

FIG. 1A

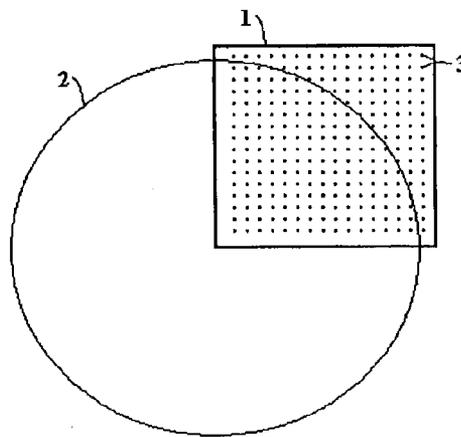


FIG. 1B

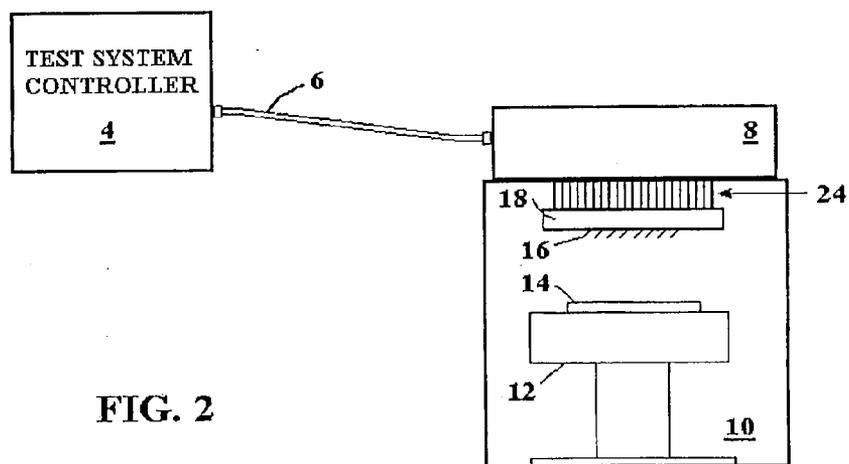


FIG. 2

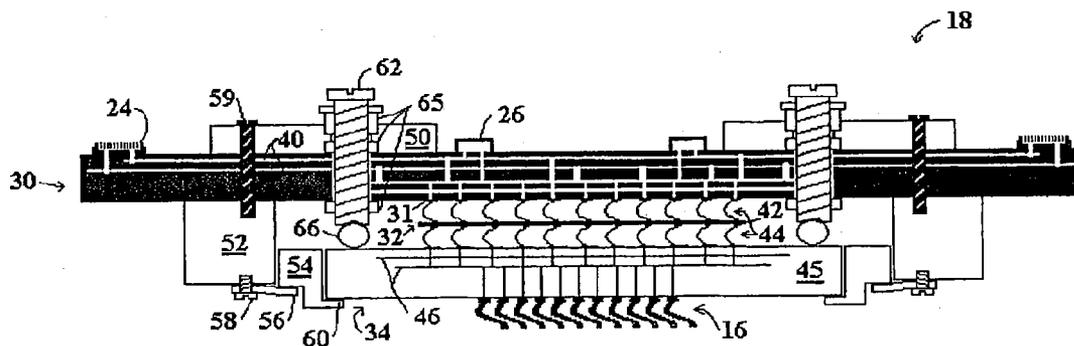


FIG. 3

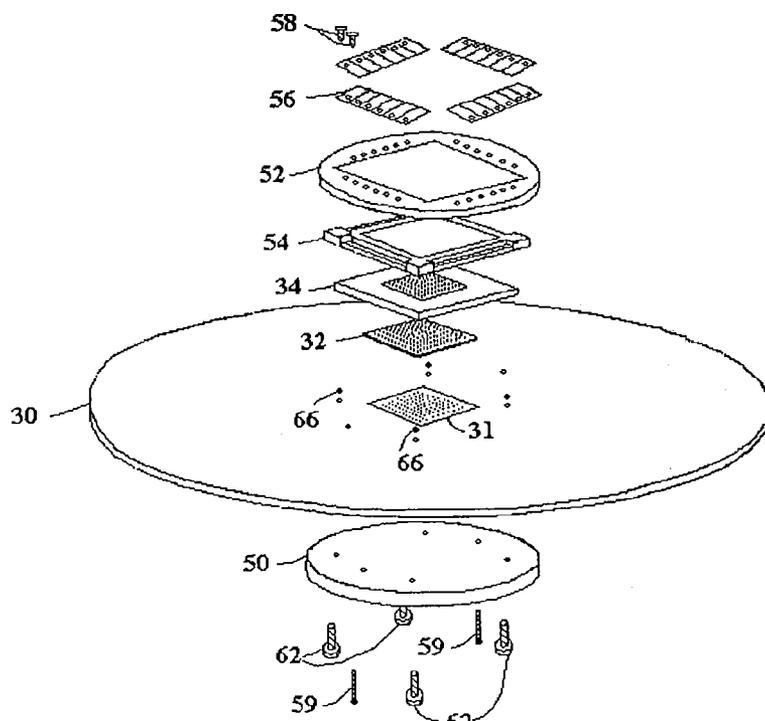


FIG. 4

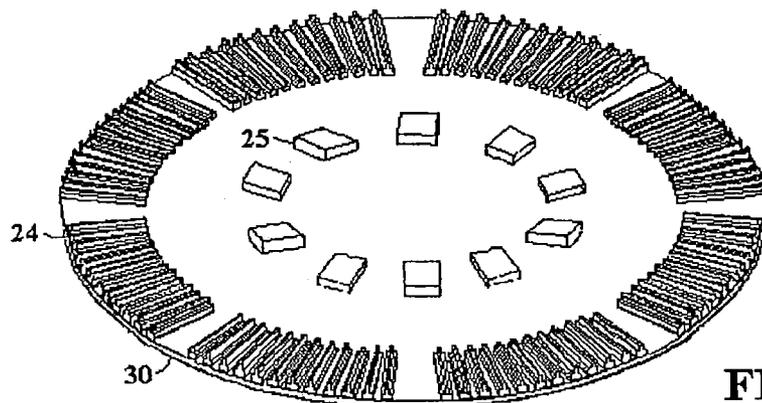


FIG. 5

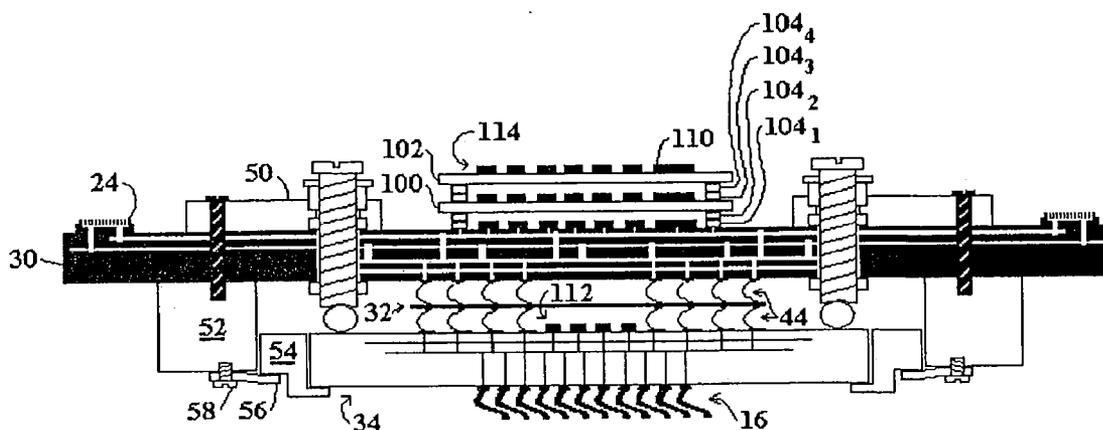


FIG. 6

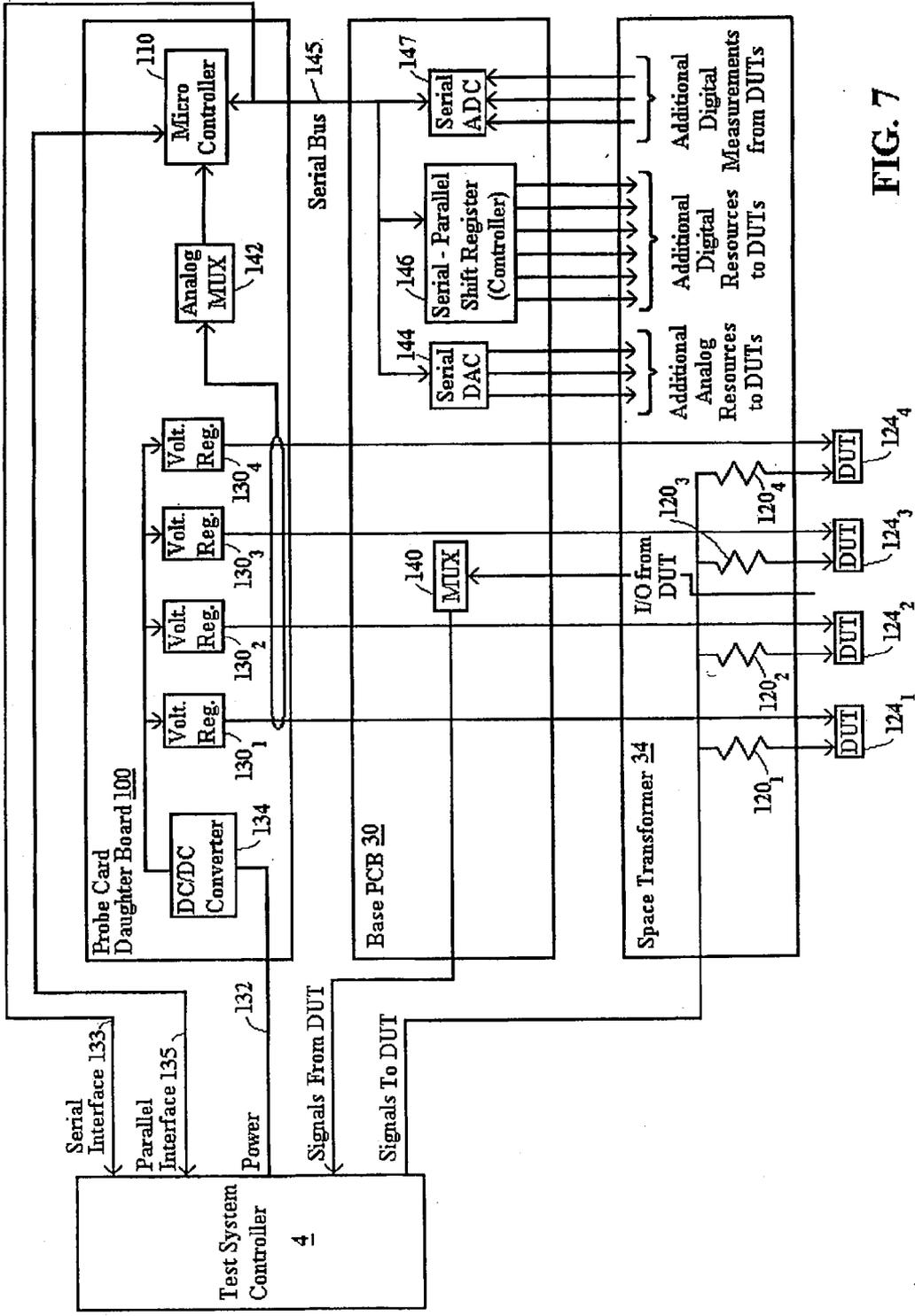


FIG. 7

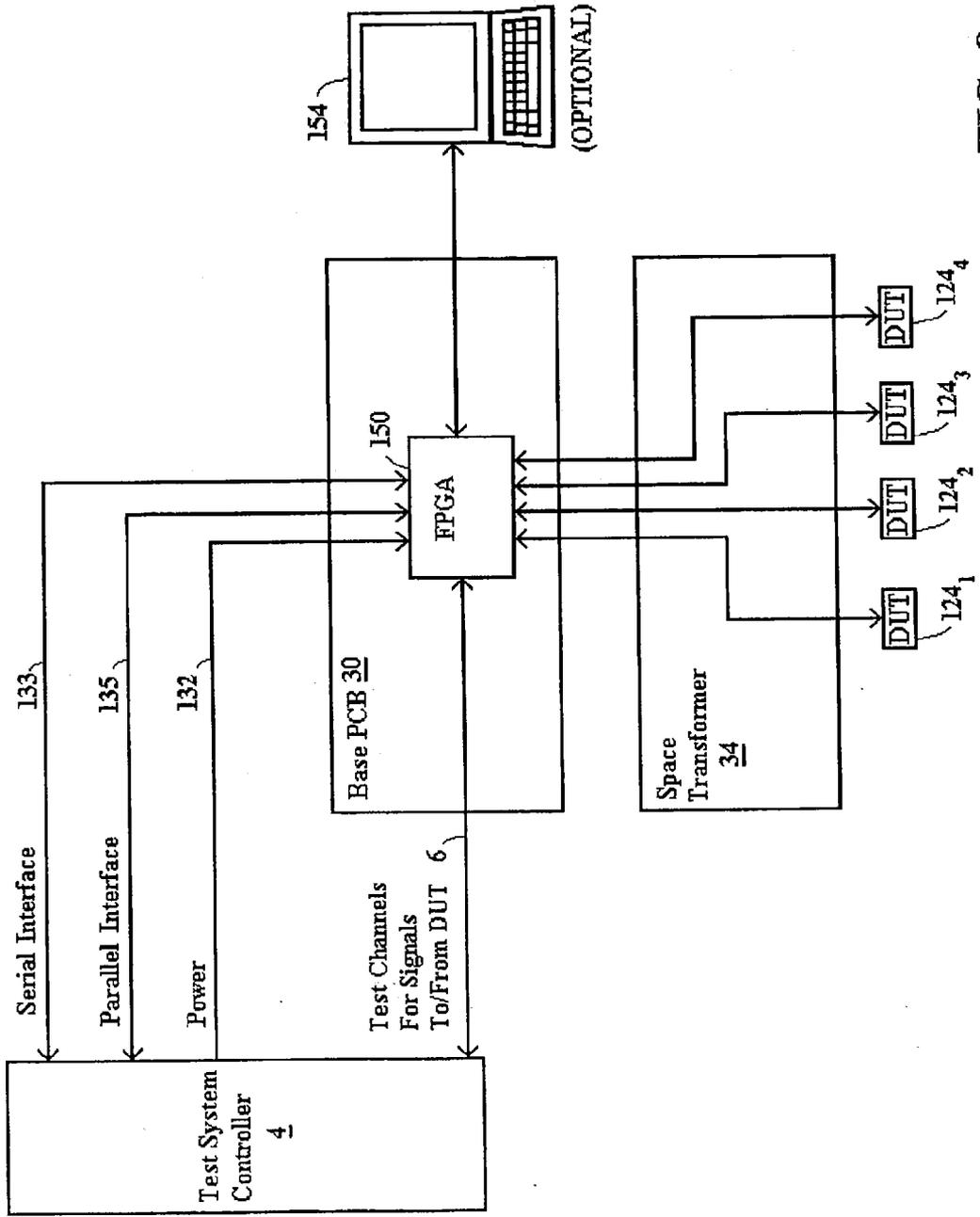


FIG. 8

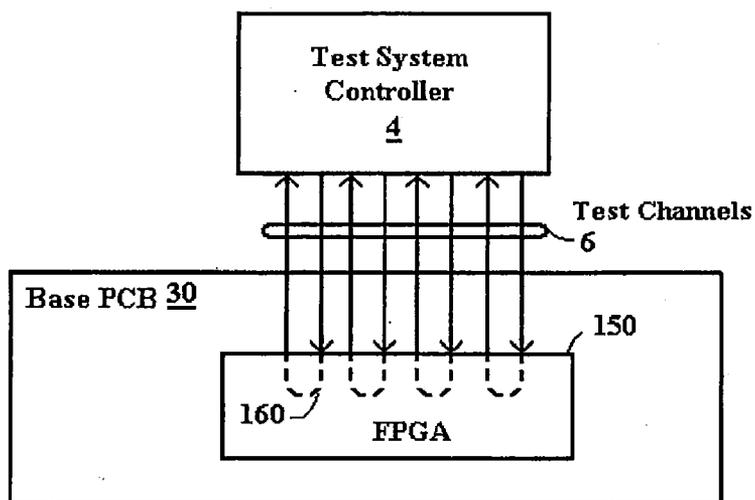


FIG. 9A

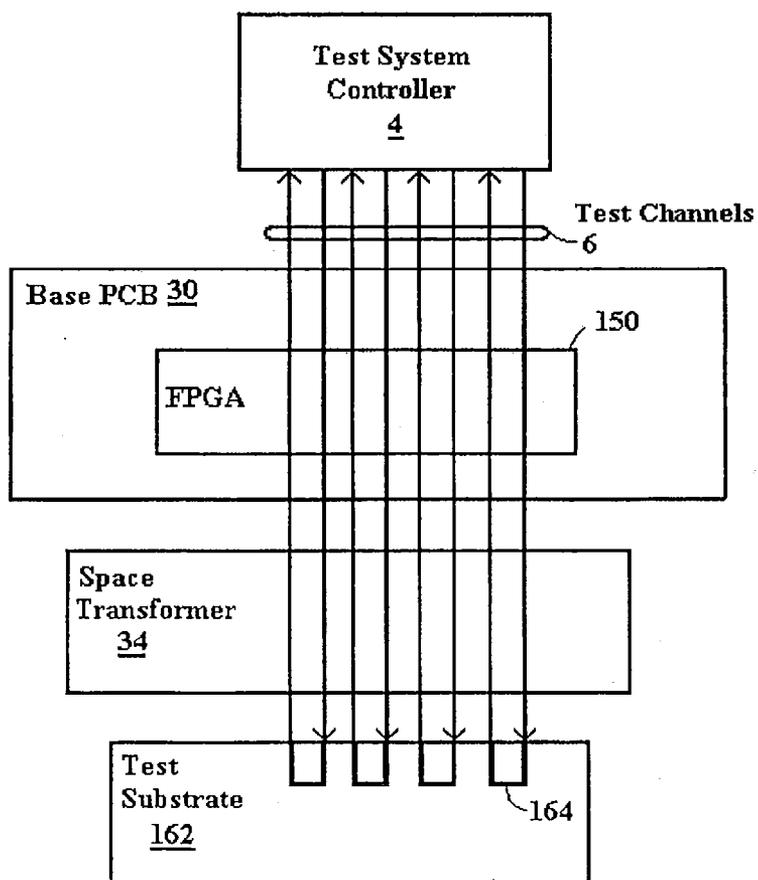


FIG. 9B

PROGRAMMABLE DEVICES TO ROUTE SIGNALS ON PROBE CARDS

BACKGROUND

[0001] 1. Technical Field

[0002] The present invention relates to routing signals through a probe card of a test system used to test integrated circuits (ICs) on a wafer.

[0003] 2. Related Art

[0004] A test system controller with increased test channels is a significant cost factor for a test system, as is a probe card with components to routing lines to accommodate a limited number of test system channels. Test system controllers have evolved to increase the number of channels and hence the number of devices that can be tested in parallel. Unfortunately, wafer size has typically outpaced the development of test system controllers, so available channels are typically inadequate for testing all Devices Under Test (DUTs) on a wafer at the same time. It is, thus, desirable to provide a probe card that allows increased test flexibility.

[0005] One conventional way to accommodate efficient testing of components on a wafer with a limited number of test channels, is to switch the test channels between different probe contacts on the probe card. Schemes used by probe card manufacturers for switching channels on a probe card include relays, analog switches and jumpers. One scheme that includes switches in a test system is described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,736,850 entitled "Configurable Probe Card For Automatic Test Equipment," by Dennis Legal, assigned to Teradyne, Inc. The benefit of switching channel paths is illustrated by FIGS. 1A-1B. In FIGS. 1B-1B, testing of a wafer is performed by moving a probe card 1 over four different quadrants of a wafer 2, two quadrants being shown. As illustrated in FIG. 1A, only a portion of the probe contacts 3 of the probe card 1 are over the wafer enabling testing. Hence, switching is used to reroute channels from the test probes not over the wafer to test probes over the wafer in the probe card 1 to accommodate testing in quadrants as shown. As shown in FIG. 1B, probe contacts that were over the wafer in FIG. 1A are no longer over the wafer, while some contacts not over the wafer in FIG. 1A have now been moved over the wafer in FIG. 1B. Thus, switching again can be performed between the step shown in FIG. 1A and the step of FIG. 1B to connect test system channels to test probes provided over the wafer. Drawbacks to conventional switching schemes on probe cards include: relays being notoriously unreliable, jumpers being usable only a few times before the bond pads will no longer take solder, and analog switches do not provide the signal swapping density often desired for flexibility.

[0006] Another conventional way to accommodate efficient testing of components on a wafer with a limited number of test channels, is to fan out a signal from a test system controller in the probe card to multiple transmission lines. In other words, test signals normally provided to a single DUT are fanned out to multiple DUTs in the probe card. This method can enable testing of all DUTs during a single touchdown with a limited number of test system channels, a condition suitable for burn in testing where during heating of the wafer multiple touch downs of the probe card to the wafer is sometimes impractical.

[0007] To better assure test integrity with fan out, increased circuitry is provided on the probe card to minimize the effect of a fault on one of the fan out lines. A fault (short circuit) in a component connected on a fanned out line will severely attenuate the test signal for all devices on the fanned out test system channel. U.S. Pat. No. 6,603,323 entitled "Closed-Grid Bus Architecture For Wafer Interconnect Structure," incorporated herein by reference, describes a solution by providing isolation resistors between the channel line branch points and probes to reduce attenuation caused by the faulty component. A further solution is provided in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/693,133, incorporated herein by reference, entitled "Isolation Buffers With Controlled Equal Time Delays" describing a system where isolation buffers are used between channel line branch points and probes, with circuitry included to assure the isolation buffers each provide a uniform delay.

[0008] FIG. 2 shows, for reference, a conventional test system block diagram. The test system includes a test system controller 4, or general purpose computer, connected by a communication cable 6 to a test head 8. The test system further includes a prober 10 made up of a stage 12 for mounting a wafer 14 being tested, the stage 12 being movable to contact the wafer 14 with probes 16 on a probe card 18. The prober 10 includes the probe card 18 supporting probes 16 which contact DUTs formed on the wafer 14.

[0009] In the test system, test data is generated by the test system controller 4 and transmitted through the communication cable 6, test head 8, probe card 18, probes 16 and ultimately to DUTs on the wafer 14. Test results are then provided from DUTs on the wafer back through the probe card 18 to the test head 8 for transmission back to the test system controller 4. Once testing is complete, the wafer is diced up to separate the DUTs.

[0010] Test data provided from the test system controller 4 is divided into the individual test channels, provided through the cable 6 and separated in the test head 8 so that each channel is carried to a separate one of the probes 16. The channels from the test head 8 are linked by connectors 24, such as flexible cable connectors, pogo pins or ZIF connectors to the probe card 18. The probe card 18 then links each channel to a separate one of the probes 16.

[0011] FIG. 3 shows a cross sectional view of components of a typical probe card 18. The probe card 18 is configured to provide both electrical pathways and mechanical support for the spring probes 16 that will directly contact the wafer. The probe card electrical pathways are provided through a printed circuit board (PCB) 30, an interposer 32, and a space transformer 34. Test data from the test head 8 is provided through flexible cable connectors 24 typically connected around the periphery of the PCB 30. Channel transmission lines 40 distribute signals from the connectors 24 horizontally in the PCB 30 to contact pads on the PCB 30 to match the routing pitch of pads on the space transformer 34. Switching elements 25 (including relays, analog switches, or jumpers) are provided on the PCB 30 in the path of at least some channel transmission lines 40 to enable for selectively routing the channel to a number of different paths on the PCB 30. The interposer 32 includes a substrate 42 with spring probe electrical contacts 44 disposed on both sides. The interposer 32 electrically connects individual pads 31 on the PCB 30 to pads forming a land grid array (LGA) on the

space transformer **34**. Traces **46** in a substrate **45** of the space transformer **34** distribute or “space transform” connections from the LGA to spring probes **16** configured in an array. The space transformer substrate **45** is typically constructed from either multi-layered ceramic or organic based laminates. The space transformer substrate **45** with embedded circuitry, probes and LGA is referred to as a probe head.

[0012] Mechanical support for the electrical components is provided by a back plate **50**, bracket (Probe Head Bracket) **52**, frame (Probe Head Stiffener Frame) **54**, leaf springs **56**, and leveling pins **62**. The back plate **50** is provided on one side of the PCB **30**, while the bracket **52** is provided on the other side and attached by screws **59**. The leaf springs **56** are attached by screws **58** to the bracket **52**. The leaf springs **56** extend to movably hold the frame **54** within the interior walls of the bracket **52**. The frame **54** then includes horizontal extensions **60** for supporting the space transformer **34** within its interior walls. The frame **54** surrounds the probe head and maintains a close tolerance to the bracket **52** such that lateral motion is limited.

[0013] Leveling pins **62** complete the mechanical support for the electrical elements and provide for leveling of the space transformer **34**. The leveling pins **62** are adjusted so that brass spheres **66** provide a point contact with the space transformer **34**. The spheres **66** contact outside the periphery of the LGA of the space transformer **34** to maintain isolation from electrical components. Leveling of the substrate is accomplished by precise adjustment of these spheres through the use of advancing screws, or leveling pins **62**. The leveling pins **62** are screwed through supports **65** in the back plate **50** and PCB **30**. Motion of the leveling pin screws **62** is opposed by leaf springs **56** so that spheres **66** are kept in contact with the space transformer **34**.

[0014] FIG. 4 shows an exploded assembly view of components of the probe card of FIG. 3. FIG. 4 shows attachment of the back plate **50**, PCB **30**, and bracket **52** using two screws **59**. Four leveling screws **62**, are provided through the back plate **50** and PCB **30** to contact four spheres **66** near the corners of the space transformer substrate **34**. The frame **54** is provided directly over the space transformer substrate **34**, the frame **54** fitting inside the bracket **52**. The leaf springs **56** are attached by screws **58** to the bracket **52**. Two screws **58** are shown for reference, although additional screws **58** (not shown) are provided around the entire periphery to attach the leaf springs.

[0015] FIG. 5 shows a perspective view of the opposing side of PCB **30** illustrating the arrangement of connectors **24** and switches **25** formed around the periphery of PCB **30**. In FIG. 5, the connectors **24** and switches **25** of the PCB **30** are facing down and not shown. In typical probe cards, the connectors **24** are located around the periphery of the probe card, and are configured to mate with connectors that are typically arranged in a similar fashion on the test head. The switches **25** are typically large components with a limited number of switching elements that occupy a considerable amount of space. The switches **25** are provided between the connectors **24** and pads on the opposing side of PCB **30**. The switches **25** are provided in spacing available if such spacing exists between the probe card and test head.

SUMMARY

[0016] In accordance with the present invention, a probe card is provided with a programmable IC, such as a Field Programmable Gate Array (FPGA), Programmable Logic Device (PLD), Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC) or other IC providing programmable routing from individual test signal channels to a number of different probes. Such programmable ICs provide a greater switching density and longer lifecycle than other conventional switches. The programmable IC would be more reliable than relays, would not be permanent like soldered jumper wires, and would provide much greater flexibility with less PCB real estate used than analog switches.

[0017] With programmability, the same PCB can be used for partial wafer testing to switch limited test system channels away from unused probes, as illustrated in a test environment with respect to FIGS. 1A-1B. Further with programmability, the same PCB can be used for many DUT designs by simply reprogramming the IC to route signals, power and ground to appropriate locations on the DUT as those locations vary. Programmable ICs further enable a single probe card to more effectively test devices with the same pad array, but having different pin-outs for different device options.

[0018] The programmable switching IC, as typical of FPGAs, would be electrically erasable and field re-programmable. Programming can be performed using the automatic test system controller attached to the probe card. Programming can also be performed by attaching a separate programming device connected by a cable to the probe card. Reprogrammability also allows test engineers to re-program as they are debugging a test program configured to send signals, power and ground to appropriate DUT contacts for testing.

[0019] A programmable switching IC, such as an FPGA, can replicate the current and voltage on a channel path between a DUT and a tester, but with buffering typically included in the programmable IC, delay will be introduced in measurements on the test channels. Accordingly, in one embodiment compensation is provided in the test measurements to eliminate the delay introduced. To characterize the delays, the programmable IC is first programmed so that a channel path is provided through the programmable IC that loops back to the test system controller. Measurements are then made by the test system controller to determine the delay introduced in the channel path by the programmable IC. With the delay introduced by the programmable IC now known, the programmable IC is reprogrammed to connect the channels directly to DUTs, and the known delay introduced is subtracted from the total measured delay to enable an accurate determination of overall delay introduced by the test system.

[0020] The programmable ICs can be provided on the PCB **30**, similar to the switches **25** shown in FIG. 5. With a limited size, the programmable ICs can also be provided on the surface of the interposer or space transformer. Further, in accordance with the present invention, the programmable ICs can be provided on daughter cards attached by connectors to the PCB **30** depending on space limitations.

[0021] In combination with using programmable switching ICs, in accordance with the present invention, further on

board features can be provided to enabling fan out of a test channel signal to multiple DUTs while limiting undesirable effects of fan out on test results. Details of on board features to enable fan out are described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/828,755, entitled "Intelligent Probe Card Architecture," filed Apr. 21, 2004 by Miller, et al., which is incorporated herein by reference.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0022] Further details of the present invention are explained with the help of the attached drawings in which:

[0023] FIGS. 1A-1B illustrate a probe card provided in two different positions of a wafer for testing the wafer in quadrants to illustrate use of the switches on the probe card;

[0024] FIG. 2 shows a block diagram of components of a conventional wafer test system;

[0025] FIG. 3 is a cross sectional view of a conventional probe card for the wafer test system of FIG. 1;

[0026] FIG. 4 is an exploded assembly view of components of the probe card of FIG. 3;

[0027] FIG. 5 is a perspective view of the PCB of FIG. 3 showing connectors for connecting to a test head, and switches;

[0028] FIG. 6 shows a cross sectional view of a probe card with on board components in accordance with the present invention;

[0029] FIG. 7 shows a circuit diagram for components of the probe card of FIG. 6;

[0030] FIG. 8 shows an alternative circuit diagram for components of the probe card of FIG. 6; and

[0031] FIGS. 9A-9B show test measurement configurations to enable characterization of delay introduced in a channel by a programmable IC, such as an FPGA.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0032] FIG. 6 shows a cross sectional view of a probe card, modified from the probe card configuration shown in FIG. 3 to include on board components, in accordance with the present invention, including daughter cards **100** and **102**. For convenience, components carried over from FIG. 3 to FIG. 6 are similarly labeled. The daughter cards are shown in FIG. 6 as connected by stacked connectors **104**₁₋₄. The stacked connectors are attached to opposing card surfaces, and include male and female mating connectors. For example connector **104**₁ is connected to the base PCB **30**, while connector **104**₂ is connected to daughter card **100**. The stacked connectors can be ZIF, pogo pin, or other type connectors suitable for interconnecting printed circuit boards. The connectors make the daughter cards removable so that different daughter cards can be easily installed, depending on the test environment. Although shown with removable connectors, in one embodiment, the daughter cards can be rigidly connected, such as by soldering. Further, although two daughter cards are shown, a single card or more than two cards can be used, depending on design requirements.

[0033] As illustrated, the daughter cards **100** and **102** are provided in available spacing between test system controller

interface connectors **24**. The test system controller could be a conventional Automatic Test Equipment (ATE) tester or a computer system used to control and configure the probe card, which can limit the height above the connectors **24** which the daughter cards can be stacked. In the configuration shown, an opening is provided in the back plate **50**, forming an outline area where the daughter cards **100** and **102** are connected to the base PCB **30**. The area of the probe card available for daughter cards is generally dictated by the test system controller connection and prober constraints. With limited horizontal spacing between test system controller interface connectors **24**, board area to accommodate additional circuitry for the architecture in accordance with the present invention is obtained by stacking additional daughter cards within the outline area of the probe card.

[0034] The stacked connectors **104**₁₋₄ provide spacing for discrete components **114** provided on the surface of each of the base PCB **30** and daughter cards **100** and **102**. The discrete components **114** can include bypass capacitors for power supply lines. In one embodiment, similar discrete components **112** are also provided on a surface of the space transformer **34**. To accommodate the discrete components **112**, a number of spring contacts **44** are removed from the interposer **32**, and rerouting of lines is provided in the space transformer **34**.

[0035] The daughter cards, such as **100** and **102** shown, may be redundant with the base PCB **30**, in that they carry the same discrete components on their surface. More redundant daughter cards can be simply added if more fan out of test channels is desired. Alternatively, the daughter cards can include differing components depending on test requirements and available space.

[0036] The daughter card **102** is shown to include a micro-controller **110** as a discrete component **114**. Although shown on daughter card **102**, similar micro-controllers can be provided on one or more of the daughter card **102**, daughter card **100**, base PCB **30**, and space transformer **34**. The micro-controller IC **110** may be any of a variety of programmable controllers including a microprocessor, digital signal processor, FPGA, PLD, ASIC or other controller that can be programmed/configured to provide test or control signals to electrical circuits.

[0037] The discrete components **114** on a daughter card or base PCB **30**, or components **112** on the space transformer can include a memory for use by the micro-controller **110**, or by another processor either on the probe card, or external to the probe card. The memory can be a random access memory (RAM) providing temporary storage, or a device providing more permanent storage such as a flash memory. To enable the micro-controller **110**, or other programmable IC to perform testing, the memory can be programmed to include test vectors or a test program. Similarly, the memory can include system configuration data.

[0038] Discrete components **114** in addition to the micro-controller **110** and memory can further include voltage regulators, relays, multiplexers, switches, D/A converters, A/D converters, shift registers, etc. Examples for the configuration of the discrete components are shown in the circuit diagrams of FIG. 7 and FIG. 8. Further details of these components, as well as other features included on the probe card in accordance with the present invention are described below.

A. DUT Signal Isolation

[0039] In one embodiment the space transformer **34** includes thin film resistors placed in series with each probe that provides a DUT input. Such thin film resistors **120₁₋₄**, providing signals from a single channel of test system controller **4** to inputs of DUTs **124₁₋₄** are illustrated in FIG. 7. As described previously, the architecture in accordance with the present invention uses embedded resistors, such as resistors **120₁₋₄**, in the space transformer **34** placed in series with each DUT input to isolate failed or shorted DUTs from good DUT inputs. The space transformer **34**, illustrated in FIG. 6, is typically a multi-layer ceramic substrate, or may be made up of a multi-layer organic substrate, with the thin film resistors **120₁₋₄** provided on one or more layers in the path of routing lines to the probes. Use of such DUT isolation resistors is described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,603,323, reference previously. Discrete or surface mounted resistors can also be used for this DUT isolation application.

[0040] In a further embodiment, as an alternative to series resistors, buffers are placed in series with each DUT input to isolate failed DUTs, as described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/693,133. Circuitry is then included on a the base PCB or daughter card to assure the delay provided in each line having a buffer is uniform, as described in the application Ser. No. 10/693,133.

B. DUT Power Isolation And Power Control

[0041] The system might be limited in the number of DUT power supplies it has available. When using a single power supply to drive multiple DUTs, it is desirable to isolate failed or shorted DUTs from affecting the other good devices connected to the same test system controller power supply. It is further desirable to control the power provided since a reduction of power can occur with each channel branch added.

[0042] The present architecture uses voltage regulators, current limiters or switches in series with each DUT power pin to isolate failed DUTs. Use of voltage regulators **130₁₋₄** from a power supply channel **132** of the test system controller **4** is illustrated in FIG. 7. Although shown provided from the test system controller **4**, power can likewise be provided from separate power supplies. The voltage regulators **130₁₋₄** have power supplied from the test system controller power supply line **132**, and distribute the signal power line to power multiple DUTs **124₁₋₄**. The voltage regulators **130₁₋₄** function to isolate failed DUTs from the good DUTs operating from the same voltage source by detecting current surges caused by a DUT with a short, or similar fault, and then cutting off or minimizing current to the DUT. Although shown as a voltage regulator in FIG. 7, the voltage regulators **130₁₋₄** can be replaced by switches or current limiters with similar feedback enabling isolation of a failed DUT.

[0043] In addition to power supply isolation, the present architecture provides for increasing power from a DUT power supply channel to enable a single power supply to drive more DUTs. To increase power, a DC/DC converter **134** is provided on daughter card **100** between the test system controller **4** and the DUT voltage regulators **130₁₋₄** to provide additional DUT power. The test system controller power supplies generally have a programmable voltage output with a fixed maximum current. Many new silicon

devices operate at lower voltages. Hence, the test system controller can be programmed to a higher voltage and the DC/DC converter **134** can regulate down to a lower voltage and higher current enabling the test system controller power supply to drive more DUTs.

[0044] To assure a precise voltage is provided to the test system; an embodiment of the present invention provides for calibration and monitoring of the voltage regulators **130₁₋₄**, as well as other probe card components. The micro-controller **110** is shown connected to monitor the output of voltage regulators **130₁₋₄** to determine when current is cut off due to a DUT failure. In addition to receiving a current signal, the micro-controller **110** of the probe card can be configured to calibrate the voltage regulators **130₁₋₄** to enable accurate control of the voltage provided from the regulators.

C. Probe Card Self Test

[0045] As parallelism for testing is provided by fan out in the probe card and test functionality is moved onto the probe card, it becomes desirable to include features on the probe card to insure probe card test function integrity without requiring additional test system controller functionality. In a conventional probe card, the test system controller can generally monitor each channel for integrity. When test system controller resources are distributed among several DUTs and components are added to isolate DUTs, probe card integrity checks made by the test system controller may no longer be valid checks of the test system.

[0046] Accordingly, in one embodiment shown in FIG. 7 the present architecture performs self testing of a combination of the micro-controller **110**, serial-parallel register (controller) **146**, multiplexers **140** and **142**, D/A converter **144**, A/D converter **147** and other circuit components used to assure integrity of the test functions added to the probe card. The modes of operation performed with the micro-controller **110**, or processing units on other daughter cards or the base PCB **30** provide for self test allowing the individual daughter card PCB assemblies and base PCB assembly to be tested.

[0047] The probe card can be configured, or include software in memory to provide for self-testing. Test results are reported from the probe card to the test system controller **4**, or other user interface. The micro-controller **110** can also include a programmable mode allowing the probe card to be reconfigured to allow probe card testing using standard probe card test metrology tools. One example of a standard metrology tool that may be used is the probeWoRx system manufactured by Applied Precision Inc. Use of a probe card with such programmable modes allows self test to be performed in the wafer production test environment.

D. Serial Bus Interface

[0048] To minimize the amount of routing lines and connector resources needed with use of the daughter cards, a serial bus **145** is provided with the present architecture. The micro-controller **110** in FIG. 7 provides a serial bus interface in one embodiment to control the serial bus **145** without additional area overhead. The serial bus **145** of the probe card allows for distribution of the probe card built in self test (BIST) features with a minimum number of interface wires. The serial bus is a key enabler of the probe card BIST functionality.

[0049] The serial interface bus **145** is provided between the daughter card **100** (and other daughter cards if used) and base PCB **30**. The serial bus enables communication between the base PCB **30** and daughter cards with a minimum number of connector and wiring resources. The serial to parallel converter, such as serial-parallel shift register **146** is provided on the base PCB **30** for distributing the serial bus signals to individual DUTs internal to the PCB **30** with a minimum amount of routing lines and connector resources.

[0050] Although shown as a simple serial-parallel shift register, the serial-parallel shifting device **146** may be a programmable controller such as a processor, DSP, FPGA, PLD, or micro-controller providing similar functionality to the micro-controller **110** on daughter card **100**, with a basic function of providing parallel to serial conversion. As a processor, the unit **146** can also be configured to perform self test functions, serve to provide programming or data to other processors on the daughter cards, and serve to provide a daisy chained connection of processors through the serial bus **145**.

[0051] As a processor, the serial/parallel controller unit **146** can further utilize compressed data formats, and can function to compress and decompress data and test vectors. For example, the serial/parallel controller unit **146** can be configured to receive BCD data from components not attached to the serial bus and convert the BCD data to serial data for subsequent distribution. Similar data compression and decompression can be provided by other programmable controllers or processors included on one of the daughter cards **100** and **102** or base PCB **30** of the probe card.

[0052] Similarly, the serial/parallel controller unit **146** configured as a processor can enable the probe card to support scan test features of the DUT. Programmable logic and memory chips can have a serial scan port to provide for scan testing. The scan port is typically used in manufacturing to provide for a built in self test (BIST) of the chip, with the scan port not later being connected to a package lead after manufacture. With a connection of a DUT scan port to the serial/parallel controller unit, or other scan test circuitry attached to the serial bus, scan test features of the DUT can be enabled by the daughter card either in conjunction with or separate from the test system controller **4**.

[0053] The serial bus interface **133** to the test system controller **4** is further shown in FIG. 7, providing for serial communication from the test system controller **4** with a minimal number of wiring and connector resources. With the serial interface **133**, the test system controller **4** can route control signals to the serial to parallel converter **146**, or to the micro-controller **110**. The serial interface **133** can be provided from the JTAG serial port of the test system controller **4** in one embodiment, with a scan register of the test system controller **4** used to provided serial control signals from the test system controller **4**.

[0054] Although the test system controller **4** is shown to have a serial interface **133** connection with the micro-controller **110**, other type communication interfaces can be provided, such as the parallel interface **135** shown. The additional interfaces can be used either in combination with the serial interface, or alone. Other types of interfaces can include RF, wireless, network, IR, or various connections as the test system controller **4** may have available. Although

shown connected only to the micro-controller **110**, interface **135** can be connected to other devices on the probe card either directly or over a bus.

[0055] The serial bus **145** can also be used to distribute analog signals to and from the DUTs. The present architecture includes a serial digital to analog converter **144** to convert serial signals to analog form and distribute the signals to multiple DUTs. The D/A converter **144** receives a test signal input through the serial bus **145** from the serial-parallel shift register **146**, although the signal could be provided from other components connected to the serial bus **145**. The D/A converter **144** can contain multiple D/A converters per package (typically 8, 16 or 32 per package) that are connected to the serial interface bus **145** for delivering analog voltages to the DUTs with a minimum wiring and PCB area. An A/D converter **147** is further included to receive analog signals from the DUTs and convert to a digital form to provide signals over the serial bus, preferably to the serial-parallel shift register. An analog multiplexer **142** is further provided to provide feedback from the outputs of the voltage regulators **130₁₋₄** to the micro-controller **110** to enable the micro-controller to assure the voltage regulators **130₁₋₄** are functioning properly for both self test, and test integrity assurance.

E. Programmable IC Routing

[0056] FIG. 8 shows an alternative circuit diagram to FIG. 7 for components that may be used on the probe card of FIG. 6. The circuit of FIG. 8 modifies FIG. 7 by using an FPGA **150** to replace the serial-parallel shift register **146**, as well as other discrete components shown on the base PCB **30** and daughtercard **100** of FIG. 7. Additionally, or alternatively, the FPGA **150**, or other programmable IC, can provide programmable routing to selectively direct individual test channels **6** to one of multiple probe contacts.

[0057] As described previously with FIG. 2-6, connectors **24** distribute signals from the test system controller **4** to connectors **24** of the base PCB **30**. Channel transmission lines **40** then distribute signals from the connectors **24** horizontally in the PCB **30** for connection to DUTs. In FIG. 8, the test channels **6** are routed through the FPGA **150** on the base PCB **30** to enable routing resources of the test system controller **4** to be programmably connectable to different DUTs. Similarly, power lines **132** are connected through the FPGA **150** for programmable connection to different DUTs. The FPGA **150** simply serves as a programmable switch matrix. Control signals from interface lines **133** and **135** are further provided either serially or directly from the test system controller **4** to provide control signals to the FPGA **150** and to program the FPGA **150**. Connection to the FPGA **150** for programming can further be made through a separate connection from a user interface (not shown) to the FPGA **150** allowing the FPGA **150** to be reprogrammed to reconfigure trace routing as desired. Although not shown, trace routing from the FPGA **150** can be branched as described with respect to FIG. 7 using components such as isolation resistors **120_{1-120₄}**, shown previously.

[0058] Conventionally, routing was only provided with some type of space transformation, either using the space transformer **34** or base PCB **30**. Once traces were manufactured, there was little flexibility in making changes. Some flexibility was built into probe cards using conventional

components such as relays, analog switches, or jumpers to provide rerouting of the traces. Relays are unreliable and jumpers are labor intensive and can only be reconnected a limited amount of times, as indicated previously. Like relays, analog switches are still large, and are limited to low frequency testing.

[0059] Using a programmable IC with internal switching, such as FPGA 150, provides a greater degree of flexibility, allowing the same probe card to be used for many designs by simply reprogramming the IC. The FPGA 150 provides significantly more switching capability than a relay or analog switch and is reliable. The FPGA 150 will operate at a higher frequency than the analog switch. Programming of the FPGA allows selective routing of the test channels 6 through switches to different DUTs. Programming of the FPGA further allows for rerouting of channels to different contacts within a DUT to accommodate DUTs having different pinnouts.

[0060] The FPGA 150 can be programmed or configured by a program such as Verilog. Programming or configuration of the FPGA 150 can be provided prior to installation of the FPGA 150 on the probe card. Programming or configuration of the FPGA 150 can further be performed after installation using the test system controller 4, or alternatively by using a user interface 154 connected directly to the probe card. The user interface 154 can be a CPU workstation, or other external control device used to reprogram the FPGA. Since the FPGA 150 can be programmed prior to installation and function without reprogramming, the user interface 154 is shown as optional.

[0061] Programming of the FPGA may be based on the design database or test bench of the DUT. A design database can include a listing of pin functions for different DUT designs that are expected to be tested in a given test system. The database can be updated to include additional DUT design descriptions as new DUTs are made available for testing. The FPGA can be reconfigured to facilitate specific tests on pinnouts required for DUTs on a wafer provided from the design database, or based on responses from the DUT changing pin functions real-time during testing. In one embodiment, the output of a Computer Aided Design (CAD) design system used to develop the DUT may be used to synthesize the test program loaded into the FPGA. The CAD design database can be used directly or post-processed by design or CAD tools used to design the probe card. A tool used to design the probe card is described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,539,531 entitled, "Method Of Designing, Fabricating, Testing And Interconnecting An IC To External Circuit Nodes," by Miller, et al., incorporated herein by reference. Thus, by using an FPGA in a probe card, a standard or semi-standard probe card may be used and customized by software prior to testing of a specific DUT design. The probe card FPGA may further be reprogrammed or reconfigured in real time for testing of specific DUT designs as described in more to follow.

[0062] Reprogrammability or reconfiguration of an FPGA allows test engineers to re-program as they are debugging a test program configured to send signals and power to appropriate DUT contacts for testing. Reprogramming of the FPGA during standard or production testing as part of the test cycle, further provides a way of adding flexibility to the test process. For example, the first set of tests might be done

with configuration A, and then the FPGA could be reconfigured to a new arrangement B that is designed to perform a second set of tests. This may coincide with changes to the DUT pin functions during test operations controlled either by on chip circuitry of the DUT or the test system control signals sent to the DUT. The FPGA can reassign test system pin connections from inactive DUT pins to newly active DUT pins, or simply reassign test system pin connections dedicated to a particular pin function to a DUT pin newly assigned to provide that function. Reconfiguration of the FPGA and DUT pin functions can occur real-time during testing without shutting down the test process to reprogram either the FPGA or the DUT pin functions.

[0063] The FPGA 150 is preferably located on the base PCB 150 to minimize the number of routing lines and connectors between a daughter card 132 and the base PCB 30, although it is conceivable the FPGA 150 could be included on daughter card 100. The FPGA or other similar programmable IC can likewise be provided on the interposer 32 or space transformer 34.

[0064] The FPGA is typically a digital device with integrated I/O buffers that adjust input and output voltages to prescribed limits. Depending on the quality of the buffers, buffering can prevent some parametric tests, including measurement of a small amount of leakage current, or measurement of specific voltages when a short circuit or open circuit is applied. Accordingly, in one embodiment of the present invention the programmable IC, such as an FPGA, is provided without I/O buffering, the programmable IC using transmission gates to provide programmable routing so that parametric tests can be performed.

[0065] Although the buffers of a programmable IC or FPGA can replicate the current and voltage received, they will introduce a delay in a test channel path. Accordingly, in one embodiment compensation is provided in the test measurements to eliminate the delay introduced. To characterize the delay, the programmable IC is first programmed so that a channel path is provided through the programmable IC that loops back to the test system controller. Measurements are then made by the test system to determine the delay introduced in the channel path by the programmable IC. With the delay introduced by the programmable IC now known, the programmable IC is reprogrammed to connect the channels directly to DUTs, and the known delay introduced is subtracted from the total measured delay to enable an accurate determination of overall delay introduced by the test system.

[0066] Test configurations used to determine the delay introduced in a channel by the programmable IC (shown as FPGA 150) are illustrated in FIGS. 9A-9B. With either the configuration of FIG. 9A or FIG. 9B, delay can be determined in the actual test environment to eliminate potential delays introduced by variables such as temperature changes. For example, to assure temperature remains the same, the programmable IC is put in the test environment for a time period allowing it to come up to temperature with the remaining test equipment before delay introduced by the programmable IC is measured.

[0067] FIG. 9A shows components from FIG. 8 used to determine delay through the FPGA 150 by looping a test signal back to test system 4 within the FPGA 150 as illustrated by dashed lines 160. To determine delay, the FPGA 150 is programmed to provide the loop back paths

160. With the a signal looped back to the test system 4 within the FPGA 150, the delays of both the input buffer and output buffer of the FPGA 150 are encountered. With test system channel delays already known, the delays introduced by the buffers of the FPGA 150 are measured and can be included in the determination of total test system delay. To later measure DUTs, the FPGA 150 is simply reprogrammed to provide signals directly to or from a DUT as illustrated in FIG. 7, while test system delays introduced can be subtracted out.

[0068] FIG. 9B shows an alternative configuration where a test substrate 162 is introduced to determine delay introduced by the test system. The test substrate 162 in the embodiment shown includes traces 164 for looping a test signal back to the test system 4. The system of FIG. 9B allows measurement of the complete delay from the test system 4 through the base PCB 30 and space transformer 34 as well as the delay introduced by the FPGA 150. Total delay is determined by subtracting known delay introduced by a trace 164 in the path and dividing by two to determine delay introduced by only one channel. The traces 164 can be arranged to replicate the channel paths when DUTs are later introduced so that the FPGA will not require reprogramming for DUT measurement after measurements to determine delay. The test substrate 162 is simply removed and replaced with a substrate supporting DUTs.

[0069] Although the present invention has been described above with particularity, this was merely to teach one of ordinary skill in the art how to make and use the invention. Many additional modifications will fall within the scope of the invention, as that scope is defined by the following claims.

1-20. (canceled)

21. A probe card assembly comprising a programmable IC, the programmable IC being programmable to connect selectively individual test channels to different ones of a plurality of test probes.

22. The probe card assembly of claim 1, wherein the programmable IC comprises a Field Programmable Gate Array (FPGA).

23. The probe card assembly of claim 2, wherein the FPGA does not include I/O buffering.

24. The probe card assembly of claim 1, wherein the programmable IC is programmable to configure selectively connections between ones of the test channels and ones of the test probes to be any of a plurality of different connection patterns.

25. The probe card assembly of claim 1, wherein the programmable IC is programmable to connect selectively ones of the test channels and ones of the test probes in a first pattern and to reconnect selectively ones of the test channels and ones of the test probes in a second pattern that is different than the first pattern.

26. A probe card assembly comprising:

a programmable IC to connect individual test channels to one of a plurality of test probes,

wherein the programmable IC comprises a Field Programmable Gate Array (FPGA), and

wherein a test program loaded into the FPGA is provided from a CAD design system used to develop the components on a wafer.

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