHTNER: "Practical Design of Globally-Asynchronous Locally-Synchronous Systems" SIXTH INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON ADVANCED RESEARCH IN ASYNCHRONOUS CIRCUITS AND SYSTEMS (ASYNC'00), [Online] 2000, XP002386194 Retrieved from the Internet: URL: http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/iel5/6759/18072/00836791.pdf?tp=&arnumber=836791&isnumber=18072 [retrieved on 2006-06-20] the whole document -----	1-35