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- (71) Applicant: PULSENT CORPORATION [US/US]; 1455
McCarthy Boulevard, Milpitas, CA 95035 (US).
- (72) Inventor: PRAKASH, Adityo; 600 Marlin Court, Red-
wood Shores, CA 95035 (US).
- (74) Agents: ALBERT, Philip, H. et al.; Townsend and
Townsend and Crew LLP, Two Embarcadero Center, 8th
floor, San Francisco, CA 94111-3834 (US).

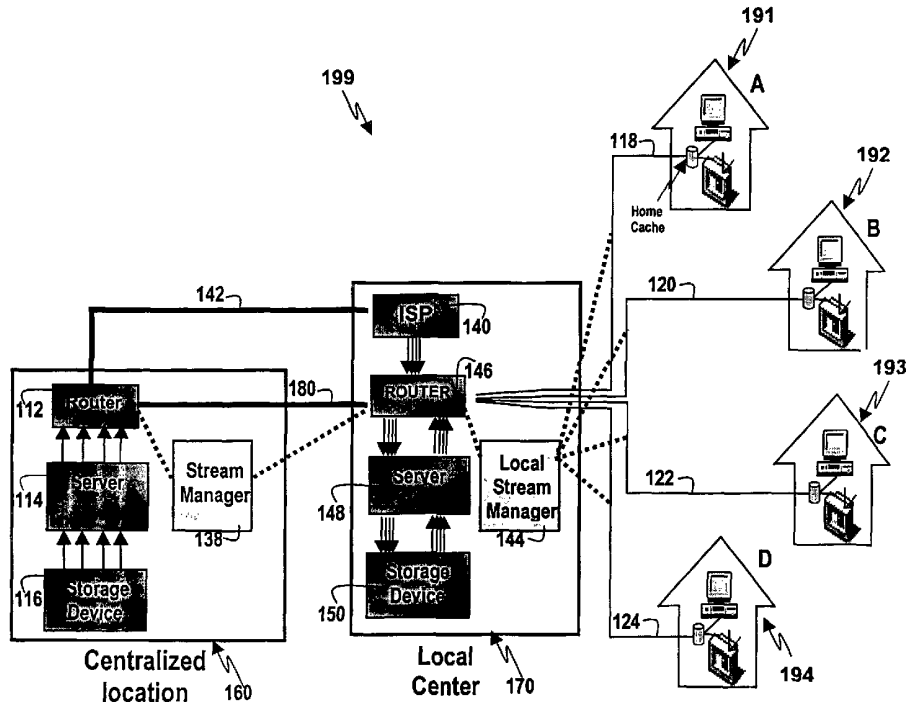
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(54) Title: METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR A HYBRID COMMUNICATION NETWORK



(57) Abstract: The utilization of a non-QOS guaranteed network (142) is envisioned within a communication network (199) to increase bandwidth when necessary. In this system two locations are connected by two separate communications networks (142, 180), one QOS guaranteed network (180) and one non-QOS guaranteed packet based network (142). A smart buffering system integrates the two networks (142, 180).



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For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR A HYBRID COMMUNICATION NETWORK

CROSS-REFERENCES TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

5 The present disclosure claims priority from U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/253,961, filed November 29, 2000, and entitled "Hybrid Star-Overflow Network," the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference for all purposes.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

10 The present invention relates to broadband content distribution networks utilizing Asynchronous Transfer Mode (ATM) or Internet Protocol (IP) or Wireless protocol backbone transport and a system of coordinated servers, storage devices, caching devices and a content stream manager.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

15 The present invention relates to electronic communication systems. More specifically, the present invention relates to a communication network system that utilizes additional network connections when necessary to increase bandwidth.

20 Many networks exist to carry data having various bandwidth requirements. One such network is a global internetwork of networks known as the "Internet". In the early days of networking, data was usually in the form of text and small data sets. The transfer of large, megabyte data sets was known, but typically such large data sets were few and far between and their recipient was content with receiving the data set over a
25 long period of time if the network bandwidth was such that the transmission would take a long period of time.

30 In the current environment, with the explosion in popularity of networking for entertainment, commerce and other new uses (as well as the old uses), many users expect to get large bandwidth data sets and they expect to get it in real-time, or near real-time.

 Data transmission may be guaranteed for Quality of Service (QOS). One way to be able to guarantee QOS is to lease an entire line connecting two locations or

lease a certain amount of bandwidth of a line. This in effect guarantees that the bandwidth in a leased line or the amount of leased bandwidth will be available for transmission at all times enabling the user to guarantee a certain average data transmission rate and guarantee QOS. Other ways of putting priority include the, so called, 'diff serve' capability where each packet in the network is given a priority of transmission. This process however does not guarantee transmission on time, only that the higher priority data packets will reach their destinations faster than the lower priority packets.

Sometimes sustained data rates higher than what the QOS-guaranteed connection can support is needed. Often non-QOS guaranteed connections exist between a transmitting and a receiving center that can be used in conjunction with the QOS guaranteed network connection according to the current invention to increase sustained data rates.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In one embodiment of a communication network system according to the present invention, a non-QOS guaranteed network is utilized when necessary to increase bandwidth. The best mode of the present invention provides a communication network system, comprising: one or more transmitting locations able to store and serve data to one or more receiving centers located as near as possible to a plurality of final destination where this data will be ultimately received. Two data network connections, one QOS guaranteed QOS guaranteed and one non-QOS guaranteed packet based network connection, connect the regional and the receiving centers. A stream manager manages and distributes load on the data networks and monitors buffer depths at both the transmitting location and the receiving center. When additional bandwidth is needed for data transfer, the non-QOS guaranteed network is utilized, in addition to the QOS guaranteed network. In one embodiment, the stream manager redirects the lower priority traffic to the non QOS guaranteed packet based network while transferring the higher priority traffic through the QOS guaranteed network. The buffering system at the receiving center is able to hold the data until all of the parts necessary for reconstructing the data are received through both available networks. The buffer can subsequently reconstruct the data.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

FIG. 1A illustrates the basic architecture of the network

FIG. 1B illustrates an exemplary buffer depth and watermarks

FIG. 1C illustrates the network in the best mode

5 FIG. 2 A-B illustrate the function of the receiving stream manager

FIG. 3 A-C illustrate the function of the stream manager at the transmitting location

DESCRIPTION OF THE SPECIFIC EMBODIMENTS

As shown in the exemplary drawings wherein like reference numerals
10 indicate like or corresponding elements among the figures, the present invention includes a communication network system. The system utilizes a hybrid network transmission method when necessary to increase bandwidth.

As mentioned previously, communication systems exhibit limited
bandwidth capability. Consequently, it would be desirable to provide a communication
15 network system with increased bandwidth capabilities.

Fig. 1A illustrates the basic structure of a hybrid network designed to
increase available bandwidth whenever necessary. The system includes a QOS
guaranteed network 102 between a transmitting location 100 and a receiving center 101,
which receives data streams from the transmitting location. The two locations 100 and
20 101 are also connected through a separate non-QOS guaranteed packet based network
103. Although a single direct network 103 is shown for the purposes of illustration, the
non-QOS guaranteed network may be a part of a large network with multiple nodes.
Similarly, the QOS guaranteed connection may not be a direct network. Instead the QOS
guaranteed network may also be a part of a network where a portion of the bandwidth is
25 leased instead of the entire network.

Data is coming into the transmitting location and being served from it at
variable rates. Load on the two data networks connecting the transmitting location and
the receiving location is managed by a stream manager 100a. The stream manager is
responsible for network connection traffic to the QOS guaranteed and the non-QOS
30 guaranteed networks by monitoring buffer level at the transmitting location 100 and the
receiving data center 101 either individually or in tandem. An exemplary buffer depth is
shown in Fig. 1B which shows a buffer full level 104, a high watermark 105 which is a
high threshold level, a low water mark 106 which is a low threshold level and a buffer
empty level 107. In one embodiment of the present invention, when the buffer 101a at

the receiving center is below a certain low watermark, the stream manager utilizes the non-QOS guaranteed network to transfer data to the receiving center in addition to the QOS guaranteed network until the buffer is filled above a high watermark. Similarly, when the buffer 100b at the transmitting location is above a high watermark, the stream manager utilizes the non-QOS guaranteed network to transfer data to the receiving center in addition to using the QOS guaranteed network. The stream manager utilizes the non-QOS guaranteed link in situations where the receiving center buffer needs to be filled or the transmitting center buffer needs to be drained in a time critical manner. The buffer at the receiving center as well the transmitting location is able to hold the data packets until all of the packets necessary for reconstructing the data is received. The buffer is then able to reconstruct the data.

In one embodiment of the present invention, the stream manager balances load on the two networks by prioritizing different types of traffic and redirecting traffic through the different network connections based upon priority. In another embodiment however, even high priority traffic is sent through the non-QOS guaranteed network. In the current embodiment the non-QOS guaranteed network is an IP based network. However in other embodiments both networks may be utilize other network transmission protocols. Regardless of the specific network or the network protocol utilized, the basic architecture involves having two transmission networks one QOS guaranteed and QOS guaranteed network while the other non-QOS guaranteed network which may or may not have QOS guarantee.

Referring now to Fig. 1C, an exemplary communication network system 199 in accordance with the present invention is illustrated. The system includes a transmitting location 160 connected to a receiving center 170 located closer to the end user final destination. The receiving center is connected to the transmitting location via a set of main data lines 180, which is a private packet-based network connection utilizing mostly RTP or UDP transfer protocols able to provide QOS guaranteed data transmission.

In addition to the main data lines, the receiving center will be coupled to an internet service provider (ISP) 140 networking the receiving center to the transmitting location through an IP based network 142 distinct from the main data network 180. The connection 142 is the embodiment of the non-QOS guaranteed connection. The said IP based data line will connect the ISP 140 to the router 112 at the transmitting location. The ISP 140 is also connected to the router 146 at the receiving center. Four final destination, 191, 192, 193 and 194, are shown for purposes of illustration; however, more

or fewer final destination may be a part of the present system. Although an IP based network is envisioned in the current embodiment, in other embodiments the non-QOS guaranteed data network may be a different type of communications network such as a wireless network. In a third embodiment the non-QOS guaranteed network may be a digital cable network.

The transmitting location houses equipments necessary for transmission of real time and stored data. This equipment can include a router 112, a server 114, and a storage device 116 and a stream manager 138. The server 114 may contain the buffer where data is temporarily held which is the embodiment of the transmitting location buffer. Although a single router, server and storage device is shown for the purposes of illustration, a plurality of said routers, servers and storage devices may be a part of the present system. Although in the best mode of the present invention, it is envisioned that the main transmission networks will be private packet based networks such as DSL, in another embodiment of the invention, the transmitting location may be a cable head end. In yet another embodiment the transmitting location may be a satellite transmission center. In each of the above embodiments the specific equipment housed at the transmitting location may differ. However the principle of utilization of a non-QOS guaranteed network will remain valid.

The receiving center 170 will house a set of equipments for storage and transmission, which may include one or more of each of a router 146, server 148, and a storage device 150. The server 148 contains a buffer where data is temporarily held. In addition, the receiving center contains a receiving stream manager 144. The capabilities of the receiving stream manager include but are not limited to:

- 1) Detection of the buffer level at the receiving center data server.
- 2) Support data priorities.
- 3) The ability to send request to the transmitting stream manager to increase data rate by utilizing 103.
- 4) The ability to send request to the transmitting stream manager to prioritize specific data.

The capabilities of the stream manager 138 located at the transmitting location include but are not limited to:

- 5) Detection of the buffer level at the regional center data server.
- 6) Increasing data rate utilizing 103 when the buffer is at the high water mark.

- 7) The ability to respond to 3 above.
- 8) The ability to respond to 4 above.
- 9) Ability to keep track of buffer level at the receiving center.
- 10) Support data priorities.

5 11) The ability to prioritize the delivery of content located at the transmitting location.

 12) The ability to redirect lower priority content to the non-QOS guaranteed network connection 103.

10 13) The ability to stop redirecting traffic to 103 when need for higher data rate has dropped based on buffer levels at both transmitting and receiving locations.

 Figure 2A and 2B illustrate the role of the receiving stream manager 144 in the method of utilizing the non-QOS guaranteed data lines in the exemplary system. As shown in the FIG. 2A, the receiving stream manager monitors the buffer level at the receiving center (202). If the buffer level falls below a preset watermark (204), the receiving stream manager sends request to the stream manager to increase the data transmission rate (206) otherwise no request is sent (208). When the buffer level is above a high watermark, the receiving stream manager sends request to the stream manager at the receiving center to resume normal rate of data transmission (210).

20 As illustrated in Fig. 2B, in another embodiment, the receiving stream manager continuously monitors the contents requested by individual viewing locations (222). As illustrated in steps 224 and 226, if demand for certain contents suddenly increases and this content is not stored at the receiving center storage device 150, the receiving stream manager 144 sends a request to the stream manager 138 coupled to the transmitting location to prioritize the streaming of that content in order to continue uninterrupted streaming to the final destination. Otherwise normal content streaming continues through the main data lines (228). When the demand for the content has dropped, the receiving stream manager sends request to the stream manager at the transmitting location to stop prioritized delivery of the previously requested content (230).

30 Figure 3A, 3B and 3C illustrate the function of the stream manager 138 at the transmitting location in the method of utilizing the non-QOS guaranteed data lines. As illustrated in Fig. 3A, the stream manager monitors the buffer level at the transmitting location (302). When the buffer level reaches a high watermark beyond which packets

may be lost (304), the stream manager increases the data rate to the receiving center by utilizing the non-QOS guaranteed network (306) until the buffer level at the transmitting location falls below a low watermark (310). If the buffer level is within normal range the stream manager continues normal data delivery through the QOS guaranteed network.

5 The stream manager also increases data transmission rate when requested to do so by the receiving stream manager. As illustrated in steps 312 and 314 of Fig. 3B, if the stream manager receives a request from the receiving stream manager to increase data transmission rate, it utilizes the non-QOS guaranteed network to increase bandwidth until the receiving stream manager sends request to resume normal rates of data
10 transmission (318).

 In another embodiment, upon receiving request from the receiving stream manager, the stream manager 138 prioritizes the transfer of the content requested by the receiving stream manager through the main data lines 180 (322, 324). However this prevents the transfer of relatively lower priority contents through the same data network
15 since most or all of the bandwidth is being utilized to transfer the high priority content. In order to prevent interruption in transmission of the relatively lower priority content from the transmitting location to the receiving center, the stream manager at the transmitting location redirects the said lower priority content to the non-QOS guaranteed network (326). Once the stream manager receives request from the receiving stream manager to
20 stop prioritizing delivery of data it previously requested, the stream manager resumes normal data streaming which may or may not include utilizing the non-QOS guaranteed network (330). In the present embodiment the stream manager continues normal data streaming if no request is received from the receiving stream manager (328). In certain conditions it is envisioned that the stream manager at the transmitting location may also
25 redirect high priority content to the non-QOS guaranteed network if all of the high priority content cannot be sent through the main data network 180. In another embodiment, the stream manager at the transmitting location may begin utilizing the non-QOS guaranteed network without any request from the receiving center. In this case the decision to utilize the non-QOS guaranteed network is made by the stream manager 138
30 based upon the bandwidth necessary to transfer data and is independent of the presence or the absence of any request made by the receiving stream manager.

 The above description is illustrative and not restrictive. The scope of the invention should, therefore, be determined not with reference to the above description,

but instead should be determined with reference to the appended claims along with their full scope of equivalents.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- 1 1. A communication network system, comprising:
2 a content server coupled with a transmitting location;
3 a content server coupled with a receiving center;
4 a QOS guaranteed network connecting the transmitting location and the
5 receiving center;
6 a non-QOS guaranteed network connecting the transmitting location and the
7 receiving center;
8 a buffer coupled with the transmitting location;
9 a buffer coupled with the receiving center;
10 a transmitting stream manager for routing traffic to either QOS guaranteed or
11 non-QOS guaranteed data networks;
12 a receiving stream manager for detecting demand for specific data at the
13 receiving center.
- 1 2. The communication network of claim 1 where the QOS guaranteed
2 data network is a QOS guaranteed quality of service (QOS) guaranteed network.
- 1 3. The communication network of claim 1 where the QOS guaranteed
2 data network is any packet based network.
- 1 4. The communication network of claim 1 where the QOS guaranteed
2 data network is a digital cable network between the transmitting location and the receiving
3 location.
- 1 5. The communication network of claim 1 where the non-QOS
2 guaranteed data network is an Internet Protocol (IP) based network.
- 1 6. The communication network of claim 1 where the non-QOS
2 guaranteed data network is any packet based network.
- 1 7. The communication network of claim 1 where the non-QOS
2 guaranteed data network is any communication network between the transmitting location
3 and the receiving location.

1 8. The buffer of claim 1, where the buffer is capable of holding the data
2 until all of the packets necessary to reconstruct the data is received.

1 9. The buffer of claim 1, where the buffer is able to reconstruct the data.

1 10. The receiving stream manager if claim 1 capable of detecting the
2 buffer level at the receiving center.

1 11. The receiving stream manager of claim 1 capable of sending request to
2 the stream manager at the transmitting location to increase the data transmission rate when
3 the buffer level at the receiving center is below a threshold.

1 12. The receiving stream manager of claim 1 capable of sending request to
2 the stream manager at the transmitting location to give higher priority to specific data.

1 13. The receiving stream manager of claim 1 capable of sending request to
2 the stream manager at the transmitting location to stop giving higher priority to specific data.

1 14. The transmitting stream manager of claim 1 capable of detecting the
2 buffer level at the transmitting location.

1 15. The transmitting stream manager of claim 1 capable of increasing data
2 transmission rate by utilizing the non-QOS guaranteed network when the buffer level at the
3 transmitting location is above a threshold.

1 16. The transmitting stream manager of claim 1 capable of increasing data
2 transmission rate by utilizing the non-QOS guaranteed network upon receiving request to do
3 so from the receiving stream manager.

1 17. The transmitting stream manager of claim 1 capable of receiving
2 request from the stream manager at the receiving center to give higher priority to specific
3 data.

1 18. The transmitting stream manager of claim 1 capable of redirecting
2 content to the non-QOS guaranteed network.

1 19. The transmitting stream manager of claim 1 capable of resuming
2 normal delivery of data to the receiving center.

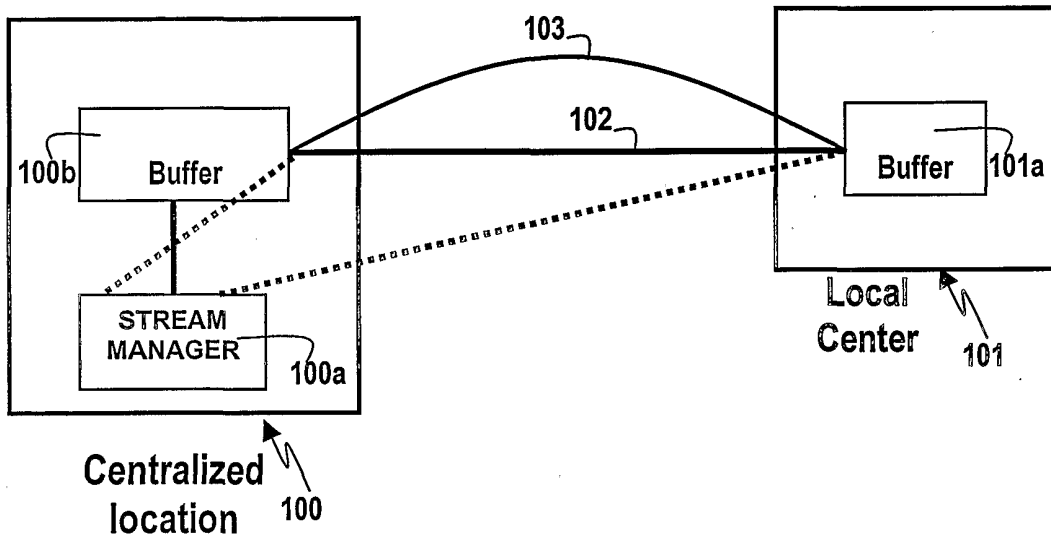


FIG. 1A

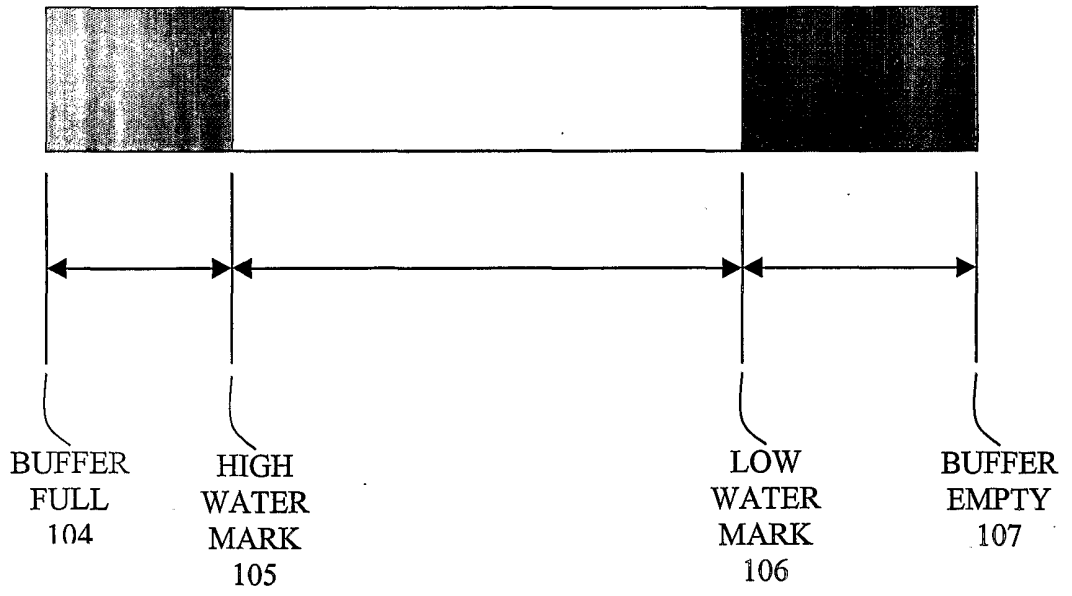


FIG. 1B

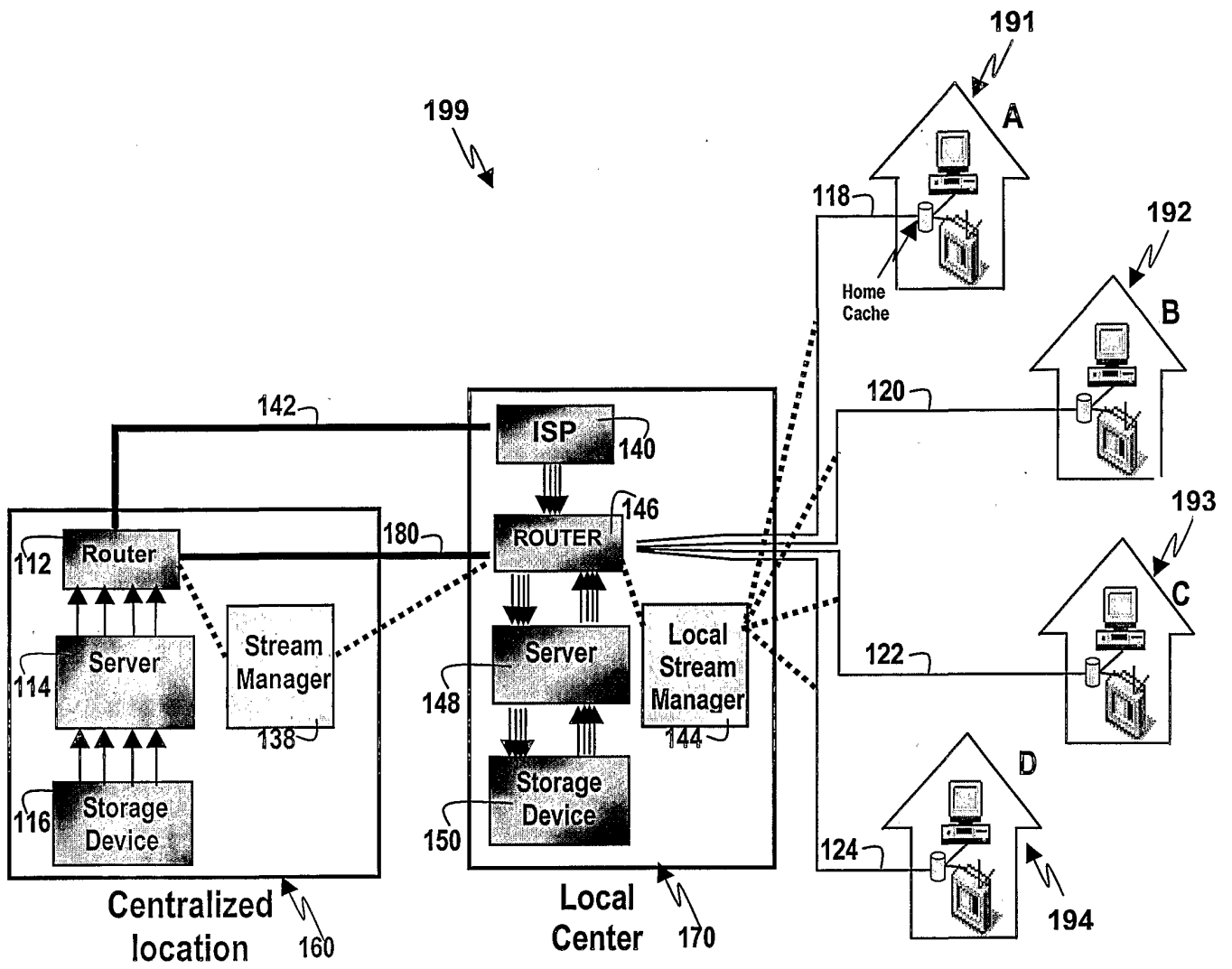


FIG. 1C

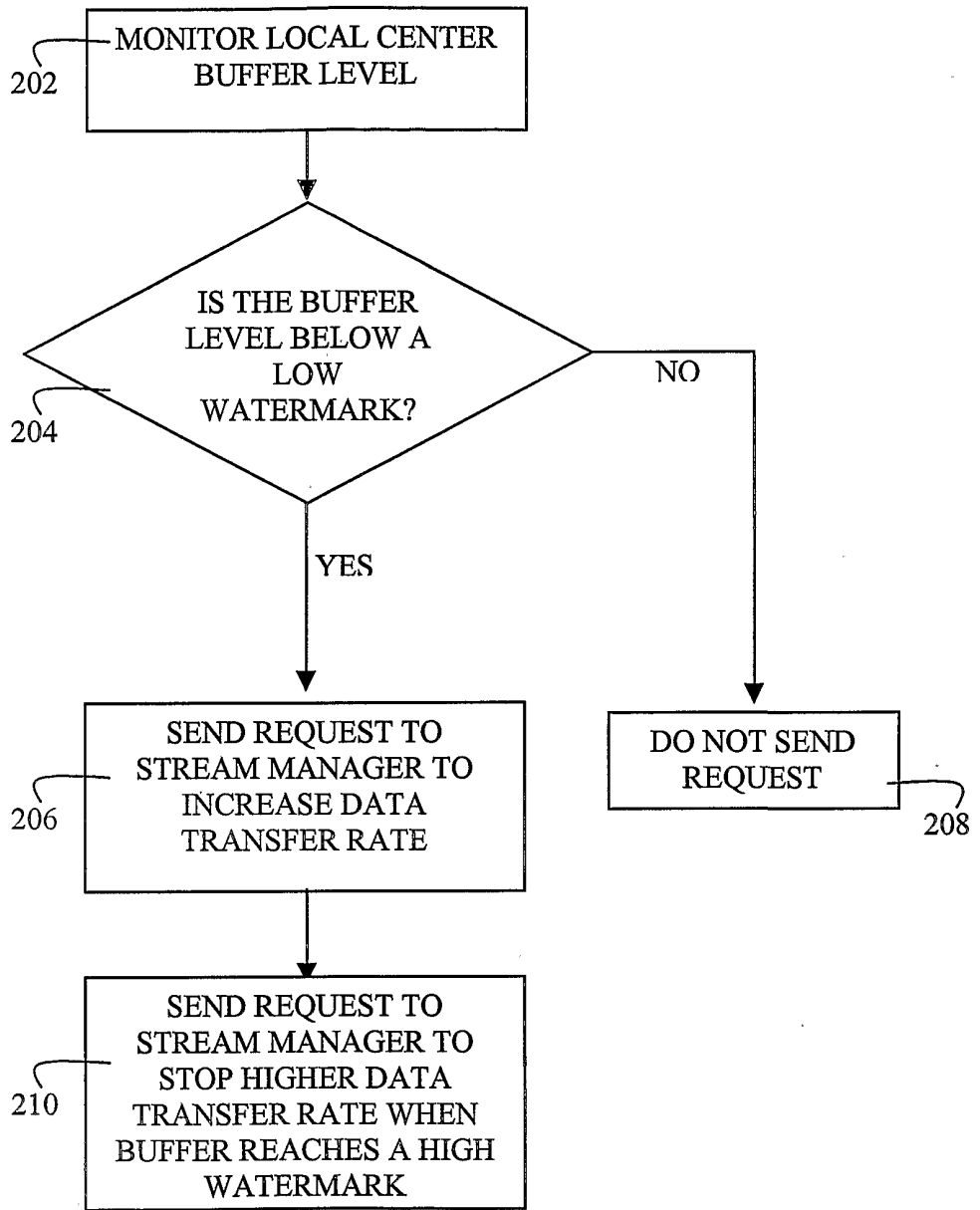


FIG. 2A

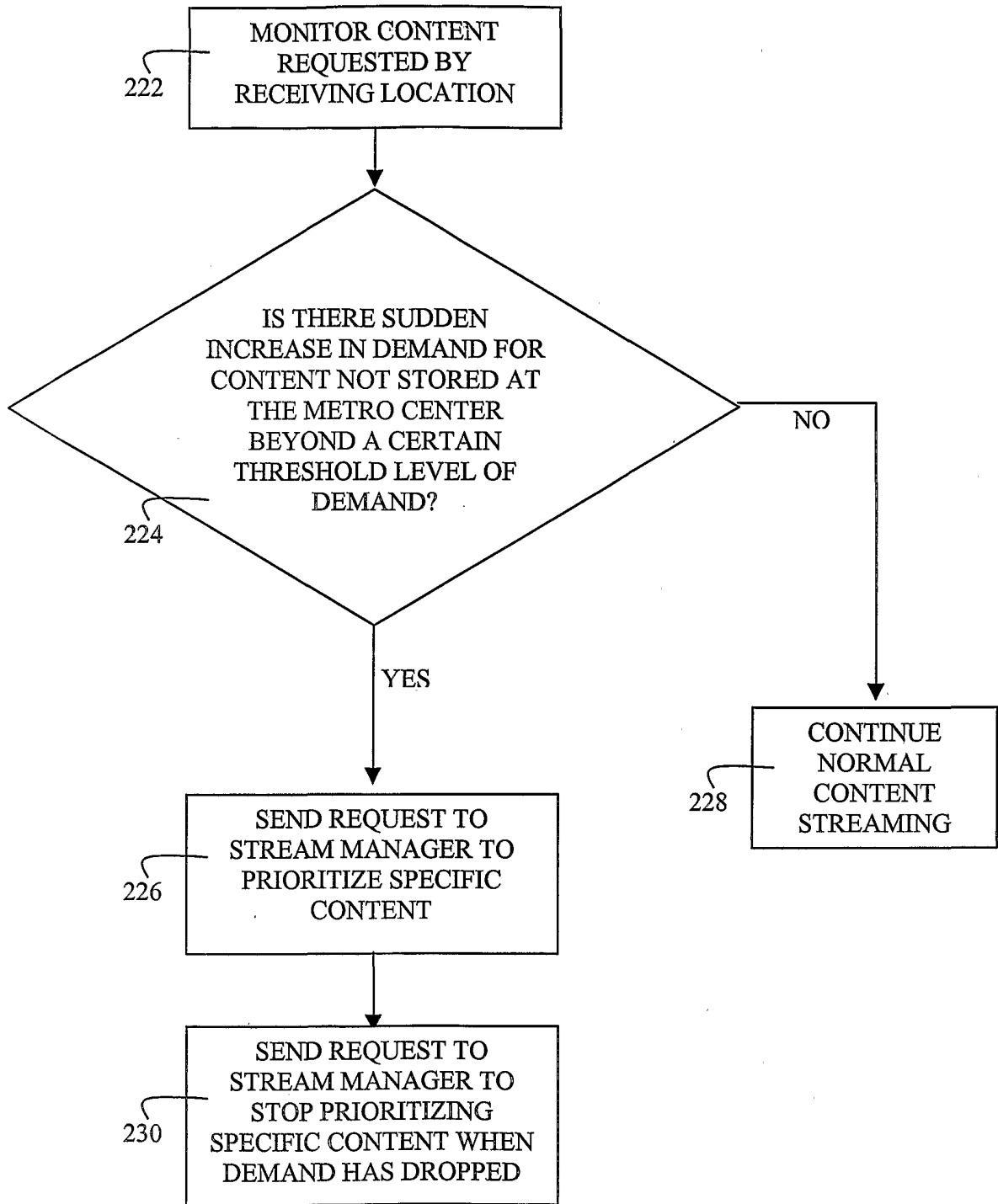


FIG. 2B

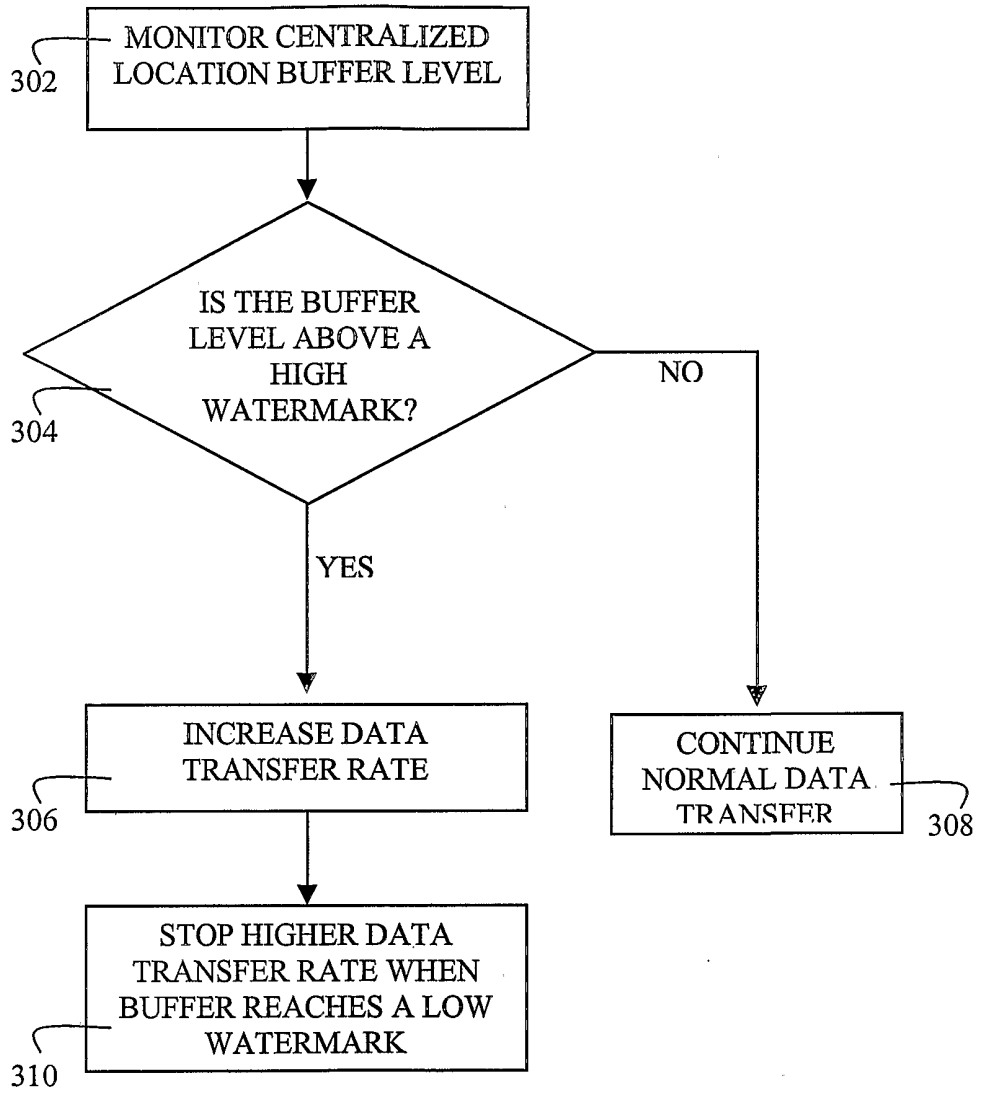


FIG. 3A

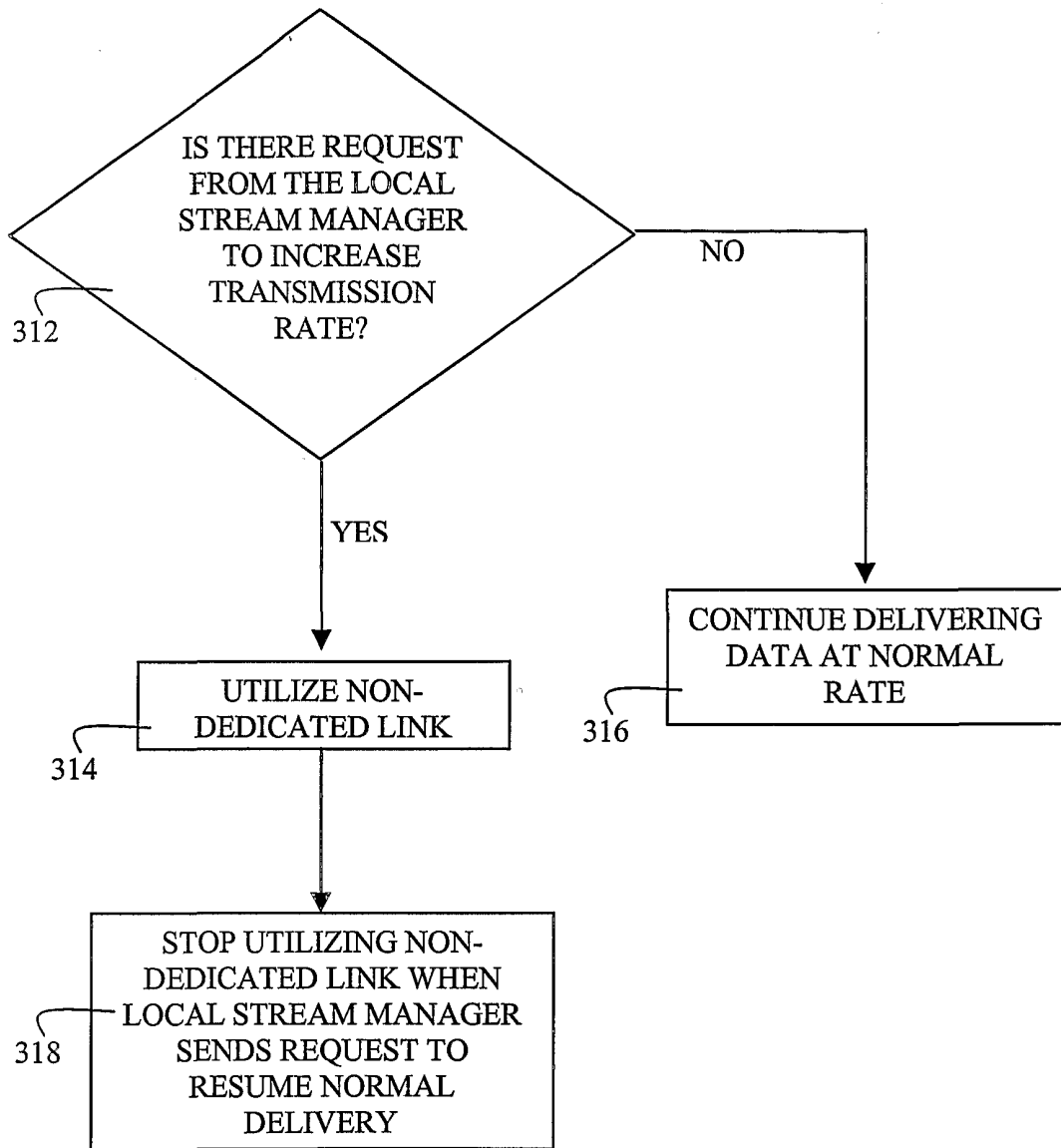


FIG. 3B

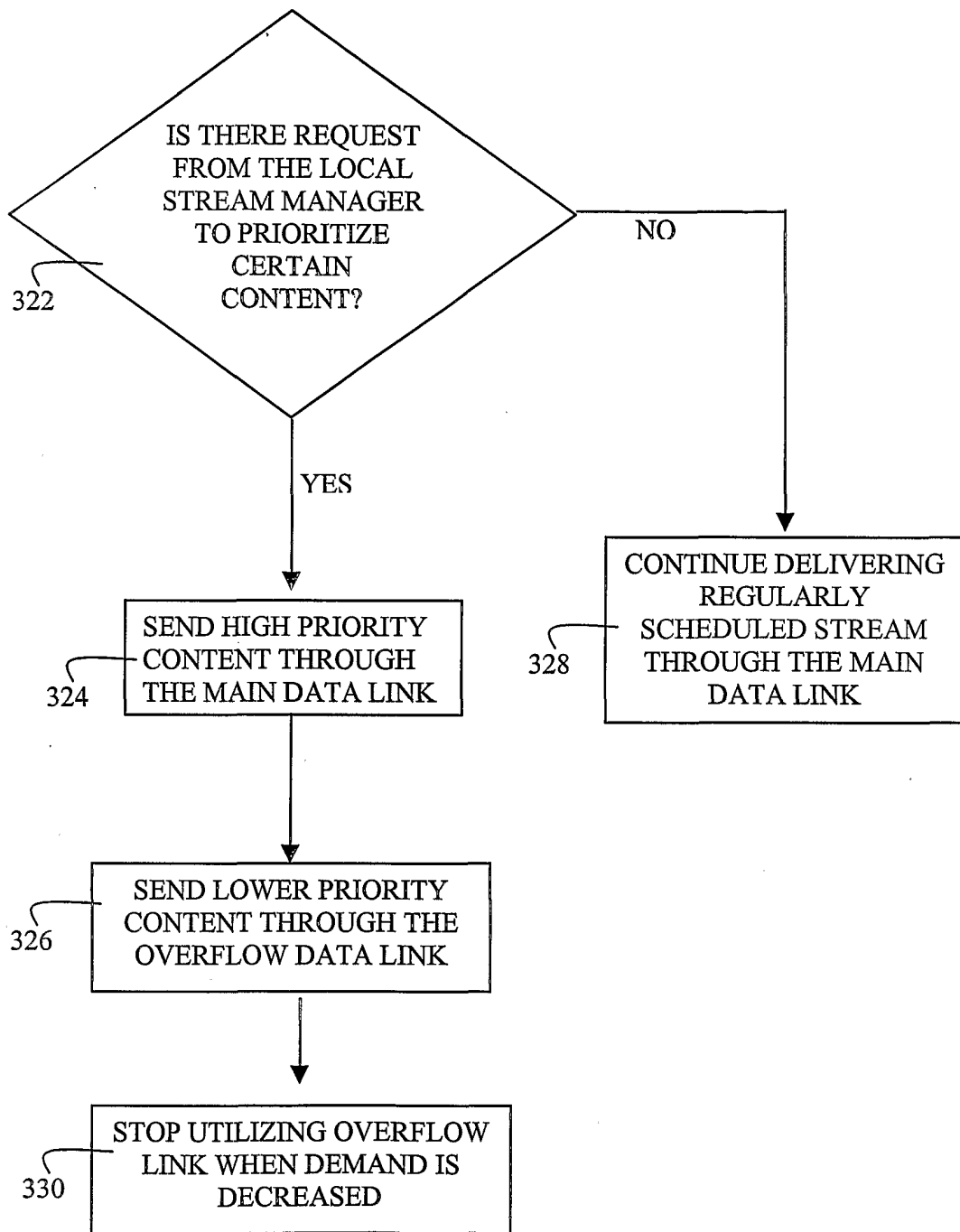


FIG. 3C

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US01/45089

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : H04L 12/66, 12/28, 12/56
 US CL : 370/354, 412

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)
 U.S. : 370/229, 235-236, 351-354, 389, 400-401, 412-418

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 practicable, search terms used)
 Please See Continuation Sheet

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 5,732,078 A (ARANGO) 24 March 1998 (24.03.1998), abstract, Figure 6.	1-7, 9 and 17-19
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Y		8 and 10-16
X	US 6,137,792 A (JONAS et al) 24 October 2000 (24.10.2000), abstract, Figure 1.	1-7, 9 and 17-19
Y	US 6,134,246 A (CAI et al) 17 October 2000 (17.10.2000), abstract, Figure 5.	8
Y	US 5,313,454 A (BUSTINI et al) 17 May 1994 (17.05.1994), abstract, Figure 7.	10-16

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	"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
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"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
"E" earlier application or patent published on or after the international filing date	"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
"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"&" document member of the same patent family
"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	

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Name and mailing address of the ISA/US: Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks, Box PCT, Washington, D.C. 20231
 Facsimile No. (703)305-3230
 Authorized officer: Kevin C. Harper
 Telephone No. 703-305-4700

Brygenia Logan

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US01/45089

Continuation of B. FIELDS SEARCHED Item 3:

EAST

search terms: guaranteed network