

PATENT APPLICATION

REDUCING PROBE TRAFFIC IN MULTIPROCESSOR SYSTEMS

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CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present application is a continuation-in-part of and claims priority under 35
10 U.S.C. 120 to U.S. Patent Application No. 10/288,347 for METHODS AND
APPARATUS FOR MANAGING PROBE REQUESTS filed on November 4, 2002
(Attorney Docket No. NWISP024), the entire disclosure of which is incorporated herein
by reference for all purposes. The subject matter described in the present application is
also related to U.S. Patent Application No. 10/288,399 for METHODS AND
15 APPARATUS FOR MANAGING PROBE REQUESTS filed on November 4, 2002
(Attorney Docket No. NWISP025), the entire disclosure of which is incorporated herein
by reference for all purposes.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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The present invention generally relates to accessing data in a multiple processor
system. More specifically, the present invention provides techniques for reducing
memory transaction traffic in a multiple processor system.

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Data access in multiple processor systems can raise issues relating to cache
coherency. Conventional multiple processor computer systems have processors
coupled to a system memory through a shared bus. In order to optimize access to data
in the system memory, individual processors are typically designed to work with cache
memory. In one example, each processor has a cache that is loaded with data that the
30 processor frequently accesses. The cache is read or written by a processor. However,
cache coherency problems arise because multiple copies of the same data can co-exist
in systems having multiple processors and multiple cache memories. For example, a
frequently accessed data block corresponding to a memory line may be loaded into the
cache of two different processors. In one example, if both processors attempt to write
35 new values into the data block at the same time, different data values may result. One
value may be written into the first cache while a different value is written into the

second cache. A system might then be unable to determine what value to write through to system memory.

5 A variety of cache coherency mechanisms have been developed to address such problems in multiprocessor systems. One solution is to simply force all processor writes to go through to memory immediately and bypass the associated cache. The write requests can then be serialized before overwriting a system memory line. However, bypassing the cache significantly decreases efficiency gained by using a cache. Other cache coherency mechanisms have been developed for specific
10 architectures. In a shared bus architecture, each processor checks or snoops on the bus to determine whether it can read or write a shared cache block. In one example, a processor only writes an object when it owns or has exclusive access to the object. Each corresponding cache object is then updated to allow processors access to the most recent version of the object.

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Bus arbitration is used when both processors attempt to write the same shared data block in the same clock cycle. Bus arbitration logic decides which processor gets the bus first. Although, cache coherency mechanisms such as bus arbitration are effective, using a shared bus limits the number of processors that can be implemented
20 in a single system with a single memory space.

Other multiprocessor schemes involve individual processor, cache, and memory systems connected to other processors, cache, and memory systems using a network backbone such as Ethernet or Token Ring. Multiprocessor schemes involving separate
25 computer systems each with its own address space can avoid many cache coherency problems because each processor has its own associated memory and cache. When one processor wishes to access data on a remote computing system, communication is explicit. Messages are sent to move data to another processor and messages are received to accept data from another processor using standard network protocols such as TCP/IP. Multiprocessor systems using explicit communication including
30 transactions such as sends and receives are referred to as systems using multiple private memories. By contrast, multiprocessor system using implicit communication including

transactions such as loads and stores are referred to herein as using a single address space.

5 Multiprocessor schemes using separate computer systems allow more processors to be interconnected while minimizing cache coherency problems. However, it would take substantially more time to access data held by a remote processor using a network infrastructure than it would take to access data held by a processor coupled to a system bus. Furthermore, valuable network bandwidth would be consumed moving data to the proper processors. This can negatively impact both
10 processor and network performance.

Performance limitations have led to the development of a point-to-point architecture for connecting processors in a system with a single memory space. In one example, individual processors can be directly connected to each other through a
15 plurality of point-to-point links to form a cluster of processors. Separate clusters of processors can also be connected. The point-to-point links significantly increase the bandwidth for coprocessing and multiprocessing functions. However, using a point-to-point architecture to connect multiple processors in a multiple cluster system sharing a single memory space presents its own problems.

20 Consequently, it is desirable to provide techniques for improving data access and cache coherency in systems having multiple processors connected using point-to-point links.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to the present invention, various techniques are provided for reducing traffic relating to memory transactions in multi-processor systems. According to various specific embodiments, a computer system having a plurality of processing nodes interconnected by a first point-to-point architecture is provided. Each processing node has a cache memory associated therewith. A probe filtering unit is operable to receive probes corresponding to memory lines from the processing nodes and to transmit the probes only to selected ones of the processing nodes with reference to probe filtering information. The probe filtering information is representative of states associated with selected ones of the cache memories.

According to other embodiments, methods and apparatus are provided for reducing probe traffic in a computer system comprising a plurality of processing nodes interconnected by a first point-to-point architecture. A probe corresponding to a memory line is transmitted from a first one of the processing nodes only to a probe filtering unit. The probe is evaluated with the probe filtering unit to determine whether a valid copy of the memory line is in any of the cache memories. The evaluation is done with reference to probe filtering information associated with the probe filtering unit and representative of states associated with selected ones of the cache memories. The probe is transmitted from the probe filtering unit only to selected ones of the processing nodes identified by the evaluating. Probe responses from the selected processing nodes are accumulated by the probe filtering unit. Only the probe filtering unit responds to the first processing node.

A further understanding of the nature and advantages of the present invention may be realized by reference to the remaining portions of the specification and the drawings.

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