

A System and Method for Concealed Connection Merging through Coordinated and Dynamic Virtual Proxy Allocation

5 FIELD OF INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to network communication systems, and more particularly to the coordination of dynamic pools of Internet proxies.

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BACKGROUND

The bandwidth of mobile broadband has seen exponential improvements over the past decades. However, due to the infrastructure behind mobile broadband technologies (e.g., 2G GSM/GPRS/EDGE, 3G WCDMA/HSPA+/DC-HSPA+, 4G LTE/WiMAX, etc.), they have always been and continue to be far slower and far more expensive per-Gigabyte-of-usage than wired Internet access technologies (e.g., ADSL, VDSL, Cable, Fibre-optic). Mobile broadband technologies transport Internet traffic via a subset of the radio spectrum. Only relatively narrow portions of the entire radio spectrum have conventionally been reserved for consumer mobile broadband technologies, and obtaining the legal rights to transmit and receive on said portions of the radio spectrum has conventionally been an extremely expensive process. Furthermore, the disjoint portions of radio spectrum, called “frequency bands”, reserved for consumer mobile broadband technologies (e.g., 800 Mhz band, 2100 Mhz band, 2600 Mhz band, etc.) are fractured into disjoint “frequency band channels”. These factors contribute to the relatively low bandwidths and high prices of mobile broadband technologies in comparison to wired Internet access technologies. A very limiting factor to the bandwidth of any mobile broadband technology is the width of the conventionally narrow frequency band channel it operates on. Modern research into improving mobile broadband technologies revolves around altering mobile broadband infrastructures (and consequently any device intended to access said infrastructures) in order to support the utilization of multiple of the limited frequency band channels simultaneously by a single device, and improving the efficiency of data transport and signal encoding techniques. Both approaches are

conventionally extremely costly and lengthy to deploy given that software and/or hardware modifications need to be physically carried out at every single cellular base station. Moreover, only the latest of consumer devices can conventionally make use of the latest mobile broadband technologies. Mobile broadband technologies do hold some advantages over wired Internet access technologies though: they are conventionally already available and/or less costly to deploy in rural areas, in developing countries, in moving vehicles, etc.; all contexts where wired Internet access technologies are often either challengingly expensive or downright impossible to deploy and/or maintain.

Merging the bandwidths of multiple network connections has been a topic of academic and commercial research for decades. Merged network connections can offer higher-bandwidth and increased robustness to individual connection failures. Numerous software and hardware, academic and commercial “connection-merging solutions” have been invented which offer varying levels of improved bandwidth and/or reliability, and varying levels of support for transporting existing network protocols (e.g., TCP, UDP, ICMP, etc.). However, a common and seemingly unavoidable limitation across all solutions is that end-points (e.g., communicating client devices and application servers) must undergo software and/or hardware upgrades to support the connection-merging solutions. Some efforts have proposed solutions where portions of the network infrastructure between end-points undergo software and/or hardware upgrades to enable the end-points to benefit from merged network connections without being altered themselves. These solutions are conventionally not portable, are limited in scope and flexibility, and do not scale to real world scenarios where client devices and application servers may be geographically scattered and exist in arbitrarily high numbers.

So-called MiFi devices and mobile broadband USB adapters (e.g., 3G/4G USB adapters) bring the ubiquitous and portable properties of mobile broadband technologies to non-mobile-broadband-enabled devices (e.g., laptop computers, desktop computers, tablets), enabling said devices to access the Internet over mobile broadband infrastructures via a peripheral device. While numerous MiFi

devices and mobile broadband USB adapters exist, they conventionally do not support or include any form of Internet connection merging.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

The invention is a system and method for demand-driven, flexible-topology and intelligently-enabled communication between conventional network-enabled client devices and conventional network-enabled application servers over multiple conventional segments of the Internet concurrently; the system comprising:

one or more Internet gateway apparatuses, each of which provides Internet access to one or more of the conventional network-enabled client devices through multiple Internet connections simultaneously by means of multiple Internet access devices and of a "connection-merging protocol";

one or more virtual relay servers, each of which also implements the connection-merging protocol, and acts as a proxy between one or more of the gateway apparatuses and one or more of the conventional network-enabled application servers the client devices connected to said gateway apparatuses wish to communicate with; and

a virtual resource allocation and information server that aggregates status and routing information relevant to the gateway apparatuses, and that dynamically adjusts the number, location and/or performance specifications of the virtual relay servers.

The key features of the invention are:

that the relay servers, each of which effectively enables one or more of the gateway apparatuses to each simultaneously utilize multiple Internet connections through the shared communication-merging protocol, are virtual and geographically scattered, and that they are dynamically launched, configured and terminated according to usage and performance metrics as well as the locations of said gateway apparatuses, thereby forming a dynamically adjusted network topology;

that the multiple Internet access devices of each of the gateway apparatuses are explicitly configured and programmed to select maximally

disjoint segments of the Internet to exchange network data with the relay servers, such as to minimize competition for network resources;

5 that neither the client devices, the application servers, nor the Internet infrastructure that connects them need to be modified or configured in any way for said clients and servers to benefit from the added reliability and bandwidth yielded by the concurrent utilization of multiple, possibly partially or entirely disjoint, segments of the Internet; and

10 that the gateway apparatuses and virtual relay servers can each transport network data of any network protocol (e.g., TCP, UDP, ICMP, etc.) over multiple Internet connections simultaneously by wrapping said data within the shared connection-merging protocol.

15 In the preferred embodiment of the invention, the gateway apparatuses are portable devices and their multiple Internet access devices are mobile broadband access devices configured and programmed to use disjoint mobile broadband infrastructure segments (i.e., disjoint frequency band channels) whenever possible. Thus, in its preferred embodiment, the invention provides a portable
20 means for conventional client devices to benefit from the added reliability and bandwidth yielded by the concurrent utilization of multiple disjoint segments of mobile broadband infrastructures when accessing the Internet.

The present invention consists of features and a combination of parts hereinafter
25 fully described and illustrated in the accompanying drawings, it being understood that various changes in the details may be made without departing from the scope of the invention or sacrificing any of the advantages of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

To further clarify various aspects of some embodiments of the present invention, a more particular description of the invention will be rendered by references to specific embodiments thereof, which are illustrated in the appended drawings. It is appreciated that these drawings depict only typical embodiments of the invention and are therefore not to be considered limiting of its scope. The invention will be described and explained with additional specificity and detail through the accompanying drawings.

FIG. 1 depicts all the elements of the disclosure's system at a high-level, as well as their network topology in the invention's preferred embodiment.

FIG. 2 zooms into an exemplary gateway device **101**, focusing on its hardware components in the invention's preferred embodiment.

FIG. 3 zooms into the mobile broadband component of the Internet infrastructure that connects an exemplary gateway device **101** and an exemplary relay machine **102** in the invention's preferred embodiment.

FIG. 4 zooms into the software elements encountered by network data flowing between an exemplary client device **100** and an exemplary application server **103** in the invention's preferred embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The invention in its preferred embodiment is depicted in FIG. 1. Client devices **100** and application servers **103** communicate with each other through one or more gateway devices **101** and one or more relay machines **102**, which in turn communicate with each other over multiple conventional segments of the Internet concurrently. Further, the gateway devices **101** and the relay machines **102** exchange network topology information and usage and performance metrics with a coordination machine **104**. Further, the coordination machine **104** dynamically launches, configures and terminates relay machines **102** and dynamically assigns one of the relay machines **102** to each of the gateway devices **101** according to usage and performance metrics.

Each of the client devices **100** is an arbitrary, unmodified, network-enabled user equipment (e.g., a mobile phone, a tablet, a phablet, a laptop computer, a desktop computer, a GPS device, a smart appliance, etc.) that accesses the Internet through one of the gateway devices **101**, which it connects to directly in a wireless manner.

Each of the gateway devices **101**, as depicted in detail in FIG. 2, comprises two or more mobile broadband (e.g., 2G GSM/GPRS/EDGE, 3G WCDMA/HSPA+/DC-HSPA+, 4G LTE/WiMAX, etc.) access devices **200** (e.g., SIM card-based modems), and is able to connect to the Internet as well as transmit and receive data to and from one or more of the application servers **103** through the two or more access devices' **200** Internet connections simultaneously. Further, the access devices **200** are configured and programmed to utilize distinct frequency band channels whenever possible such as to maximally reduce the likelihood of the access devices **200** competing for the same network resources (e.g., network capacity and bandwidth of a single frequency band channel) as well as to minimize the likelihood of interference between the access devices **200**.

This is depicted in FIG. 3 where an exemplary gateway device's **101** mobile broadband access devices **200** explicitly connect to distinct

frequency band channels **302** of possibly distinct frequency bands **301** on a cellular base station **300**. In this configuration, each of the mobile broadband access devices **200** can potentially access the entire bandwidth of the frequency band channel **302** it connects to and the total bandwidth accessible by all of the mobile broadband access devices **200** equals the sum of the available bandwidths of each of the connected-to frequency band channels **302**, and is thus larger than the available bandwidth of any individual connected-to frequency band channel **302**. Conversely, and illustrative of the aforementioned competition for network resources, if two or more of the mobile broadband access devices **200** were to connect to the same frequency band channel **302**, the total bandwidth accessible by said mobile broadband access devices **200** would be at most as large as the available bandwidth of said individual frequency band channel **302**.

Each of the gateway devices' **101** mobile broadband access devices **200** may further utilize different mobile broadband technologies (e.g., 2G GSM/GPRS/EDGE, 3G WCDMA/HSPA+/DC-HSPA+, 4G LTE/WiMAX, etc.). This is especially useful to further reduce the possibility of competition for network resources, to further reduce the likelihood of interference between the access devices **200**, to increase the reliability of the gateway devices' **101** overall connectivity by utilizing maximally disjoint mobile broadband infrastructures, and to dynamically adapt to the varying levels of coverage and deployment of the numerous existing mobile broadband technologies.

In one realization of the preferred embodiment of the invention, the gateway devices' **101** mobile broadband access devices **200** are SIM card-based modems. In this realization, the mobile broadband access devices **200** can be forced to utilize disjoint frequency band channels **302** by inserting SIM cards from different mobile operators into each of the modems, and/or by inserting SIM cards restricted to different mobile broadband technologies (e.g., 2G GSM/GPRS/EDGE, 3G

WCDMA/HSPA+/DC-HSPA+, 4G LTE/WiMAX, etc.) into each of the modems, and/or by explicitly programming the modems to connect to disjoint frequency band channels **302**, regardless of their SIM cards.

5 Each of the gateway devices **101** further comprises a WiFi adapter **201**, and provides Internet connectivity to one or more of the client devices **100** in a wireless manner through 2.4Ghz and/or 5Ghz WiFi networks emitted by said WiFi adapter **201**.

10 Each of the gateway devices **101** further comprises a processing unit **202**, a memory unit **203** and a storage unit **204**, to run and store computer programs.

Each of the gateway devices **101** further runs computer programs that intercept all Internet traffic originating from connected client devices **100** and intended for
15 one or more of the application servers **103**, irrespective of said traffic's network protocol (e.g., TCP, UDP, ICMP, etc.), and proxy said traffic through one or more of the relay machines **102**, selectively using the Internet connection of one of the gateway device's **101** mobile broadband access devices **200** for each network data unit (e.g., network packet).

20 The Internet connection to use is selected dynamically based on one or more properties (e.g., latency, available bandwidth, reliability, cost) of each of the connections. This selection mechanism, as well as the associated transmission, reception, buffering, validation and synchronization facilities
25 form a "connection-merging protocol". Numerous such protocols exist and may be utilized. The merger of a gateway device's **101** multiple Internet connections is henceforth referred to as its "macro connection"; the macro connection's upstream and downstream bandwidths are respectively equal to the sum of the upstream bandwidths and the sum of the
30 downstream bandwidths of each of said gateway device's **101** Internet connections.

The relay machine **102** each of the gateway devices **101** should proxy Internet traffic originating from connected client devices **100** through is
35 dictated by network topology information periodically provided by the

coordination machine **104**. The coordination machine **104** provides each of the gateway devices **101** with the Internet Protocol (IP) address of the geographically nearest relay machine **102** with the most available bandwidth. Each of the gateway devices **101** thus normally proxies Internet traffic originating from connected client devices **100** through a single relay machine **102**. However, the coordination machine **104** may decide, for resource management or maintenance purposes, that one or more of the gateway devices **101** should “migrate” to a different relay machine **102**, in which case it will instruct said gateway devices **101** to proxy all future Internet traffic originating from connected client devices **100** through a different relay machine **102**. Thus, and until any pending network exchanges already proxied through its original relay machine **102** are complete, one or more of the gateway devices **101** may simultaneously proxy Internet traffic originating from connected client devices **100** through multiple relay machines **102**.

Upon receiving network data from one of the client devices **100** (via one of the gateway devices **101** and one of the relay machines **102**), one of the application servers **103** may choose to transmit a network response to that client. Said network response from said application server **103** intended for said client device **100** is first transmitted to said relay machine **102**, and then from said relay machine **102** to said gateway device **101** along one or more of the Internet connections between said gateway device **101** and said relay machine **102**. The Internet connections to use for each network data unit (e.g., network packet) are selected dynamically based on one or more properties (e.g., latency, available bandwidth, reliability, cost) of each of the connections.

Each of the gateway devices **101** further runs a computer program that queries the coordination machine **104** to know which relay machine **102** it should proxy Internet traffic originating from connected client devices **100** through. This computer program runs after one of the gateway devices **101** completes its boot process, and after any loss of Internet connectivity.

Each of the gateway devices **101** further runs a computer program that periodically monitors the latency, bandwidth and reliability of each of its Internet connections. Whenever one of its connection is deemed of unacceptably poor
5 quality, said computer program terminates said connection and schedules its relaunch at a later time.

Each of the gateway devices **101** further runs a computer program that provides secure remote access facilities to log in to said gateway device **101**. Said
10 facilities enable remote maintenance, technical support, software updates, device locating, disabling in the event of loss and/or theft, and more.

Each of the gateway devices **101** further comprises a feedback display **205** and two physical interfaces **206-207**. The feedback display **205** indicates status
15 information on said gateway device's **101** macro connection's reliability, bandwidth and/or latency, and on the overall signal strengths of each of said gateway device's **101** Internet connections. The feedback display **205** can take several forms including but not limited to an LCD screen, an e-ink screen and/or one or more LEDs. The first physical interface **206** re-computes the status
20 information and refreshes the feedback display **205**. The second physical interface **207** is said gateway device's **101** on/off switch.

Each of the gateway devices **101** further runs a computer program that provides a network interface for connected client devices **100** to remotely access and
25 refresh the status information displayed by said gateway device's **101** feedback display **205** by connecting to a predetermined network port on said gateway device **101** and/or through a dedicated computer program that may run on one or more of the client devices **100**.

30 Each of the gateway devices **101** further comprises an internal, rechargeable battery **208**, and a power input port **209** to recharge said battery (e.g., a micro-USB port). Thus, the gateway devices **101** may be portable devices.

Each of the relay machines **102** is a virtual machine operating on the Internet,
35 and comprises a virtual processing unit, a virtual memory unit and a virtual

storage unit, to run and store computer programs.

5 There are one or more relay machines **102** geographically hosted around the world. The coordination machine **104** controls their numbers and geographic locations as a function of bandwidth demand on per-region, per-country or per-city bases according to the availability of virtual machine hosting services, and in such a way as to maximally reduce the number of network hops between the gateway devices **101** and the relay machines **102** said gateway devices proxy Internet traffic originating from
10 connected client devices **100** through, to reduce overall latency and increase overall reliability.

Each of the relay machines **102** acts as a proxy between one or more of the client devices **100** and the Internet, and hides from the application
15 servers **103** the fact that said client devices **100**, via the gateway devices **101**, simultaneously utilize multiple Internet connections. This is required due to the fact that conventional application servers expect a given client device to have a single Internet connection or IP address.

20 Further, each of the relay machines **102** implements the connection-merging protocol used by the gateway devices **101**.

Further, for the client devices **100** connected to each of the gateway devices **101** to be able to fully utilize the bandwidth of said gateway device's **101** macro connection, and to account for the fact that the relay machines' **102** bandwidths are used to both receive the gateway devices' **101** network traffic and to retransmit it to the application servers **103**, or
25 conversely, to both receive network traffic from the application servers **103** and to retransmit it to the gateway devices **101**, the available bandwidth between each of the relay machines **102** and the Internet must be at least
30 twice as high as the summed bandwidths of the macro connections of the gateway devices **101** proxying Internet traffic originating from connected client devices **100** through said relay machine **102**.

35 More specifically, both the available upstream and downstream

bandwidths between each of the relay machines **102** and the Internet must each be at least as high as the summed downstream and upstream bandwidths of the macro connections of the gateway devices **101** proxying Internet traffic originating from connected client devices **100** through said relay machine **102**.

Each of the relay machines **102** further runs a computer program that periodically measures the network and computational load of the relay machine **102**, and reports the measurements to the coordination machine **104**.

Each of the relay machines **102** further runs an additional computer program that logs the Internet traffic the relay machine relays when the governing laws of the country in which relevant client devices **100**, gateway devices **101** and said relay machine **102** are located require that Internet traffic be traceable to its originating client device.

Each of the application servers **103** is an arbitrary, unmodified, network-enabled machine connected to the Internet (e.g., a machine hosting a website such as Google.com, Facebook.com, etc.). Each of the relay machines **102** accesses the application servers **103** through its Internet connection.

The coordination machine **104** is a virtual machine operating on the Internet, and comprises a virtual processing unit, a virtual memory unit and a virtual storage unit, to run and store computer programs. The coordination machine **104** aggregates usage and performance metrics sent to it by the relay machines **102**, launches, configures and terminates relay machines **102** according to said metrics, and instructs each of the gateway devices **101** as to which of the relay machines **102** to proxy Internet traffic originating from connected client devices **100** through.

The coordination machine **104** receives queries by newly booted up and (re-)connected gateway devices **101**, asking to be assigned a relay machine **102** to proxy Internet traffic originating from connected client devices **100** through. The coordination machine **104** instructs said gateway devices **101** to proxy Internet traffic originating from connected

client devices **100** through the geographically nearest of the relay machines **102**, with the most available bandwidth.

5 Further, when geographically colocated relay machines **102** are under-utilized to a degree where reducing their number would not cause the remaining relay machines **102** to become over-utilized, the coordination machine **104** initiates the termination of one or more of the relay machines **102**. The termination process begins with the coordination machine **104** instructing the gateway devices **101** currently proxying
10 Internet traffic originating from connected client devices **100** through the one or more to-be-terminated relay machines **102** to proxy all future Internet traffic originating from connected client devices **100** through one of the other relay machines **102**. Once all said gateway devices **101** have completely ceased to proxy any Internet traffic originating from connected
15 client devices **100** through one of the to-be-terminated relay machines **102**, the coordination machine **104** shuts down said relay machine **102**. At no point after the termination process of one of the relay machines **102** has begun will the coordination machine **104** instruct any of the gateway devices **101** to proxy the Internet traffic originating from connected client
20 devices **100** through said relay machine **102**. The coordination machine **104** ensures that the gateway devices **101** are instructed to migrate to different relay machines **102** such that post-migration, the summed bandwidths of the macro connections of the gateway devices **101** assigned to any of the remaining relay machines **102** is as uniform as
25 possible across the remaining relay machines **102**. The coordination machine **104** further ensures that there is always at least one relay machine **102** for any given geographic area where one or more of the gateway devices **101** operate, which may be a region, a country or a city depending on the availability of virtual machine hosting services in said
30 geographic area.

Further, as one or more geographically colocated relay machines **102** become over-utilized, the coordination machine **104** launches one or more

- new geographically colocated relay machines **102** to alleviate the network and computational load borne by the currently operating relay machines **102**. Once one of the new relay machines **102** has completed its boot up process, the coordination machine **104** instructs a subset of the gateway devices **101** to migrate to the new relay machine **102** such that post-migration, the summed bandwidths of the macro connections of the gateway devices **101** assigned to each of the (old and new) relay machines **102** is as uniform as possible.
- 10 As of this writing, there exists a number of “connection-merging protocols” that enable communication between specialized network-enabled client devices and specialized network-enabled application servers over multiple specialized or conventional segments of the Internet concurrently. Conceptually, connection-merging protocols can “merge” several Internet connections into a
- 15 “macro connection”. The purpose of such connection merging is to combine the bandwidth and/or reliability of the individual connections, or to otherwise improve upon one or more metrics of the individual connections. A commonly recurring means of realizing this purpose is to prioritize those individual connections that provide such properties as higher bandwidths, higher reliability, lower operating
- 20 costs, lower latencies, etc. These properties can be observed dynamically to adjust the way network traffic is distributed among the individual connections dynamically. Further, connection-merging protocols that operate in contexts where individual connection latencies are heterogeneous may temporarily store incoming and outgoing network data in buffers to synchronize the data that is
- 25 sent and received on each individual connection, where said buffers are sized according to one or more properties of said individual connections. An alternate means of operating in contexts where individual connection latencies are heterogeneous is to artificially increase the latency of lower-latency connections in order for all connections to have more uniform latencies. Although certain
- 30 connection-merging protocols can operate over conventional segments of the Internet which are oblivious to said connection-merging protocols, a limitation of all existing connection-merging protocols as of this writing is that the

communicating end-point network devices (i.e., client devices and application servers) are required to implement the connection-merging protocol. A core function of the system formed by the gateway devices **101**, the relay machines **102** and the coordination machine **104** is to overcome this limitation in a dynamically-calibrated manner and enable any conventional network-enabled client device (i.e., any of the client devices **100**) and any conventional network-enabled application server (i.e., any of the application servers **103**) to communicate while benefiting from the enhanced properties of the macro connection over any of the individual connections it merges, without the need for said client devices, said application servers, or the Internet infrastructure between them to be modified to implement the connection-merging protocol.

The flow of network data between an exemplary client device **100** and an exemplary application server **103** in the preferred embodiment of the invention is depicted in FIG. 4.

The client device **100** makes a conventional network request directed at the application server **103** using an arbitrary network protocol (e.g., TCP, UDP, ICMP, etc.). As the client device's **100** Internet gateway, one of the gateway devices **101** must route the client device's **100** network request to the Internet. In order for network requests originating from the client device **100** to be transmitted by the gateway device's **101** multiple Internet connections concurrently, the requests must undergo a processing, carried out by three computer programs **400-401-402** running on the gateway device **101**.

The first computer program **400** intercepts the network request and redirects it (i.e., changes its destination) to a local port on the gateway device **101** on which the second computer program **401** is listening.

The second computer program **401** further alters the network request such that the gateway device's **101** assigned relay machine **102** may act as a proxy for the client device **100**, and forwards it to said relay machine **102** for said relay machine **102** to complete the network request and return the

application server's **103** network response.

As the network request exits the gateway device **101**, the third computer program **402** intercepts it and modifies it to support the connection-merging protocol such that the gateway device's **101** multiple Internet connections can be utilized concurrently to transmit the network request. The third computer program **402** then chooses how much of each of the gateway device's **101** Internet connections to use to transmit the network request to the relay machine **102** based on one or more properties (e.g., latency, available bandwidth, reliability, cost) of each of the connections, and transmits the network request accordingly.

The relay machine **102** receives the network request through its single, Internet-facing network interface, but from multiple source-IP addresses. Any network requests received by the relay machine **102** from the gateway device **101** are handled by two computer programs **403-404**. The first computer program **403**, analogously to the third computer program **402** running on the gateway device **101**, synchronizes and reassembles partial network requests received over the multiple Internet connections, and recreates the original network request with its original network protocol (e.g., TCP, UDP, ICMP, etc.) so that it can be processed by the application server **103** (that does not implement the connection-merging protocol). Then, the first computer program **403** hands off the request to the second computer program **404**.

The second computer program **404** operates in tandem with the second computer program **401** running on the gateway device **101**. Together, they carry out the proxying of the network request. The second computer program **404** transmits the network request to the application server **103** over the relay machine's **102** single Internet connection on its single network interface.

The application server **103** receives the network request, processes it as it would any conventional request, and transmits a network response back

to the relay machine **102** over the single Internet connection that connects the relay machine's **102** single network interface to the application server **103**.

5 The second computer program **404** running on the relay machine **102** receives the network response from the application server **103**, recognizes that the network response is intended for the client device **100**, and forwards it to the gateway device **101** to return the application server's **103** network response to the client device **100**.

10 As the network response exits the relay machine **102**, the first computer program **403** intercepts it and modifies it to support the connection-merging protocol such that the gateway device's **101** multiple Internet connections can be utilized concurrently to receive the network response. The first computer program **403** then chooses how much of
15 each of the gateway device's **101** Internet connections to use to transmit the network response to the gateway device **101** based on one or more properties (e.g., latency, available bandwidth, reliability, cost) of each of the connections, and transmits the network response accordingly.

20 The third computer program **402** running on the gateway device **101** receives the network response over the gateway device's **101** multiple Internet connections. It synchronizes and reassembles partial network responses received over each of the Internet connections, and recreates
25 the original network response with its original network protocol (e.g., TCP, UDP, ICMP, etc.) so that it can be processed by the client device **100** (that does not implement the connection-merging protocol). Then, the third computer program **402** hands off the network response to the second computer program **401**.

30 The second computer program **401** recognizes that the network response is intended for the client device **100** and hands it off to the first computer program **400**.

35 The first computer program **400** transmits the network response to the

client device **100**, thereby completing the network request and response process between the client device **100** and the application server **103**.

5 In realistic embodiments and as depicted in FIG. 1, there may be multiple client devices **100** connected to a single gateway device **101**, multiple gateway devices **101** each proxying traffic originating from connected client devices **100** through one or more relay machines **102**, multiple relay machines **102** each exchanging network data with one or more gateway devices **101** and one or more application servers **103**, and multiple
10 application servers **103** exchanging network data with one or more relay machines **102**. The described flow of network data between the client devices **100** and the application servers **103** extends to these more complex network topologies without alteration.

15 In another embodiment of the invention, the client devices **100** do not connect directly to the gateway devices **101** but rather there is one or more conventional network routing apparatuses (e.g., network router, network switch, WiFi range extender) between the client devices **100** and the gateway devices **101**. Such an embodiment is conceivable in cases where the gateway devices **101** are
20 intended to provide Internet connectivity to client devices **100** that are beyond the range of the WiFi emitted by said gateway devices' **101** WiFi adapters **201**. The invention is not restricted by the network topology between the client devices **100** and the gateway devices **101**.

25 In another embodiment of the invention, the gateway devices' **101** mobile broadband access devices **200** may have one or more external antennas to improve signal reception. Said antennas may be detachable and/or motorized. The invention is not restricted to any past, present or future mobile broadband signal acquisition and/or enhancement technologies used by the gateway
30 devices' **101** mobile broadband access devices **200**.

In another embodiment of the invention, the gateway devices' **101** mobile broadband access devices **200** may be modular and it may be possible to add and/or remove one or more of the gateway devices' mobile broadband access

devices **200**. The invention is not restricted to the physical realization of the gateway devices **101**.

In another embodiment of the invention, one or more of the gateway devices' **101** mobile broadband access devices **200** may not rely on conventional SIM-cards. In another embodiment of the invention, the gateway devices' **101** Internet connections may not utilize mobile broadband infrastructure, and instead be based on alternate Internet access technologies (e.g., ADSL, VDSL, Cable, Fibre-optic, Satellite). In yet another embodiment, the gateway devices' **101** Internet connections may be based on heterogeneous Internet access technologies (e.g., one or more mobile broadband Internet connections and one or more ADSL Internet connections). The invention is not restricted to any past, present or future Internet technologies or combination thereof used by the gateway devices' **101** Internet connection access devices.

In another embodiment of the invention, the gateway devices **101** may comprise Ethernet ports in replacement or alongside their WiFi adapters **201**. Said gateway devices **101** would provide connectivity to the client devices **100** in a wired manner via said Ethernet ports. In another embodiment, the gateway devices **101** may provide additional means of wireless connectivity to the client devices **100** (e.g., Bluetooth, infrared, LiFi) in replacement or alongside their WiFi adapters **201**. The invention is not restricted to any past, present or future means by which the gateway devices **101** provide wired or wireless connectivity to the client devices **100**.

In another embodiment of the invention, the gateway devices **101** may not comprise batteries **208**, rechargeable or otherwise, and may require constant, external electrical input to their power input ports **209** to function. In this embodiment, the gateway devices **101** may not be portable devices. The invention is not restricted by the portability or lack thereof of the gateway devices **101**.

In another embodiment of the invention, the relay machines **102** may be physical machines rather than virtual machines. The invention is not restricted by the

physical infrastructure that realizes the relay machines **102**.

In another embodiment of the invention, the coordination machine **104** may dynamically scale the performance specifications of the relay machines **102** rather than merely adjust their numbers. The invention is not restricted by the means by which the processing and network resources of the relay machines **102** are managed by the coordination machine **104**.

In another embodiment of the invention, the coordination machine **104** may be a physical machine rather than a virtual machine. The invention is not restricted by the physical infrastructure that realizes the coordination machine **104**.

In another embodiment of the invention, the functions of the coordination machine **104** may be distributed onto multiple coordination machines **104**—to reduce the network and computational load borne by a single coordination machine **104**, to reduce the geographic distance from the gateway devices **101** and the relay machines **102** to their coordination machine **104**, and/or to increase the overall system's robustness to coordination machine **104** failures. The invention is not restricted to any set number of coordination machine **104** instances.

In another embodiment of the invention, the functions of the coordination machine **104** may be implemented as a peer-to-peer, decentralized, possibly distributed computer program running on one or more of the relay machines **102**, to increase the overall system's robustness to coordination machine **104** failures and/or performance limitations. The invention is not restricted by the software architecture of the computer programs that carry out the functions of the coordination machine **104**.

In another embodiment of the invention, the client devices **100** could be explicitly configured or programmed to redirect their Internet traffic to one of the relay machines **102**. This would remove the need for the first two computer programs **400-401** running on the gateway devices **101** and for the second computer program **404** running on the relay machines **102** thereby considerably reducing the gateway devices' **101** and the relay machines' **102** respective processing

loads. The invention is applicable to conventional client devices **100** as well as to client devices **100** configured and/or programmed to take on the proxying functions of the gateway devices' **101** functions.

- 5 In another embodiment, the gateway devices **101** could be physically and/or functionally enhanced to provide functionality attributed to the client devices **100**. In one realization of this embodiment, the gateway devices **101**, while retaining their multiple Internet access devices **200**, proxying and connection-merging functions, additionally serve as mobile phones. Each of said mobile phones
- 10 would comprise, alongside its conventional components (e.g., processing unit, cameras, touch screen, etc.), two or more Internet access devices, would implement the connection merging protocol, and would be programmed to proxy its Internet traffic as well as that of any of the client devices **100** connected to said mobile phone through one of the relay machines **102**. The invention is
- 15 applicable to gateway devices **101** physically or functionally enhanced to provide arbitrary functions attributed to client devices **100** (e.g., a mobile phone, a tablet, a phablet, a laptop computer, a desktop computer, a GPS device, a smart appliance, etc.).
- 20 The present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from its essential characteristics. The described embodiments are to be considered in all respects only as illustrative and not restrictive. The scope of the invention is therefore indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description. All changes, which come within the meaning and range of
- 25 equivalency of the claims, are to be embraced within their scope.

CLAIMS

1. A system for demand-driven, flexible-topology and intelligently-enabled communication between at least one network-enabled client device **100** and at
5 least one network-enabled application server **103** over multiple segments of the Internet concurrently; the system comprising:
 - at least one gateway device **101**, wherein the gateway devices **101** each
comprise at least two simultaneously-operating Internet access devices
10 **200** and enable each of the client devices **100** to transmit and receive data to and from the application servers **103** through at least two Internet connections simultaneously by means of connection-selection and network data transmission, reception, buffering, validation, and synchronization facilities being referred to as a connection-merging
15 protocol, the merger of a gateway device's **101** multiple Internet connections being referred to as a macro connection;
 - at least one virtual relay machine **102**, wherein the relay machines **102**
each implement the connection-merging protocol, and act as proxies
20 between the client devices **100** and the application servers **103**; and
 - one virtual coordination machine **104** operating on the Internet, wherein the virtual coordination machine **104** aggregates system status metrics, and launches, configures and terminates relay machines **102** according to
25 said metrics, and instructs the gateway devices **101** as to which of the relay machines **102** to proxy Internet traffic originating from the client devices **100** through.
2. The system of claim **1**, wherein the client devices **100** are programmed to use
30 at least one of the relay machines **102** as a proxy.
3. The system of claim **1**, wherein the gateway devices **101** are physically and/or functionally enhanced to provide functionality attributed to the client devices **100**.
- 35 4. The system of claim **1**, wherein the Internet access devices **200** are mobile broadband access devices.

5. The system of claim **1**, wherein at least one of the Internet access devices **200** utilizes a non-mobile broadband Internet access technology.
6. The system of claim **4**, wherein the mobile broadband access devices are
5 programmed to utilize distinct frequency band channels **302** whenever possible.
7. The system of claim **1**, wherein the gateway devices **101** provide direct and/or routed, wired and/or wireless Internet connectivity to the client devices **100**.
- 10 8. The system of claim **1**, wherein the gateway devices **101** are portable and battery powered.
9. The system of claim **1**, wherein the available upstream and downstream bandwidths between each of the relay machines **102** and the Internet are each at
15 least as high as the summed downstream and upstream bandwidths of the macro connections of the gateway devices **101** using said relay machine **102** as their proxy.
10. The system of claim **1**, wherein the relay machines **102** log the internet traffic
20 they relay.
11. The system of claim **1**, wherein the relay machines **102** are physical machines.
- 25 12. The system of claim **1**, wherein the coordination machine **104** is a physical machine.
13. The system of claim **1**, wherein the functions of the coordination machine **104** are distributed onto at least two machines.
- 30 14. The system of claim **1**, wherein the functions of the coordination machine **104** are implemented as a peer-to-peer, decentralized, and/or distributed computer program.
- 35 15. A method for demand-driven, flexible-topology and intelligently-enabled communication between at least one network-enabled client device **100** and at least one network-enabled application server **103** over multiple segments of the Internet concurrently; the method comprising the steps of:

making at least one network request directed at at least one of the application servers **103**, using the client devices **100**;

5 intercepting the network requests, modifying them to support the connection-merging protocol defined in claim **1**, and transmitting the modified network requests for proxying to at least one of the relay machines **102** over at least two Internet connections per gateway device **101**, using the gateway devices **101**;

10 synchronizing and reassembling the modified network requests received over the Internet connections, recreating the original network requests, and transmitting the original network requests to the application servers **103**, using the relay machines **102**;

15 receiving the network requests and transmitting network responses back to the relay machines **102**, using the application servers **103**;

20 receiving the network responses from the application servers **103**, modifying them to support the connection-merging protocol, and transmitting modified network responses to the gateway devices **101** over the Internet connections, using the relay machines **102**;

25 synchronizing and reassembling the modified network responses received over the Internet connections, recreating the original network responses, and transmitting the original network responses to the client devices **100**, using the gateway devices **101**; and

receiving the network responses, using the client devices **100**.

30 16. The method of claim **15**, wherein the client devices **100** explicitly proxy their traffic through the relay machines **102**.

17. The method of claim **15**, wherein the network requests to the application servers **103** originate from the gateway devices **101**, and the network responses
35 from said application servers **103** are intended for said gateway devices **101**.

18. The method of claim **15**, further comprising, when the relay machines **102** are under-utilized, the steps of the coordination machine **104**:

initiating the termination of at least one of the relay machines **102**, being referred to as to-be-terminated relay machines;

5 ensuring that the gateway devices **101** are instructed to “migrate” away from the to-be-terminated relay machines; and

shutting down the to-be-terminated relay machines once the gateway devices **101** have ceased using the to-be-terminated relay machines as

10 proxies.

19. The method of claim **15**, further comprising, when the relay machines **102** become over-utilized, the steps of the coordination machine **104**:

15 launching at least one new relay machine **102**, being referred to as the newly-launched relay machines; and

instructing a subset of the gateway devices **101** to migrate to the newly-launched relay machines.

20 20. The method of claim **15**, wherein the coordination machine **104** dynamically scales the performance specifications of the relay machines **102**.

21. The method of claim **15**, further comprising the steps of:

25 querying the coordination machine **104** for which of the relay machines **102** to use as a proxy, using the gateway devices **101**; and

instructing the gateway devices **101** as to which of the relay machines **102**

30 to proxy through, using the coordination machine **104**.

22. The method of claim **15**, further comprising the steps of the gateway devices **101**:

35 periodically measuring at least one property of their Internet connections; and

terminating and scheduling the relaunch of certain of their Internet connections based on said measurements.

40 23. The method of claim **15**, further comprising the steps of the relay machines

102:

periodically measuring their network and computational load; and

5 reporting said measurements to the coordination machine **104**.