

(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
8 March 2001 (08.03.2001)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 01/16799 A1

(51) International Patent Classification⁷: G06F 17/30, (74) Agents: SAWYER, Joseph, A., Jr. et al.; Sawyer Law Group LLP, P.O. Box 51418, Palo Alto, CA 94303 (US).
9/00, 9/44

(21) International Application Number: PCT/US00/20771 (81) Designated States (national): BR, CA, IL, JP.

(22) International Filing Date: 28 July 2000 (28.07.2000) (84) Designated States (regional): European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE).
(25) Filing Language: English

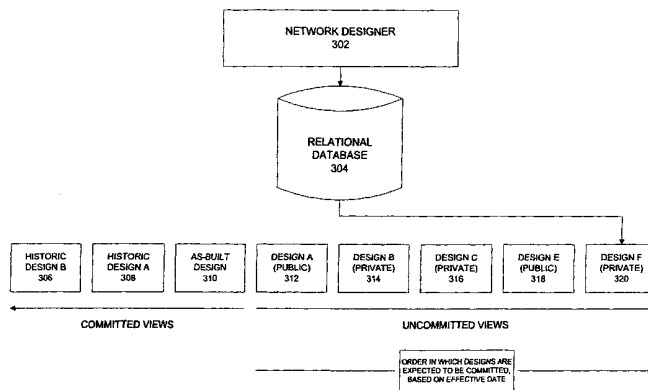
(26) Publication Language: English Published:
— With international search report.

(30) Priority Data: 09/385,783 30 August 1999 (30.08.1999) US 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.

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(54) Title: METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR SUPPORTING MULTIPLE, HISTORICAL AND FUTURE DESIGNS IN A RELATIONAL DATABASE



(57) Abstract: A method and system comprise interfacing with the Relational Database (304), the Network Designer (302) decides to change or view a design configuration. The system accesses the design of interest based upon a user interaction. Any particular design configuration contains the as-built design, which represents the current documented network, plus the historic and future designs. The Network Designer (302) can access the historic designs, the as-built design or any future designs. For instance, Design F (320) contains the As-Built Design (310) plus any changes made to Design A (312) and Design E (318). Private designs: Design B (314), Design C (316), and Design F (320) do not share their information, but they are affected by Public Designs with earlier effective dates. When a design is committed, it becomes the new as-built design. Historic Design B (306), Historic Design A (308), and the As-Built Design (310) are considered committed views, while future designs are uncommitted views. Future designs are committed in the order of their effective dates.



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METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR SUPPORTING MULTIPLE, HISTORICAL AND FUTURE DESIGNS IN A RELATIONAL DATABASE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to relational database management systems and specifically to a method and system to support multiple designs in a relational database.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A conventional relational database management system (RDBMS) allows for the definition of data structures, storage and retrieval operations and integrity constraints. In such a database the data and relations between them are organized in tables. A table is a collection of records and each record in a table contains the same fields. Certain fields may be designated as keys which indicates the fields which uniquely identify the records in that table. Indexes will be maintained on key fields and on other selected fields. These indexes speed up searches for specific values of those fields.

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Leading physical management products use relational database management systems to store network object data in tables corresponding to each object type. An object is a general designation that can refer to a map, location, floor, room, cabinet, device, port, or cable. Information about the objects which make up a network configuration at a point in time (either in the past, present, or future) is collected into a design. A design is a set of objects which are intended to be placed into service as a complete group.

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Designs can be historic or proposed. The effective date of a historic design is the date that its objects were actually in the physical network and available for use. Proposed (or future) designs have an effective date indicating when they are expected to be placed in service. Designs are ordered by the date they became effective or are proposed to become effective. Proposed designs are classified as private or public. Objects in public designs are viewable by other designs with later effective dates. Objects in private designs are hidden from all other designs. Historic designs are always public.

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Each object in a design is associated with the design to which it was first added, and changes to an object are stored as a modified copy of the object which is associated with the

design in which the change occurs. Because the object types have a hierarchical relationship with each other, certain restrictions are imposed regarding which design the objects can be in. For example, if a device is located in a cabinet, the device can not exist in a design that occurs earlier than the design of the cabinet. Also, if the cabinet's design is private as opposed to public, any devices placed in that cabinet must be in the same design because private designs are not visible in other designs.

Conventional Network Management Systems (NMSs) provide system users with information regarding whether specific objects are running properly or are not running properly, as well as information about how objects are connected to each other. FIG 1 shows how a system user 100 accesses the network model, stored in a relational database 104 via a typical NMS 102. However, these systems don't comprehensively track design objects or associate them with designs that are dependent upon them.

Because of the dependencies that can exist between objects that may be in different designs, certain operations like changing the effective date of a design and changing a design from public to private may not be allowed. When the effective date of a design is changed, it may cause an order conflict between an object in that design and an object in another design. When a public design becomes private, its objects are no longer visible to other designs, and some objects may become orphaned. If an operation would cause such conflicts, then the operation should not be allowed to take place.

To get the correct information about an object in a specific design, a user must be able to select the most recent instance of that object from the specified design or from all public designs that have an effective date earlier than the specified design. This selection operation will be performed often for many objects of all types, therefore its performance must be quick enough to present the results to the user without noticeable delay.

Therefore, what is needed is a method and system that allows the user to handle multiple designs while having the capability of building designs based upon historic and proposed designs. The system should analyze the dependencies of objects in a design and identify which objects are dependent upon objects in earlier public designs. The system should allow the user to stay up-to-date on current network information, review previous network configurations and work on as many proposed network configurations as desired. The present invention addresses such a need.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A method and system in accordance with the present invention receives correct information concerning a design in a database. The method comprises selecting a most recent instance of an object in the design and analyzing the dependencies of that object on the other objects in the design database.

Through the use of a method and system in accordance with the present invention, relational database management systems will have the capability of building designs upon other designs by presenting the user with the appropriate versions of objects from earlier designs. The method and system in accordance with the present invention will also allow changes to the ordering of designs within restrictions based on the dependencies between the designs. This will give the user the ability to stay up-to-date on current network information, review previous network configurations and work on as many proposed network configurations as desired.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 shows a conventional Network Management System environment.

Figure 2 is a simple block diagram of a system in accordance with the present invention.

Figure 3 shows a block diagram of a system for supporting multiple network designs in accordance with the present invention.

Figure 4 is a flowchart of how the system in accordance with the present invention selects objects to be viewed in a particular design.

Figure 5 is a flowchart of how the system in accordance with the present invention analyzes the dependencies of the objects in a particular design.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The present invention provides a method and system for receiving correct information concerning objects within a design in a database. The following description is presented to enable one of ordinary skill in the art to make and use the invention and is provided in the context of a patent application and its requirements. Various modifications to the preferred embodiment will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art and the generic principles herein may be applied to other embodiments. Thus, the

present invention is not intended to be limited to the embodiments shown but is to be accorded the widest scope consistent with the principles and features described herein.

The method and system in accordance with the present invention is disclosed in the context of a preferred embodiment. The preferred embodiment allows for the use of dynamically created graphic representations of physical network design configurations based on the actual network configuration information stored in a relational database. These are called "virtual drawings". The preferred embodiment further provides a system user with the ability to stay up-to-date on current network design information, review previous network design configurations and work on as many proposed network design configurations as desired.

Each network object within each individual network design configuration has a unique identifier that triggers a collection of information in the relational database. Anytime a change is made to the graphical representation of a network object, the change is immediately reflected in the relational database. Conversely, anytime a change is made in the relational database the change is immediately reflected in the graphical representation of the network object.

To describe the operation of a system in accordance with the present invention, refer now to FIG 2. FIG 2 is a simple diagram of a method in accordance with the present invention. The most recent instance of an object in a design is selected, via step 200. The dependencies between all objects in a design on objects in all other designs in the relational database are analyzed, via step 202.

OPERATION

To more fully describe the operation of the present invention in the context of a preferred embodiment, FIG 3 is a block diagram of the operation of the system in accordance with the present invention. FIG 4 is a detailed flowchart of how the system in accordance with the present invention selects objects to be viewed in a particular design. FIG 5 is a detailed flowchart of how the system in accordance with the present invention analyzes the dependencies of the objects in a particular design configuration with other objects within the design configuration.

Selecting Design Objects to be Viewed

Referring to FIG 3 and FIG 4 together first, while interfacing with the relational database 304 the network designer 302 decides to change or view a design configuration, via step 402. Next, the system accesses the design of interest based upon a user
5 interaction, via step 404. Any particular design configuration contains the as-built design, which represents the current documented network, plus the historic and future designs. Accordingly, the network designer can access the historic designs, the as-built design or any future designs. For instance, Design F 320 contains the as-built view 310 plus any changes made to Design A 312 and Design E 318. Private designs 314, 316,
10 320 do not share their information, but they are affected by public designs with earlier effective dates.

When a design is committed, it becomes the new as-built design. Historic designs 306, 308 and the as-built design 310 are considered committed views, while future designs are uncommitted views. Future designs are committed in the order of
15 their effective dates. In other words, the earlier the effective date of the future design, the earlier the future design can be committed.

Referring back to FIG 4, it is determined whether an object exists in the design itself, via step 406. If an undeleted object exists in the design itself, the object is displayed in the design view, via step 408. If the object doesn't exist in the design itself,
20 it is determined whether the object exists in an earlier public design, via step 410. If the object does exist in an earlier public design, the latest version of the object is displayed in the design view, via step 408 if not flagged as deleted. If the object does not exist in an earlier public design, the system does not display the object in the design view, via step 412. Steps 406-412 are repeated for every object in the design, via step
25 414.

Analyzing the Dependencies of the Design Objects

Refer now to FIG 5. Once the user decides to change the effective date of a design or change a public design to a private design, a design view is displayed which
30 shows the most recent instance of the objects in the design, via step 502. Next, in order to determine the earliest allowable date, it is determined whether objects in the design are

dependent upon objects in earlier public designs, via step 504. If any object(s) in the design is dependent upon any object(s) in earlier public designs, the date of the design can be changed to a date no earlier than just after the date of the latest dependent public design, via step 506. To determine the latest allowable date, it is then determined
5 whether there are any object(s) in later designs that are dependent upon any object(s) in the current design, via step 508. If there are objects in later designs that are dependent upon objects in the current design, then the date of the design can be changed to no later than just before the date of the earliest dependent design and the design cannot be made private, via step 512. If there are no objects in later designs that are dependent upon
10 objects in the current design, the date of the design can be changed to any future date and the current design may be made private, via step 510.

Although the present invention has been described in accordance with the embodiments shown, one of ordinary skill in the art will readily recognize that there could be variations to the embodiments and those variations would be within the spirit
15 and scope of the present invention. Accordingly, many modifications may be made by one of ordinary skill in the art without departing from the spirit and scope of the appended claims.

CLAIMS:

What is claimed is:

- 1 1. A method for receiving correct information concerning a plurality of
2 designs in a database, wherein each of the plurality of designs includes a plurality of
3 objects, comprising the steps of:
 - 4 a) selecting a most recent instance of one of the plurality of objects
5 of one of the plurality of designs; and
 - 6 b) analyzing the dependencies of the one of the plurality of objects
7 on the plurality of objects of each of the plurality of designs.

- 1 2. The method of claim 1 wherein the plurality of designs comprises at least
2 one private design and at least one public design.

- 1 3. The method of claim 1 in which the analyzing step (b) further comprises:
 - 2 (b1) identifying one object in one public design upon which the one of
3 the plurality of objects depends; and
 - 4 (b2) identifying one object in one later design that is dependent upon
5 the one of the plurality of objects.

- 1 4. The method of claim 3 wherein the one public design is an earlier design.

- 1 5. The method of claim 4 wherein if there are no objects in one later design
2 that are dependent upon the one of the plurality of objects of the one of the plurality of
3 designs, the one of the plurality of designs can be made private.

- 1 6. A system for receiving correct information concerning a plurality of
2 designs in a database, wherein each of the plurality of designs includes a plurality of
3 objects, comprising:
 - 4 means for selecting a most recent instance of one of the plurality of

5 objects of one of the plurality of designs; and
6 means for analyzing the dependencies of the one of the plurality of
7 objects on the plurality of objects of each of the plurality of designs.

1 7. The system of claim 6 wherein the plurality of designs comprises at least
2 one private design and at least one public design.

1 8. The system of claim 6 in which the analyzing means further comprises:
2 means for identifying one object in one public design upon which the one
3 of the plurality of objects depends; and
4 means for identifying one object in one later design that is dependent
5 upon the one of the plurality of objects.

1 9. The system of claim 8 wherein the one public design is an earlier design.

1 10. The system of claim 9 wherein if there are no objects in one later design
2 that are dependent upon the one of the plurality of objects of the one of the plurality of
3 designs, the one of the plurality of designs can be made private.

1 11. A computer readable medium containing program instructions for
2 receiving correct information concerning a plurality of designs in a database, wherein
3 each of the plurality of designs includes a plurality of objects, the program instructions
4 comprising the steps of:

5 a) selecting a most recent instance of one of the plurality of objects of one of
6 the plurality of designs; and

7 b) analyzing the dependencies of the one of the plurality of objects on the
8 plurality of objects of each of the plurality of designs.

1 12. The computer readable medium of claim 11 wherein the plurality of
2 designs comprises at least one private design and at least one public design.

1 13. The computer readable medium of claim 11 in which the analyzing step
2 (b) further comprises:

3 (b1) identifying one object in one public design upon which the one of
4 the plurality of objects depends; and

5 (b2) identifying one object in one later design that is dependent upon
6 the one of the plurality of objects.

1 14. The computer readable medium of claim 13 wherein the one public design
2 is an earlier design.

1 15. The computer readable medium of claim 14 wherein if there are no
2 objects in one later design that are dependent upon the one of the plurality of objects of
3 the one of the plurality of designs, the one of the plurality of designs can be made
4 private.

1 16. A method for receiving correct information concerning a plurality of
2 designs in a database, wherein each of the plurality of designs includes a plurality of
3 objects, comprising the steps of:

4 a) selecting a most recent instance of a particular object in one of the
5 plurality of designs; and

6 b) analyzing the dependencies of the particular object on the plurality of
7 objects of each of the plurality of designs.

1 17. The method of claim 16 wherein the plurality of designs comprises at
2 least one private design and at least one public design.

1 18. The method of claim 16 in which the analyzing step (b) further comprises:

2
3 (b1) identifying one object in one public design upon which the particular
4 object depends; and

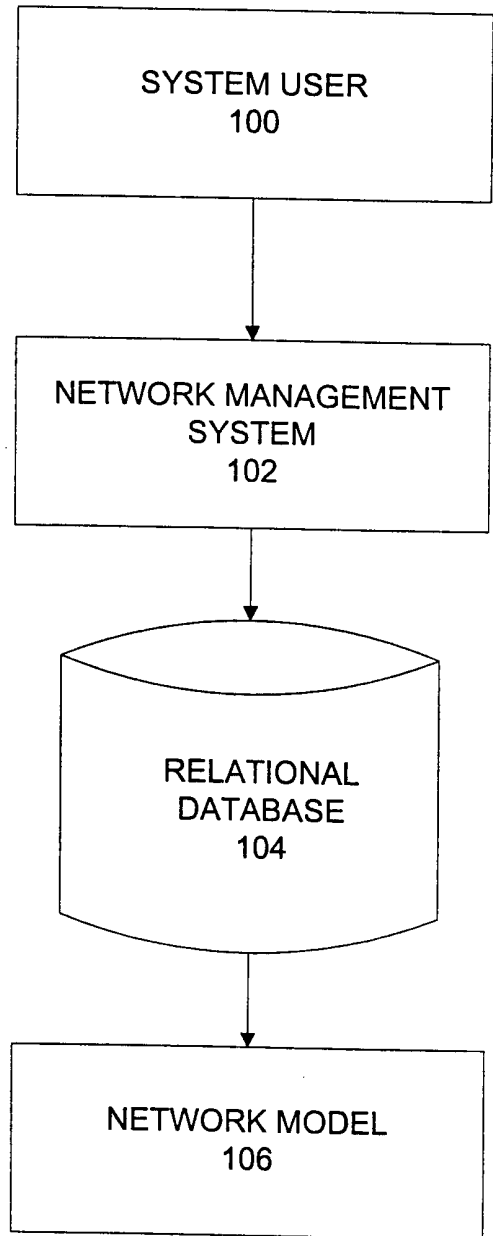
5 (b2) identifying one object in one later design that is dependent upon the

6 particular object.

1 19. The method of claim 18 wherein the one public design is an earlier
2 design.

1 20. The method of claim 19 wherein if there are no objects in one later design
2 that are dependent upon the particular object of the one of the plurality of designs, the
3 one of the plurality of designs can be made private.

1/5



PRIOR ART

FIG. 1

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SELECTING THE MOST RECENT INSTANCE
OF AN OBJECT IN A PARTICULAR DESIGN

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ANALYZING THE DEPENDENCIES OF ALL
OBJECTS IN A DESIGN WITH OBJECTS IN ALL
OTHER DESIGNS IN A RELATIONAL DATABASE

202

FIG. 2

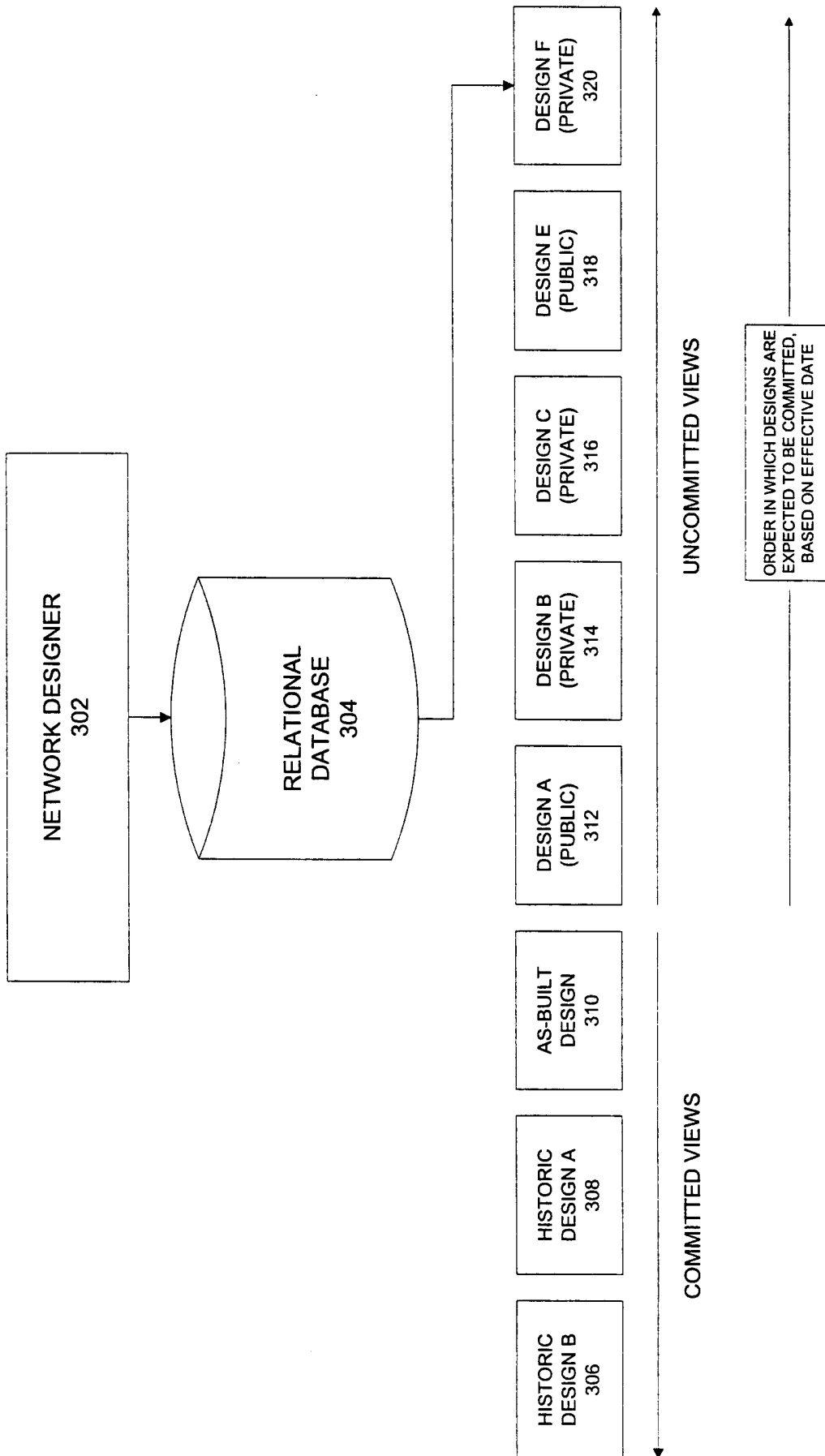


FIG. 3

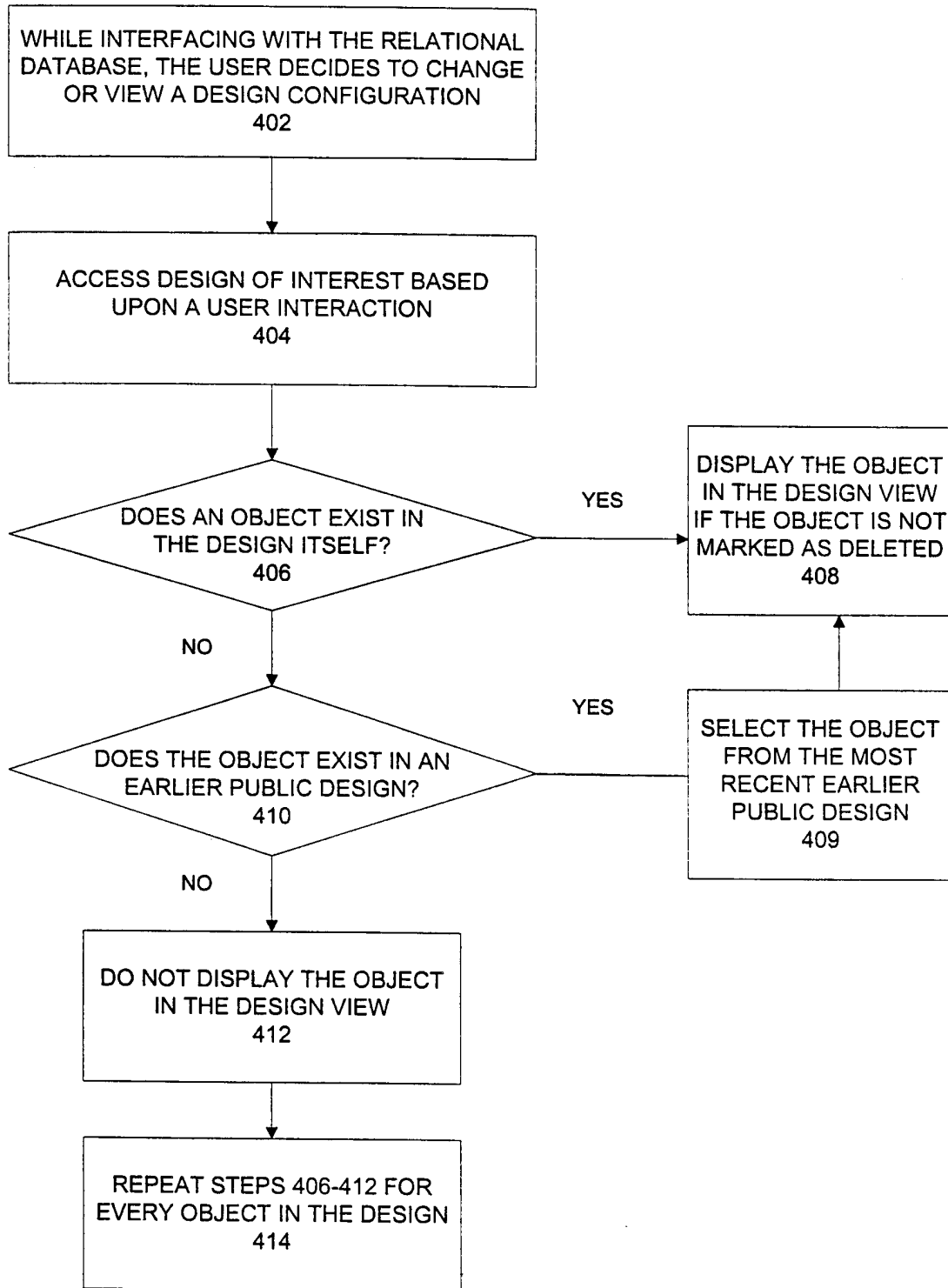


FIG. 4
SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

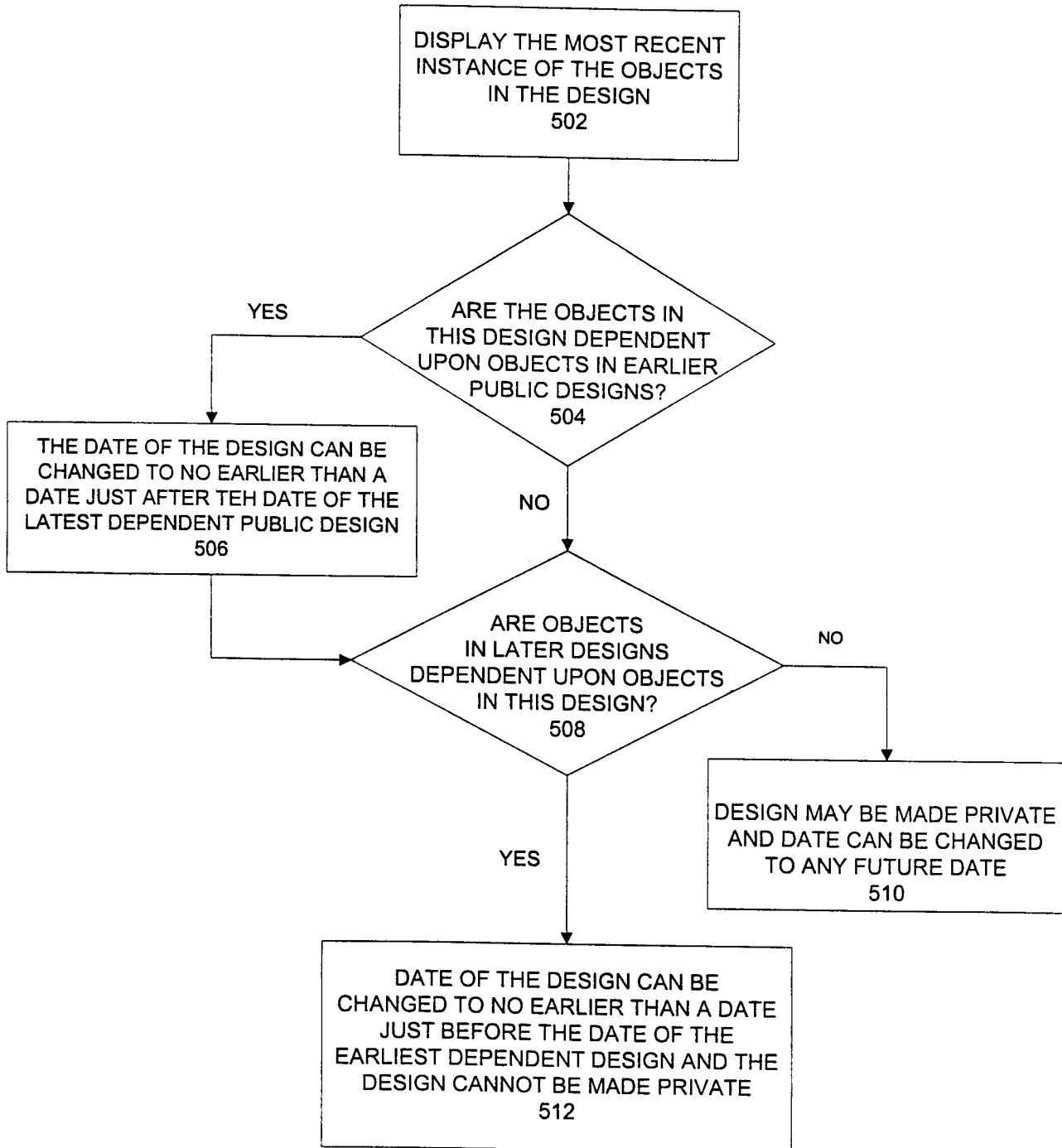


FIG. 5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US00/20771

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER		
IPC(7) : G06F 17/30, 9/00, 9/44 US CL : 707/1, 103; 717/4; 395/702 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. : 707/1, 103; 717/4; 395/702		
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)		
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X --- Y	US 5,787,437 A (POTTERVELD et al.) 28 JULY 1998, col. 2, lines 4-16, see Fig. 8, col. 15, lines 66-67, col. 16, lines 1-54, col. 9, lines 1-43, col. 18, lines 10-65, see Fig. 2, col. 5, lines 25-50	1,5,6,10, 11,15,16, 20 ----- 2-4, 7-9, 12-14, 17-19
Y	US 5,878,408 A (VAN HUBEN et al.) 02 March 1999, col. 12, lines 8-46, col. 20, lines 20-44, and col. 22, lines 10-68	2,4,7,9,12,14,17, 19
Y	US 5,918,053 A (GRAHAM) 29 JUNE 1999, col. 10, lines 57-67, and col. 11, lines 1-20	3, 8, 13, 18
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex.		
* "A" "E" "L" "O" "P"	Special categories of cited documents: document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance earlier document published on or after the international filing date 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 referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	"T" "X" "Y" "&" 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 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 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 06 SEPTEMBER 2000		Date of mailing of the international search report 03 OCT 2000
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 ANH LY <i>James R. Matthews</i> Telephone No. (703) 305 3200

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US00/20771

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 6,023,578 A (BIRSAN et al.) 08 February 2000, ALL	