

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
6 April 2006 (06.04.2006)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2006/036886 A2

- (51) International Patent Classification:
H04L 12/26 (2006.01)
- (21) International Application Number:
PCT/US2005/034400
- (22) International Filing Date:
23 September 2005 (23.09.2005)
- (25) Filing Language: English
- (26) Publication Language: English
- (30) Priority Data:
10/949,682 24 September 2004 (24.09.2004) US
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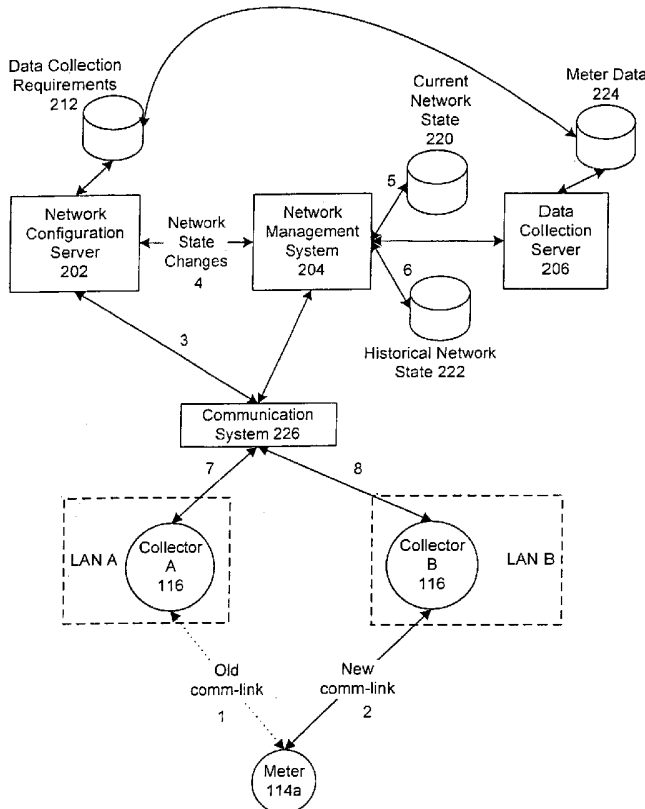
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(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KM, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, LY, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH,

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: SYSTEM FOR AUTOMATED MANAGEMENT OF SPONTANEOUS NODE MIGRATION IN A DISTRIBUTED FIXED WIRELESS NETWORK



(57) Abstract: Methods and systems of managing node migration in a wireless network where nodes may spontaneously migrate from a first communication path to a second communication path. The system includes a first collector disposed within the first communication path and a second collector disposed within the second communication path, a network management server that determines a network state and maintains a database of the network state. When the network management server detects that a node has migrated from the first communication path to the second communication path, information associated with the node is retrieved from the first collector and downloaded to the second collector to ensure the proper operation of the node in the network.

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GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:

— *without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report*

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.

SYSTEM FOR AUTOMATED MANAGEMENT OF SPONTANEOUS NODE MIGRATION IN A DISTRIBUTED FIXED WIRELESS NETWORK

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims priority to U.S. Application Serial No. 10/949,682 filed September 24, 2004, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates to wireless networks for collecting data, and more particularly, to systems and methods for managing the migration of nodes on such networks.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The collection of meter data from electrical energy, water, and gas meters has traditionally been performed by human meter-readers. The meter-reader travels to the meter location, which is frequently on the customer's premises, visually inspects the meter, and records the reading. The meter-reader may be prevented from gaining access to the meter as a result of inclement weather or, where the meter is located within the customer's premises, due to an absentee customer. This methodology of meter data collection is labor intensive, prone to human error, and often results in stale and inflexible metering data.

[0004] Some meters have been enhanced to include a one-way radio transmitter for transmitting metering data to a receiving device. A person collecting meter data that is equipped with an appropriate radio receiver need only come into proximity with a meter to read the meter data and need not visually inspect the meter. Thus, a meter-reader may walk or drive by a meter location to take a meter reading. While this represents an improvement over visiting and visually inspecting each meter, it still requires human involvement in the process.

[0005] An automated means for collecting meter data involves a fixed wireless network. Devices such as, for example, repeaters and gateways are permanently affixed on rooftops and pole-tops and strategically positioned to receive data from enhanced meters fitted with radio-transmitters. Typically, these transmitters operate in the 902-928 MHz range and employ Frequency Hopping Spread Spectrum (FHSS) technology to spread the transmitted energy over a large portion of the available bandwidth.

[0006] Data is transmitted from the meters to the repeaters and gateways and ultimately communicated to a central location. While fixed wireless networks greatly reduce human involvement in the process of meter reading, such systems require the installation and maintenance of a fixed network of repeaters, gateways, and servers. Identifying an acceptable location for a repeater or server and physically placing the device in the desired location on top of a building or utility pole is a tedious and labor-intensive operation. Furthermore, each meter that is installed in the network needs to be manually configured to communicate with a particular portion of the established network. When a portion of the network fails to operate as intended, human intervention is typically required to test the effected components and reconfigure the network to return it to operation.

[0007] Thus, while existing fixed wireless systems have reduced the need for human involvement in the daily collection of meter data, such systems require substantial human investment in planning, installation, and maintenance and are relatively inflexible and difficult to manage. Therefore, there is a need for networks that do not depend on pre-determined communication paths, but instead rapidly adapt to changing wireless communications conditions so as to maintain optimal network connectivity. These networks, where nodes in the network can change communication paths spontaneously based on changing wireless communication performance, have a need for a system to manage the wireless network as nodes migrate among the many communication paths.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0008] The present invention is directed to methods and systems of managing the migration of wireless nodes amongst repeaters and collectors in a wireless network. According to a first aspect of the invention, there is provided a system for managing nodes migrating from a first communication path to a second communication path in a wireless network. The system includes a first collector disposed within the first communication path and a second collector disposed within the second communication path, a network management server that determines a network state, and a network management system that maintains a database of the network state. When the network management server detects that a node has migrated from the first

communication path to the second communication path, information associated with the node is retrieved from a global database of device configuration parameters and downloaded to the second collector. In this way, the system ensures that each collector has the configuration information for each meter communicating through it.

[0009] According to a feature, a current network state database and a historical network state database may be update to reflect that the node has migrated from the first communication path to the second communication path.

[0010] According to another aspect of the invention, there is provided a method of managing nodes that spontaneously migrate among plural communication paths in a wireless network. The method includes detecting a migration of a node from a first communication path to a second communication path; updating a network state; retrieving information associated with the node from a first intermediary node in the first communication path; and downloading the information to a second intermediary node in the second communication path.

[0011] According to a feature, a current network state database and a historical network state database may be updated to reflect that the node has migrated from the first communication path to the second communication path. Also, the node may be configured in the second communication path in accordance with the information. The collected data from the first intermediary node may be merged with second collected data that is collected after the node migrated to the second communication path. The information may be removed from the first intermediary node after being downloaded to the second intermediary node.

[0012] According to another aspect of the invention there is provided a method for managing a spontaneous migration of a meter from a first collector in a first communication path to a second collector in a second communication path. The method includes detecting the spontaneous migration; retrieving configuration information and first collected data associated with the meter; contacting the second collector and download the configuration information and the first collected data; and merging the first collected data with second collected data associated with the meter stored in the second collector.

[0013] Additional features and advantages of the invention will be made apparent from the following detailed description of illustrative embodiments that proceeds with reference to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] The foregoing summary, as well as the following detailed description of preferred embodiments, is better understood when read in conjunction with the appended drawings. For the purpose of illustrating the invention, there is shown in the drawings exemplary

constructions of the invention; however, the invention is not limited to the specific methods and instrumentalities disclosed. In the drawings:

[0015] Fig. 1 is a diagram of a wireless system for collecting data from remote devices;

[0016] Fig. 2 expands upon the diagram of Fig. 1 and illustrates a system in which the present invention is embodied;

[0017] Fig. 3 illustrates an exemplary sequence of events when a meter switches from a first collector to a second collector.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

[0018] Exemplary systems and methods for gathering meter data are described below with reference to Figs. 1-3. It will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that the description given herein with respect to those figures is for exemplary purposes only and is not intended in any way to limit the scope of potential embodiments.

[0019] Generally, a plurality of meter devices, which operate to track usage of a service or commodity such as, for example, electricity, water, and gas, are operable to wirelessly communicate with each other. A collector is operable to automatically identify and register meters for communication with the collector. When a meter is installed, the meter becomes registered with the collector that can provide a communication path to the meter. The collectors receive and compile metering data from a plurality of meter devices via wireless communications. A communications server communicates with the collectors to retrieve the compiled meter data.

[0020] Fig. 1 provides a diagram of an exemplary metering system 110. System 110 comprises a plurality of meters 114, which are operable to sense and record usage of a service or commodity such as, for example, electricity, water, or gas. Meters 114 may be located at customer premises such as, for example, a home or place of business. Meters 114 comprise an antenna and are operable to transmit data, including service usage data, wirelessly. Meters 114 may be further operable to receive data wirelessly as well. In an illustrative embodiment, meters 114 may be, for example, a electrical meters manufactured by Elster Electricity, LLC.

[0021] System 110 further comprises collectors 116. Collectors 116 are also meters operable to detect and record usage of a service or commodity such as, for example, electricity, water, or gas. Collectors 116 comprise an antenna and are operable to send and receive data wirelessly. In particular, collectors 116 are operable to send data to and receive data from meters 114. In an illustrative embodiment, meters 114 may be, for example, an electrical meter manufactured by Elster Electricity, LLC.

[0022] A collector 116 and the meters 114 for which it is configured to receive meter data define a subnet/LAN 120 of system 110. As used herein, meters 114 and collectors 116 maybe considered as nodes in the subnet 120. For each subnet/LAN 120, data is collected at collector 116 and periodically transmitted to a data collection server 206. The data collection server 206 stores the data for analysis and preparation of bills. The data collection server 206 may be a specially programmed general purpose computing system and may communicate with collectors 116 wirelessly or via a wire line connection such as, for example, a dial-up telephone connection or fixed wire network.

[0023] Generally, collector 116 and meters 114 communicate with and amongst one another using any one of several robust wireless techniques such as, for example, frequency hopping spread spectrum (FHSS) and direct sequence spread spectrum (DSSS). As illustrated, meters 114a are "first level" meters that communicate with collector 116, whereas meters 114b are higher level meters that communicate with other meters in the network that forward information to the collector 116.

[0024] Referring now to Fig. 2, there is illustrated a system 200 in which the present invention may be embodied. The system 200 includes a network management server 202, a network management system (NMS) 204 and a data collection server 206 that together manage one or more subnets/LANs 120 and their constituent nodes. The NMS 204 tracks changes in network state, such as new nodes registering/unregistering with the system 200, node communication paths changing, etc. This information is collected for each subnet/LAN 120 and are detected and forwarded to the network management server 202 and data collection server 206.

[0025] In accordance with an aspect of the invention, communication between nodes and the system 200 is accomplished using the LAN ID, however it is preferable for customers to query and communicate with nodes using their own identifier. To this end, a marriage file 208 may be used to correlate a customer serial number, a manufacturer serial number and LAN ID for each node (e.g., meters 114a and collectors 116) in the subnet/LAN 120. A device configuration database 210 stores configuration information regarding the nodes. For example, in the metering system 110, the device configuration database may include data regarding time of use (TOU) switchpoints, etc. for the meters 114a and collectors 116 communicating to the system 200. A data collection requirements database 212 contains information regarding the data to be collected on a per node basis. For example, a user may specify that metering data such as load profile, demand, TOU, etc. is to be collected from particular meter(s) 114a. Reports 214

containing information on the network configuration may be automatically generated or in accordance with a user request.

[0026] The network management system (NMS) 204 maintains a database describing the current state of the global fixed network system (current network state 220) and a database describing the historical state of the system (historical network state 222). The current network state 220 contains data regarding current meter to collector assignments, etc. for each subnet/LAN 120. The historical network state 222 is a database from which the state of the network at a particular point in the past can be reconstructed. The NMS 204 is responsible for, amongst other things, providing reports 214 about the state of the network. The NMS 204 may be accessed via an API 220 that is exposed to a user interface 216 and a Customer Information System (CIS) 218. Other external interfaces may be implemented in accordance with the present invention. In addition, the data collection requirements stored in the database 212 may be set via the user interface 216 or CIS 218.

[0027] The data collection server 206 collects data from the nodes (e.g., collectors 116) and stores the data in a database 224. The data includes metering information, such as energy consumption and may be used for billing purposes, etc. by a utility provider.

[0028] The network management server 202, network management system 204 and data collection server 206 communicate with the nodes in each subnet/LAN 120 via a communication system 226. The communication system 226 may be a Frequency Hopping Spread Spectrum radio network, a mesh network, a Wi-Fi (802.11) network, a Wi-Max (802.16) network, a land line (POTS) network, etc., or any combination of the above and enables the system 200 to communicate with the metering system 110.

[0029] The present invention provides a system and method for downloading a meter's collection data from an old collector to a new collector upon determining that the meter changed collectors. The present invention serves to ensure that the new collector is able to provide accurate metering data to the system 200 when requested, as well as properly configure the meter. With reference to Fig. 3, it is shown that the meter 114a has changed its communication path from collector A to collector B (steps 1-2). In the exemplary communication paths, the collectors are intermediary nodes between the meter 114a and the communication system 226. Next, the network management server 202 detects the change in the communication path of meter 114a from LAN A to LAN B (step 3). The network management server 202 then sends network state updates to the network configuration system 204 and the data collection system 206 (step 4). A data collection requirements database 212, may also be updated, if necessary.

The network management system 204 then updates the current network configuration 220 (step 5) and the historical network configuration 222 (step 6) to reflect the change.

[0030] Prior to the meter 114a changing LANs, it is possible that collector A in LAN A has collected meter data and contains configuration information associated with the meter 114a. This data and configuration information may include historical demand, load profile and event data. If collector A has such data, it is advantageous to make collector B aware of that data in order to accurately collect subsequent data from the meter 114a. Therefore, according to the present invention, to ensure that collector B has all of the data and configuration information associated with meter 114a, the system 200 contacts collector A after detecting the change (step 7) and downloads the meter's settings and data from collector A. Next, the system 200 communicates the information to collector B (step 8) where the settings and data from collector A are merged with data and configuration information contained in collector B for the meter 114a. The data contained in collector A is removed to free up space on the collector. In this manner, meter data and configuration information is maintained at the appropriate collector. As such, collector B will have all of the historical information for meter 114a and will be able to accurately provide metering data to the system 200 when requested.

[0031] While systems and methods have been described and illustrated with reference to specific embodiments, those skilled in the art will recognize that modification and variations may be made without departing from the principles described above and set forth in the following claims. Accordingly, reference should be made to the following claims as describing the scope of disclosed embodiments.

What is Claimed:

1. A system for managing nodes migrating from a first communication path to a second communication path in a wireless network, comprising:

a first collector disposed within said first communication path and a second collector disposed within said second communication path;

a network management server that determines a network state; and

a network management system that maintains a database of said network state,

wherein when said network management server detects that a node has migrated from said first communication path to said second communication path, information associated with said node is retrieved from said network management server and downloaded to said second collector.

2. The system of claim 1, further comprising updating a current network state database and a historical network state database to reflect that said node has migrated from said first communication path to said second communication path.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein said information associated with said node comprises configuration information.

4. The system of claim 3, wherein said configuration information is downloaded to said second collector to determine operational characteristics of said node within said second communication path.

5. The system of claim 1, wherein said information associated with said node comprises data collected by said node.

6. The system of claim 5, wherein said data is merged with data collected by said second collector from said node after said node migrated to said second communication path.

7. The system of claim 1, wherein said information is removed from said first collector after being downloaded to said second collector.

8. The system of claim 1, wherein said node comprises a utility meter.

9. A method of managing nodes that spontaneously migrate among plural communication paths in a wireless network, comprising:

detecting a migration of a node from a first communication path to a second communication path;

updating a network state;

retrieving information associated with said node from a global configuration database;

and

downloading said information to a second intermediary node in said second communication path.

10. The method of claim 9, further comprising:

updating a current network state database and a historical network state database to reflect that said node has migrated from said first communication path to said second communication path.

11. The method of claim 9, further comprising:

configuring said node in said second communication path in accordance with said information.

12. The method of claim 9, said information including first collected data associated with said node, said method further comprising:

merging said first collected data with second collected data collected after said node migrated to said second communication path.

13. The method of claim 9, further comprising:

removing said information from said first intermediary node after being downloaded to said second intermediary node.

14. The method of claim 1, wherein said node comprises a utility meter and said first and second intermediary nodes comprise a collector.

15. A method for managing a spontaneous migration of a meter from a first collector in a first communication path to a second collector in a second communication path, comprising:

detecting said spontaneous migration;

retrieving configuration information and first collected data associated with said meter;
contacting said second collector and download said configuration information and said
first collected data; and

merging said first collected data with second collected data associated with said meter
stored in said second collector.

16. The method of claim 15, further comprising:

updating a current network state database and a historical network state database to
reflect that said node has migrated from said first communication path to said second
communication path.

17. The method of claim 16, further comprising:

removing said information and said first collected data from said first collector.

18. The method of claim 16, further comprising:

updating a data collection requirements server to reflect that said node has migrated from
said first communication path to said second communication path.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein said data collection requirements indicate what
types of data said meter is collect.

20. The method of claim 15, wherein said configuration information determines
operating characteristics of said meter.

FIG. 1

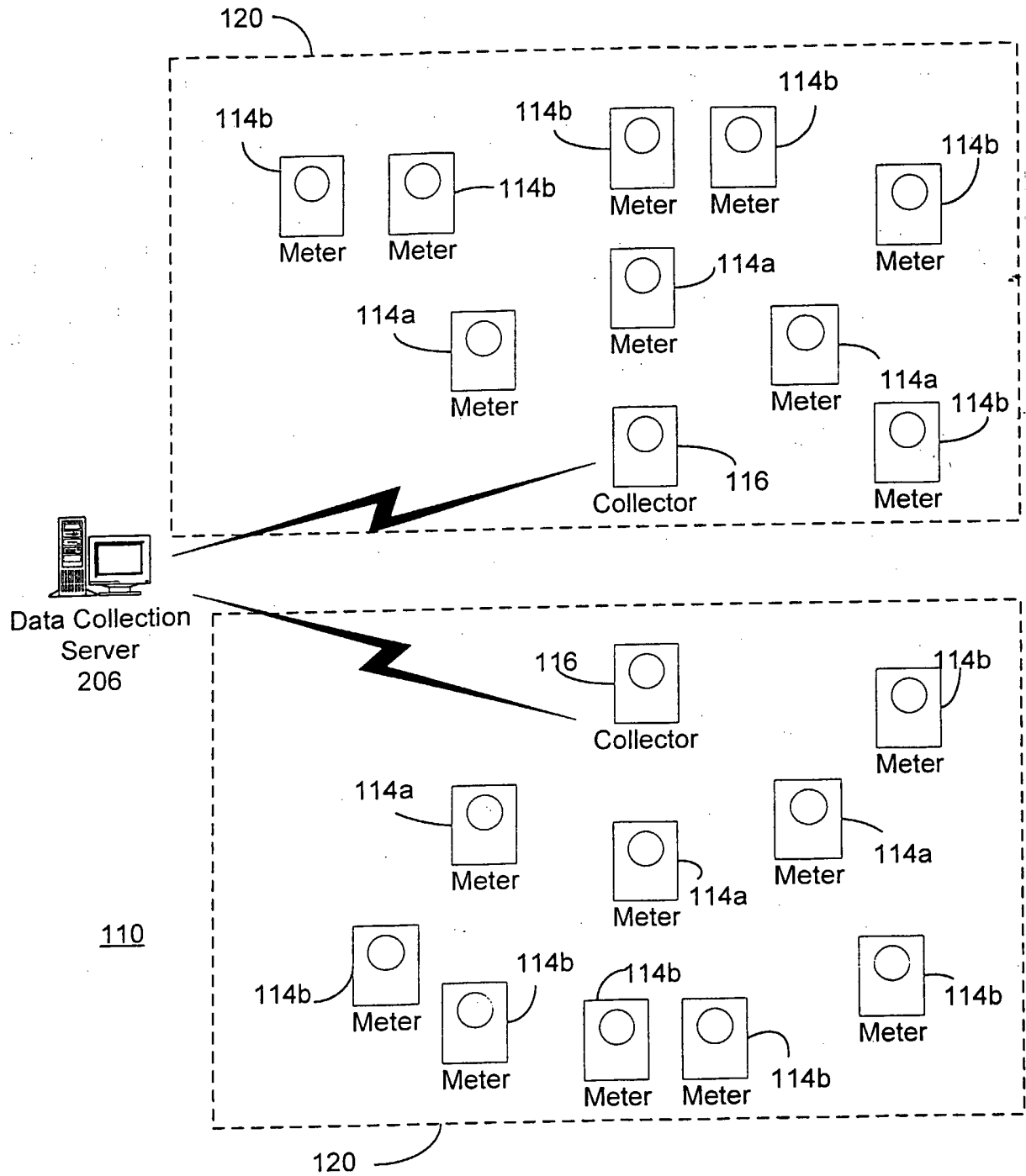


FIG. 2

