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(54) **PORTABLE TETHERED CARRIER AND METHOD**

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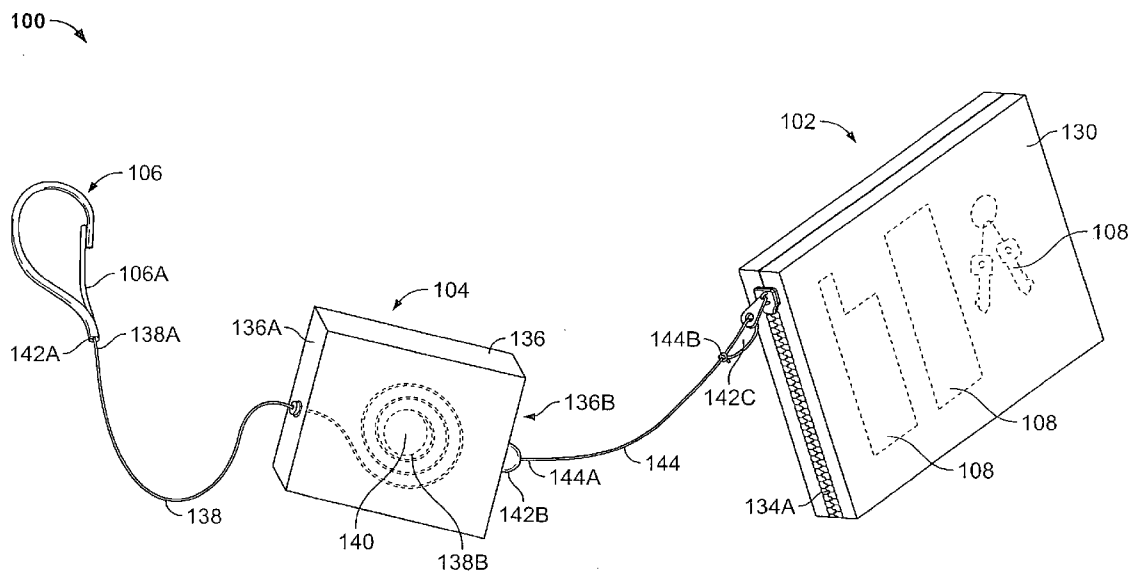
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The carrier system of the present invention includes an enclosable case for stowing items, a tether to extend and retract the enclosable case and an anchoring element for quick and easy fastening and removal of the carrier system to something, for example, a piece of luggage.

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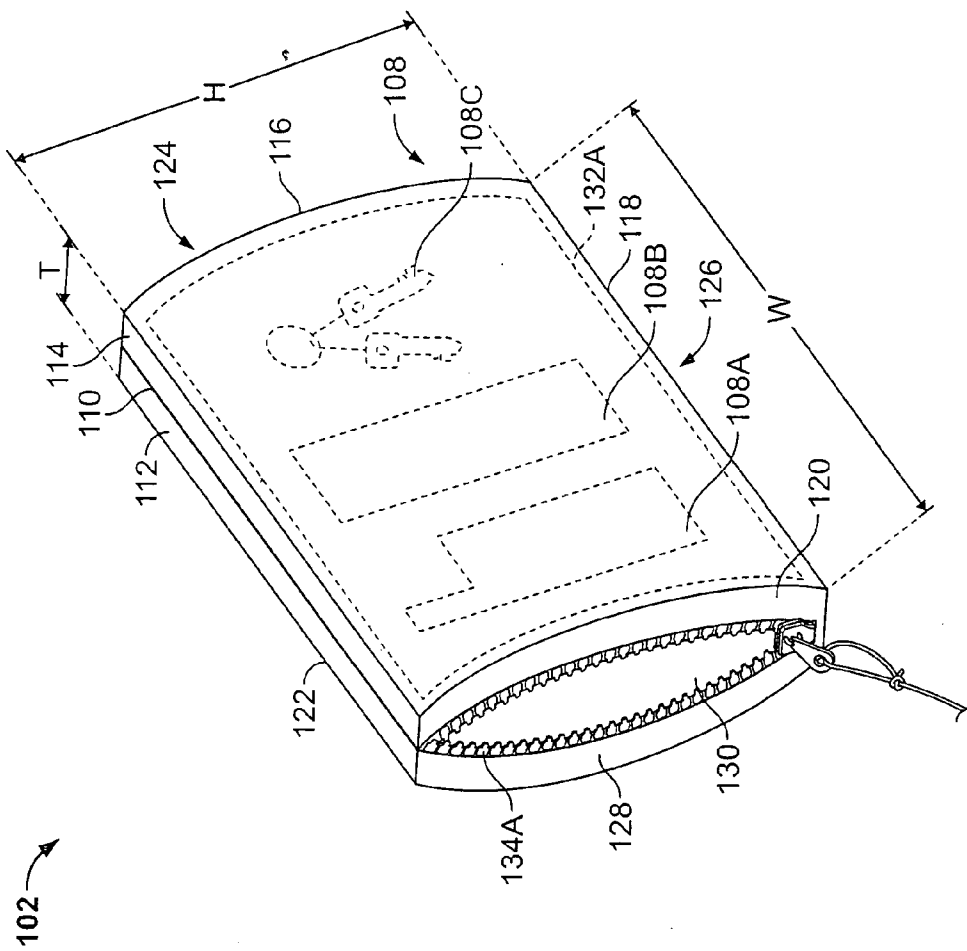


FIG. 2

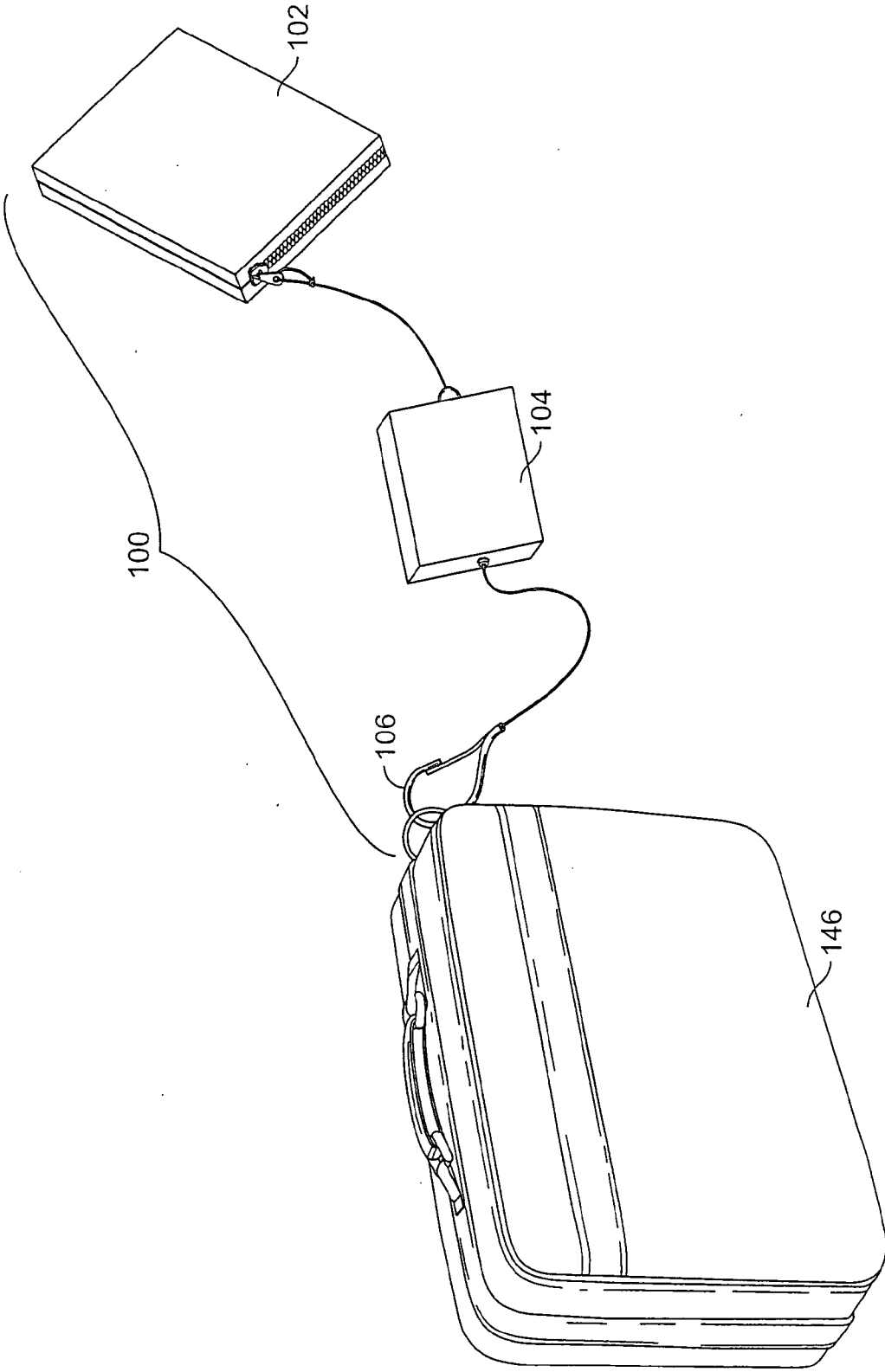


FIG. 3

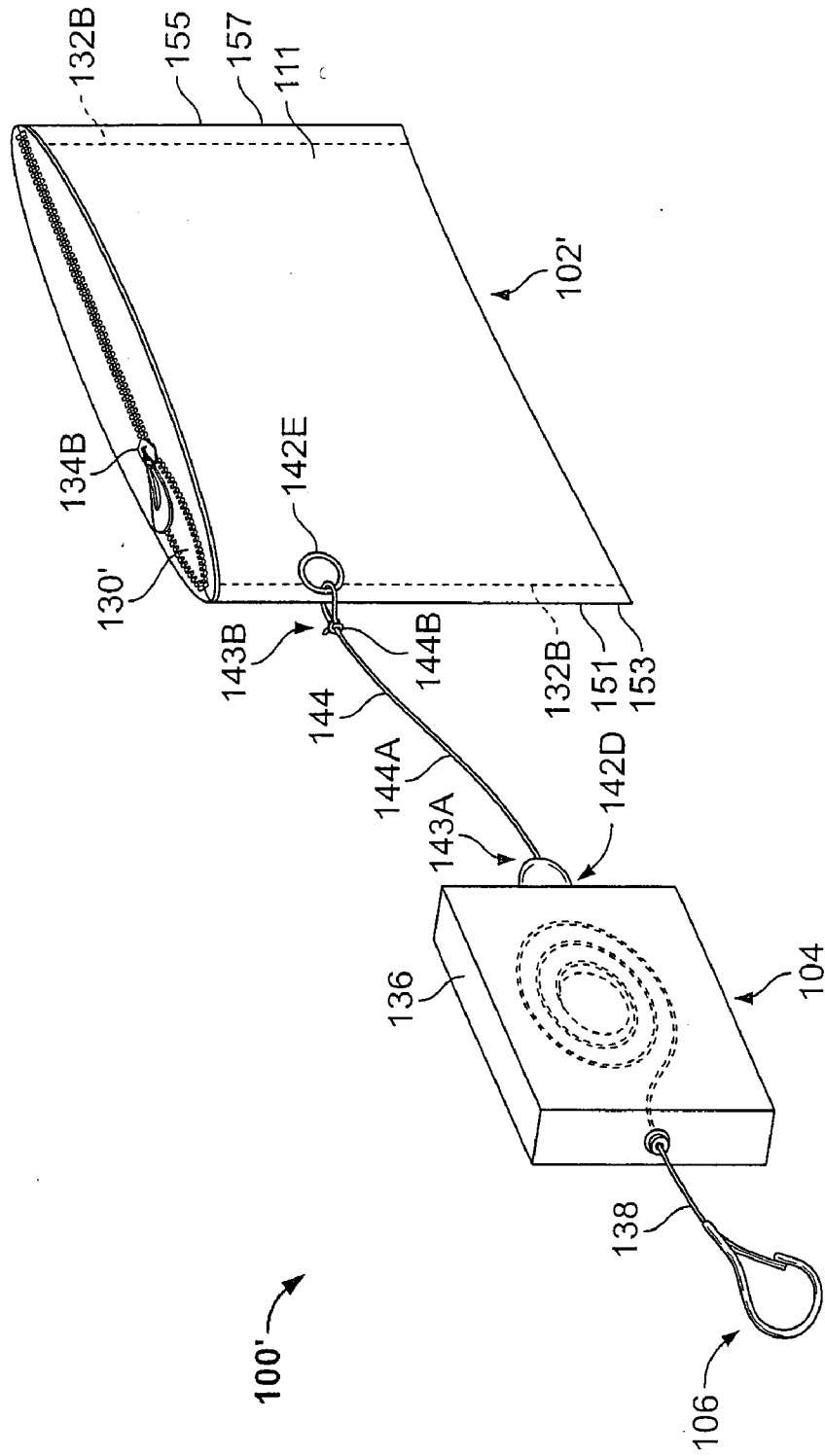


FIG. 4

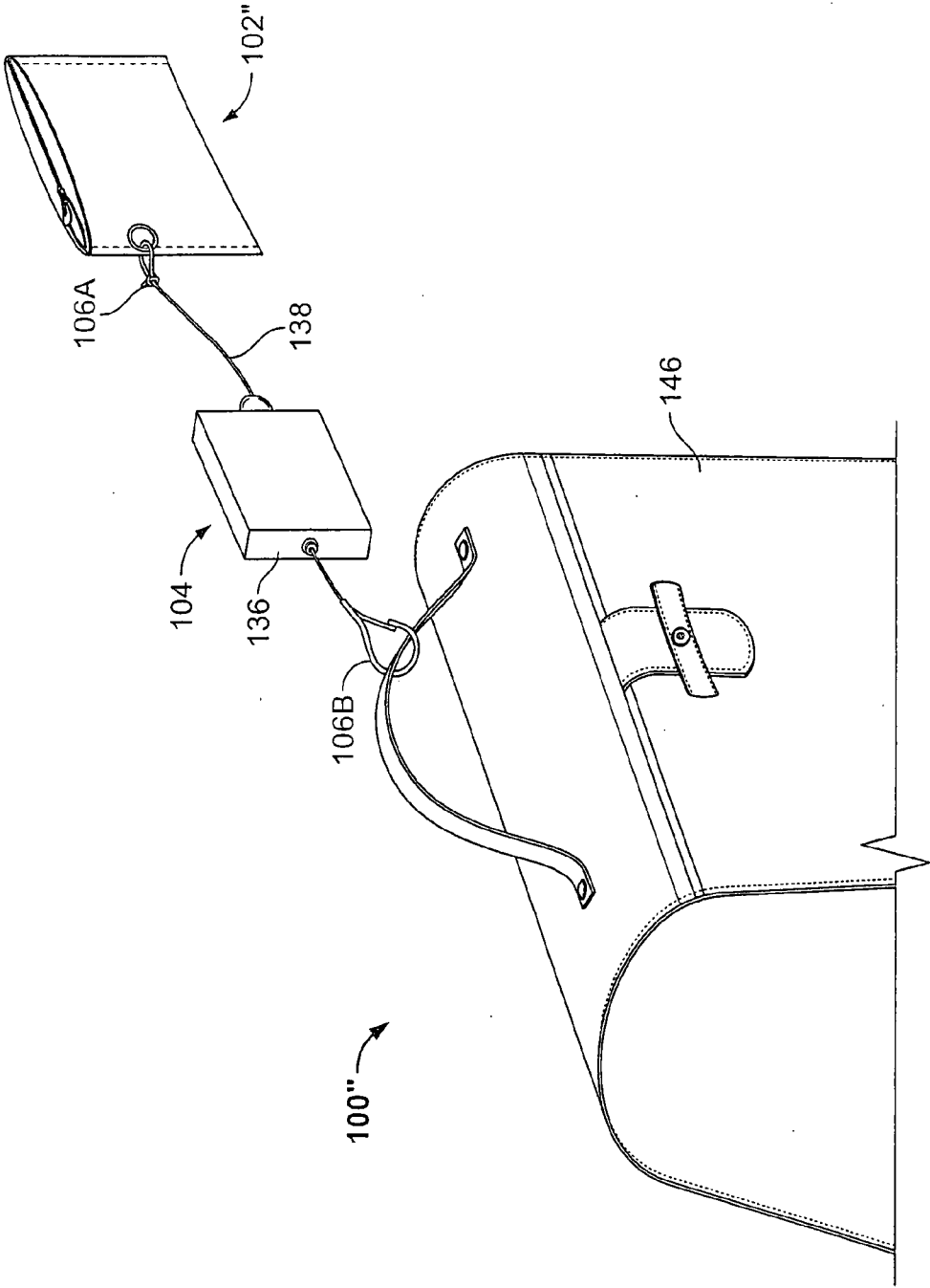


FIG. 5

**PORTABLE TETHERED CARRIER AND METHOD**

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates to a carrier system in general, and more particularly to a portable carrier system including an enclosable case for stowing items such as documentation and personal articles, a tether and an attachment element.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] With increased security in the mass transportation industry, including airline, train and bus, the need to carry and readily present documents by a traveler, for example identification information or travel materials, is required. Identification information may include such things as a passport, driver's license, birth certificate, military identification, or any photo identification. Travel materials may include, for instance, a boarding pass, ticket, fare card, or baggage claim tickets.

[0003] In addition, personal articles may be desired to be easily accessible to a traveler. For example, a traveler may need to contact someone via cellular phone upon arrival at their destination. Besides a cellular phone, personal articles may include many kinds of things, such as keys, wallet, or medication, for further example, which a person may want readily at hand.

[0004] There are, of course, many existing devices for storing and carrying personal articles and documents, including purses, handbags, briefcases, backpacks and the like. Other devices include those as described in U.S. Pat. No. 4,920,673 to Mitsuyama, U.S. Pat. No. 6,766,932 to Hansen, U.S. Pat. No. 6,862,827 to Gregory and U.S. Pat. No. 6,886,283 to Arraut. While these prior art devices store and maintain documents and other things, they have certain shortcomings.

[0005] The card holder of Mitsuyama has small slits formed therein which are only suitable for holding small items, such as business cards. This device is not adapted to hold larger items such as a cellular phone, passport, or boarding pass.

[0006] The carriers of Hansen, Gregory and Arraut each have clear pockets for holding a variety of items. Storing identification information or travel materials in clear pockets allows others, besides security or boarding gate personnel, to view the information. With increasing identity theft and terrorism activity, visibility of identification information or travel materials is not necessarily desirable.

[0007] The carriers of Hansen, Gregory and Arraut each further include an adjustable lanyard or necklace in order to wear the holder or carrier around the neck. Wearing these carriers around the neck, while making the contents available, can be constricting, possibly, uncomfortable, and unfashionable. These devices are not easily extendable to position the carrier in view of security or boarding gate personnel, and may further require some contortion by the user to get at the contents unless the device is taken off.

[0008] It would be nice to somehow associate such personal articles, identification information or travel materials with the hand luggage, laptop computer, jacket, purse, handbag, suitcase, briefcase, backpack, or other such items

people carry during travel. Making the portable carrier readily movable and usable between any such other baggage would be even better.

[0009] Thus, there is a need for providing travelers with a portable carrier system to stow items such as documentation and personal articles, and provide easy access to the items when required, and make the carrier ubiquitous for use as between many other hand-carried items with which it can be associated. Such a portable carrier system could also serve to eliminate a piece of hand luggage, such as a purse, the strategic contents of which could be temporarily put in the carrier during travel, with the purse and its other contents packed away in a suitcase. This is especially important in view of the limitations placed upon hand luggage on airlines.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] The system and method of the present invention overcomes the limitations of devices of the prior art by providing an improved portable carrier system to stow items such as personal articles, identification information and travel materials, among other things.

[0011] The carrier system of the present invention in one form includes a closable case or valise for stowing items, a retractable tether and an anchoring element. The enclosable case includes an interior area that is preferably sized to contain a variety of items. Of course, it could just be item specific, such as being adapted just for travel documents. The enclosable case includes a securement mechanism to readily open and close the interior. It is contemplated that the securement mechanism may be, for example, a tethered zipper, buttons, Velcro®, a magnet, Ziploc® mechanism, a snap-fit device, and so on.

[0012] The enclosable case can be comprised of just about any suitable material, but preferably is flexible, but with some rigidity, and most preferably opaque. In one preferred form, the case is manufactured from neoprene fabric. Neoprene is water-resistant and sufficiently rigid to hold its form, while also protecting the items stowed within the case. Additionally, since neoprene is not transparent or translucent, the items stowed therein are concealed from others to maintain confidentiality and privacy.

[0013] As noted, the carrier system of the present invention further includes a tether attached to the carrier case. The tether is preferably one that can extend and be retracted. With the tether anchored, this enables the attached carrier case to be pulled away from the tether attachment point, yet still remain connected, so as not to be misplaced or even let loose. Tethers are known in the art, for example as described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,697,572 to Salentine, and the disclosure therein is incorporated herein by reference. In one preferred embodiment, the tether is positioned outside the carrier case, but it is also contemplated that the tether can be positioned inside the carrier case for concealment and protection.

[0014] The carrier system of the present invention still further includes an anchoring element. For purposes of this invention, an anchoring element is anything that quickly and easily fastens and removes the carrier system from a base, i.e. something being carried by the user such as, a piece of luggage. For purposes of this application, the "something" or "base" article, can include a piece of luggage, jacket, purse, handbag, suitcase, briefcase, backpack, clothing, or other such items typically carried by a traveler.

[0015] It is contemplated that the anchoring element is a releasable clasp or fastener and may be, for example, a snap hook, loop fastener, lobster clasp, ball chain with channel receptacle, snap-fit mechanism, Velcro®, magnet, or any other clasp or fastener that quickly and easily is secured to or removed from the base article.

[0016] As can be seen, the components of the carrier system comprise a united carrier case, tether and anchoring element. The tether is connected to the anchoring element and further connected to the case in the preferred form of the invention. The components are associated or connected via unifying elements. The unifying elements can be various, such as a clasp, fastener, ring, hook, snap-hook, snap-fit mechanism, adhesive, bond, weld, crimp, or any other element that connects or affixes the components together. Conceivably, the anchoring element could be formed with the tether itself, i.e., as part of the tether case.

[0017] With the forgoing in mind, it is one object of the invention to provide an improved carrier system that stows items such as documents and personal articles while enabling easy access to the documents and articles, that is compact, convenient and portable, and which can be removably attached to a variety of articles typically carried by travelers.

[0018] It is a further object of the invention to provide an enclosable case to secure items to prevent the items from being dropped or lost, while also concealing the items to maintain privacy and confidentiality, and which uses a tether for extending and retracting the enclosable case of the portable carrier system.

[0019] Another object of the invention is to provide an anchoring element for securing the portable carrier system to prevent it from being misplaced or lost, for example in the event the portable carrier system is accidentally dropped, which is readily attached and detached to another carried article.

[0020] A further object of the invention is to provide an improved carrier system that is flexible, yet sturdy, attractive, inexpensive and easy to use particularly in combination with transporting luggage, a laptop computer case, jacket, purse, handbag, suitcase, briefcase, back pack, or other such items carried along during travel.

[0021] The present invention and its attributes and advantages will be further understood, and appreciated with reference to the detailed description below of a presently contemplated embodiment, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0022] The preferred embodiments of the invention will be described in conjunction with the appended drawings provided to illustrate, and not to the limit, the invention, where like designations denote like elements, and in which:

[0023] FIG. 1 illustrates a perspective view of a portable carrier system according to the present invention;

[0024] FIG. 2 illustrates a perspective view of one embodiment of an enclosable carrier case of the portable carrier system according to the present invention;

[0025] FIG. 3 illustrates a perspective view of a portable carrier system connected to a piece of luggage according to the present invention;

[0026] FIG. 4 illustrates a perspective view of an alternate embodiment of an enclosable carrier case of the portable carrier system according to the present invention; and

[0027] FIG. 5 illustrates a perspective view of another alternate embodiment of an enclosable carrier case of the portable carrier system according to the present invention.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0028] The embodiments of the present invention described hereinafter have been particularly adapted for use in the mass, or public, transportation industry. The portable carrier device could easily be adapted for other environments or applications, without departing from the invention

[0029] Shown in FIG. 1, a portable carrier system 100 includes an enclosable carrier case 102, tether 104 and an anchoring element 106. The enclosable case 102 stows a variety of items 108, such as documents and/or personal articles. Preferably, the portable carrier system 100 is capable of holding items 108 with a combined weight of between and including one ounce and twenty-four ounces, and more preferably between and including two ounces and twelve ounces, and most preferably of at least and including six ounces. This weight range enables use of an economical, retractable tether. Of course, more robust and expensive tethers yield a concomitant increase in the weight of the case 102 along with its contents.

[0030] As illustrated in FIG. 2, the enclosable case 102 includes at least two sheets of material 110, 112. The first sheet of material 110 includes four edges 114, 116, 118, 120. The second sheet of material 112 also includes four edges 122, 124, 126, 128. A joining element 132A joins the first sheet 110 and second sheet 112 along at least three edges, such that edge 114 and edge 122 are joined, edge 116 and edge 124 are joined, and edge 118 and edge 126 are joined, forming a cavity 130. In this embodiment, the joining element 132A is such that the edges 114, 116, 118 of the first sheet 110 and the edges 122, 124, 126 of the second sheet 112 are sewn along 132A. It is further contemplated that the edges of the first sheet and the edges of the second sheet may be joined in a number of alternate ways, such as glue, buttons, Velcro®, bonded (see discussion below regarding FIG. 4 and heat seal 132B) or fastened, just to name a few.

[0031] Additionally, the enclosable case 102 includes a securement mechanism 134A to connect and disconnect edge 120 of the first sheet 110 and edge 128 of the second sheet 112 to close and open the cavity 130. In this embodiment, the securement mechanism 134A is a zipper. It could just as well be some other type of closure device that is readily manipulated such as Velcro®, buttons, magnets, Ziploc® (see, e.g., discussion of FIG. 4) and the like. The carrier case can be made or provided in a multitude of other manners and forms. It need not be made of two sheets, but could be extrusion molded, for instance. In essence, it is a re-sealable container suited for the task at hand, which is to hold and transport items placed therein.

[0032] The cavity 130 allows for the insertion and stowing of items 108 in the enclosable case 102. Preferably, the cavity 130 is sized and shaped to receive a variety of items 108, for example a cellular phone 108A, an airline ticket 108B, or a set of keys 108C. It could be adapted to just one kind of item, however.



[0033] As shown in FIG. 2, the cavity 130 has a height H of, between and including, two inches and eight inches, and in this embodiment between and including three inches and six inches. The cavity 130 has a width W of, between and including, about four inches and about twelve inches, and more preferably in this form, including between about six inches and about ten inches. Moreover, the cavity 130 has a thickness T of between and including 0.001 inches and three inches, and more preferably between and including 0.1 inches and one inch. This makes a thin and relatively small carrier case that is valise and wallet-like, which is particularly well-suited for the air traveler.

[0034] Turning back to FIG. 1, the carrier system 100 has a retractable tether 104. The tether 104 includes a housing 136 with a first side 136A and a second side 136B, a cable 138 with a first end 138A and a second end 138B, and a spring 140. The tether 104 enables the enclosable case 102 of the portable carrier system 100 to extend and retract relative to the tether and hence relative to a luggage bag 146 (FIG. 3), the base to which the system 100 is connected. The cable 138 of the tether 104 extends from the housing 136 under a pulling force and retracts into the housing 136 under a bias from the spring 140. It is shown partially extending from the housing 136, for clarity.

[0035] The tether 104 is relatively thin and has a low profile so it is not bulky. As shown in FIG. 1, the cable 138 of the tether 104 exits through the first side 136A of the housing 136. This arrangement is particularly convenient for use with the portable carrier system 100 because it allows the traveler to pull the case 102 such that the cable 138 can exit straight from the first side 136A of the housing 136. This reduces the number of bends experienced by the cable 138 from repetitive use, thereby reducing the wear and tear on the cable 138, thus extending its life. This arrangement also allows for the cable 138 to be more easily pulled from the housing 136. It is further contemplated that the tether 104 can be arranged at different angles, depending on the type of enclosable case 102 attached to the tether 104 and how the portable carrier system 100 is used.

[0036] The cable 138 of the tether 104 includes a first end 138A and a second end 138B. The first end 138A of the cable 138 extends from the first side 136A of the housing 136 to connect to an anchoring element 106. The second end 138B of the cable 138 is connected to the spring 140 of the tether 104. In this embodiment, the anchoring element 106 is a snap hook 106A, although any anchoring element is contemplated that is quickly and easily secured to and removed from something, such as the piece of luggage 146, as illustrated in FIG. 3.

[0037] A cord 144 with a first end 144A and a second end 144B connects the tether 104 with the case 102. The first end 144A of the cord 144 is connected to the second side 136B of the housing 136 of the tether 104. The second end 144B of the cord 144 connects to the enclosable case 102. The cord 144 further allows the tether 104 to be positioned within the case 102, if desired, such that the cable 138 extends from the cavity 130. Thus, the tether 104 can be concealed while still allowing the enclosable case 102 to be extended and retracted.

[0038] Unifying elements connect, or affix, the components of an enclosable case 102, tether 104 and anchoring element 106 to comprise this first embodiment of the carrier

system 100. The cable 138 of the tether 104 is connected to the anchoring element 106. In this embodiment, the unifying element 142A at this point is a crimp that connects the first end 138A of the cable 138 to the anchoring element 106, more specifically a snap hook 106A. The cord 144 connects the tether 104 with the case 102. In this embodiment, the unifying element 142B at this point is a fastener that connects the first end 144A of the cord 144 to the second side 136B of the housing 136 of the tether 104. The second end 144B of the cord 144 connects to the enclosable case 102. In this embodiment, the unifying element 142C at this point is a clasp that connects the second end 144B of the cord 144 to the case 102 near the cavity 130, and more specifically to the zipper 134A.

[0039] Preferably, the tether 104 is capable of fully retracting in use. Thus, the tether 104 is capable of extending and then fully retracting a case 102 when the case 102 stows items 108. Ideally, the user can simply close the case 102 and let it go, whereupon it will retract on the tether 104.

[0040] As illustrated in FIG. 3, the portable carrier system 100 is attached to a piece of luggage 146 via the anchoring element 106. It is further contemplated that the carrier system 100 can be removably attached to other items such as a person (e.g., belt loop), laptop bag, jacket, purse, handbag, suitcase, briefcase, backpack, or other such items. The tether 104 allows a traveler to extend and retract an enclosable case 102 to quickly, conveniently and easily access items 108 such as personal articles or documentation, including travel documents and personal information.

[0041] FIG. 4 illustrates a perspective view of an alternate embodiment of an enclosable carrier case 102' of the portable carrier system 100'. The enclosable case 102' includes one sheet of material 111. The sheet of material 111 is folded such that a joining element 132B joins the sheet 111 along at least two sides, such that edge 151 and edge 153 are joined and edge 155 and edge 157 are joined, forming a cavity 130'. In this embodiment, the joining element 132B is such that the edges 151 and 153 and the edges 155 and 157 are heat welded together. It is further contemplated that the edges of the folded sheet 111 may be joined in a variety of ways, such as glue, buttons, Velcro®, bonded or sewn, just to name a few.

[0042] Additionally, the enclosable case 102' includes a securement mechanism 134B to close and open the cavity 130'. The securement mechanism 134B is positioned on top (versus the side as shown in FIGS. 1 and 2). In this embodiment, the securement mechanism 134B is a reclosable Ziplock®. It could just as well be some other type of closure device that is readily manipulated such as Velcro®, buttons, magnets, zippers and the like.

[0043] The components of an enclosable case 102', tether 104 and anchoring element 106 are connected, or affixed, to comprise this embodiment of the carrier system 100'. The cable 138 extends from the housing 136 to connect to an anchoring element 106. A cord 144 with a first end 144A and a second end 144B connects the tether 104 with the case 102'.

[0044] In this embodiment, the unifying element 142D to connect the cord 144 and tether 104 is a ring. The first end 144A of the cord 144 is connected to the ring 142D via a knot 143A. The second end 144B of the cord 144 connects

to the enclosable case 102'. In this embodiment, the unifying element 142E at this point is a grommet. The second end 144B of the cord 144 is connected to the grommet 142E via a knot 143B.

[0045] In alternate embodiments, the foregoing attachment points for the tether could be reversed, vis-a-vis elements 138, 144. FIG. 5 illustrates a perspective view of another embodiment of an enclosable carrier case 102" of the portable carrier system 100" according to the present invention. In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 5, cord 144 (shown in FIGS. 1 and 4) is eliminated with some releasable connector (e.g., another anchoring element 106) simply mounted or otherwise fixed to the housing 136 of the tether 104 for attachment to the luggage 146. The tether 104 is connected to the luggage 146 as well as to the carrier case 102" via anchoring elements 106. Without the cord 144, tether 104 is connected to the luggage 146 via a loop fastener 106B, but again, many other kinds of well known releasable fasteners could be employed. In this embodiment, the cable 138 extends from the housing 136 of the tether 104 to connect to a snap hook 106A, now being used to clip onto the carrier case 102".

[0046] While the present inventions and what is considered presently to be the best modes thereof have been described in a manner that establishes possession thereof by the inventors and that enables those of ordinary skill in the art to make and use the inventions, it will be understood and appreciated that there are many equivalents to the exemplary embodiments disclosed herein and that myriad modifications and variations may be made thereto without departing from the scope and spirit of the inventions, which are to be limited not by the exemplary embodiments but by the appended Claims.

What is claimed is:

1. An improved portable carrier system for stowing items comprising:

an enclosable case including a cavity with a securement mechanism to open and close said cavity;

a tether including a housing and cable, wherein said cable extends from said housing,

a first unifying element connects said cable to one of an anchoring element and said case; and

a second unifying element, said second unifying element connects said housing of said tether to the other of said anchoring element and said case.

2. The improved portable carrier device for storing items of claim 1 wherein said tether retracts a weight greater than and including three ounces.

3. The improved portable carrier device for storing items of claim 1 wherein said tether retracts a weight greater than and including six ounces.

4. The improved portable carrier device for storing items of claim 1 wherein said tether retracts a weight greater than and including twelve ounces.

5. The improved portable carrier device for storing items of claim 1 wherein said anchoring element is a releasable clasp, and further including a cord attached to said housing, said cord having one of said first and second unifying elements on an end thereof, and a third unifying element on the other end thereof.

6. The improved portable carrier device for storing items of claim 1 wherein said tether is positionable in use within said cavity of said case.

7. The improved portable carrier device for storing items of claim 1 wherein said cavity of said case includes a height, width and thickness, said height between and including two inches and eight inches, said width between and including four inches and twelve inches, said thickness between and including 0.001 inches and three inches.

8. The improved portable carrier device for storing items of claim 1 wherein said first unifying element is a crimp.

9. The improved portable carrier device for storing items of claim 1 wherein said second unifying element is a fastener.

10. The improved portable carrier device for storing items of claim 1 wherein said anchoring element is a releasable fastener, and further including a cord extending from said housing, said cord affixed at one end by one of said first and second unifying elements.

11. The improved portable carrier device for storing items of claim 10 wherein said releasable fastener attaches to said case, and said cord attaches to a base.

12. The improved portable carrier device for storing items of claim 11 wherein said anchoring element is a snap hook.

13. A carrier system for use by travelers, comprising:

a carrier case having an interior defined therein adapted to receive and enclose items to be carried by a traveler, said case having an access opening to said interior and a closure for said access opening,

a retractable tether mechanism,

an anchor device, said anchor device being releasably engageable with a base to which said anchor device can be attached,

a first connection adapted to connect said tether mechanism to said case, and

a second connection adapted to connect said tether to said anchor device.

14. The carrier system of claim 13 wherein said first connection is a releasable fastener which is attached to a retractable cable of said tether mechanism.

15. The carrier system of claim 13 wherein said first connection includes an elongated cord, and said anchor device is attached to a retractable cable of said tether mechanism.

16. The carrier system of claim 13 wherein said case is specifically adapted to carry generally planar travel documents.

17. The carrier system of claim 13 wherein said first connection is a fixed mount on said case.

18. The carrier system of claim 13 wherein said second connection attaches said anchor device to an end of a cable of said tether mechanism.

19. The carrier system of claim 13 wherein said base is an article of hand luggage.

20. A carrier system for small articles carried, as by a person, comprising:

a carrier case having an interior defined therein adapted to receive and enclose items to be carried, said case having an access opening to said interior and a closure for said access opening,

a retractable tether mechanism,  
 an anchor device, said anchor device being releasably engageable with a base to which said anchor device can be attached, and  
 means for connecting said case, tether mechanism and anchor device uniting them together.

**21.** A portable carrier system for small articles carried, as by a person, comprising:  
 a carrier case having an interior defined therein adapted to receive and enclose items to be carried, said case having an access opening to said interior and a closure for said access opening,  
 a retractable tether mechanism,  
 an anchor device, said anchor device being releasably engageable with a base to which said anchor device can be attached, and  
 connections between said case, tether mechanism and anchor device uniting them together.

**22.** The carrier system of claim 21 wherein said connections include an elongated thin element, which is attached between said case and said tether mechanism.

**23.** The carrier system of claim 22 wherein said anchor device is a clasp having a releasable clasp closure.

**24.** The carrier system of claim 21 wherein said base is an article of hand luggage.

**25.** The carrier system of claim 24 wherein said case is specifically adapted to carry generally planar travel documents.

**26.** The carrier system of claim 24 wherein said connections include a releasable fastener connecting said tether mechanism to said case.

**27.** A portable carrier system for small articles carried by a person who is traveling, comprising:  
 a carrier case having an interior defined therein adapted to receive and enclose items to be carried, including generally planar travel documents,  
 said case having an access opening to said interior and a closure for said access opening,

a retractable tether mechanism,  
 an anchor device in the form of a clasp having a releasable clasp closure, said anchor device being releasably engageable with an article of hand luggage to which said clasp can be attached, and  
 connections between said case, tether mechanism and anchor device uniting them together, one of said connections being between said case and said tether mechanism, and the other of said connections being between said tether mechanism and said anchor device,  
 whereby, with said clasp engaged with said hand luggage, said carrier case can be pulled away from a first position closely adjacent to said hand luggage by extension of said tether to a second and more remote position relative to said hand luggage for easier access to said carrier case interior, as by the traveler, and then retracted from said second position to said first position.

**28.** The portable carrier system of claim 27 wherein said connection between said tether mechanism and said carrier case is a releasable connection.

**29.** The portable carrier of claim 27 wherein said connection between said tether mechanism and said carrier case is a non-releasable connection.

**30.** The carrier system of claim 18 wherein said first connection is a fixed mount on said case.

**31.** The carrier system of claim 21 wherein said attachment between said case and said tether mechanism is a direct connection of said tether mechanism with said case placing them closely adjacent to each other.

**32.** The portable carrier system of claim 27 wherein said connection between said case and said tether mechanism is a direct connection of said tether mechanism with said case placing them closely adjacent to each other.

**33.** The portable carrier system of claim 27 wherein said connection between said case and said tether includes an elongated thin element, which is attached at one end to said tether mechanism and is attached to said carrier case at the other end.

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