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PACKET PIPE ARCHITECTURE FOR ACCESS NETWORKS



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CROSS-REFERENCES TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

5 This Application for Patent claims the benefit of priority from, and hereby incorporates by reference the entire disclosure of, co-pending U.S. Provisional Application for Patent Serial No. 60/109,899, filed November 25, 1998.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 Technical Field of the Invention

The present invention relates in general to the telecommunications field and, in particular, to a packet pipe architecture for access networks.

Description of Related Art

15 Present day wireless telecommunication systems are vertically integrated. This structure implies that the radio air interface specifications which define the physical layer (as well as the network layers) and the medium's access control functions are often proprietary and tailored to fit particular applications such as voice or best effort data communications. However, a significant problem with the existing radio air interface specifications is that they have evolved with a circuit-switched legacy.

20 Consequently, attempts to convey Internet Protocol (IP) or Asynchronous Transfer Mode (ATM) data over the existing (circuit-switch-based) air interfaces have resulted in cumbersome, complex, and proprietary patchwork design solutions which are inefficient and incapable of handling the complete plethora of services that can be provided by these network models.

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For example, FIGURE 1 is a block diagram of an existing protocol stack that can be used by a generic access concentrator (e.g., an Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) access network or radio access network) to access an IP network such as the Internet, and convey packet data traffic therebetween. The basic idea behind the protocol stack architecture shown in FIGURE 1 is that a logical point-to-point link can be constructed between the Terminal Equipment (TE) and the access router (i.e., Edge Router in this case) devices using conventional layer 2 "tunneling" protocols (e.g., based on a conventional IP model). Network terminations at the layer 1 and/or layer 2 levels of the stack enable the relaying of IP packets locally between devices, in accordance with the best effort principles used. However, as mentioned earlier, a problem with such an approach is that it is limited to best effort type applications, and therefore, is not capable of handling all of the numerous services available with an IP or ATM layered architecture. Consequently, a significant need exists in the wireless telecommunications field for a new network access architecture that can improve on the efficiency of existing radio air interfaces while minimizing the complexity of the approach used. As described in detail below, the present invention successfully solves the above-described problems and satisfies this need.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, a packet pipe architecture is provided for an access network (e.g., provides access to an IP, ATM or similar packet-based network to convey packet data traffic therebetween), whereby the network interfaces with the packet pipe are standardized so that any packet pipe that satisfies the interface requirements can be utilized in the same access

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network. Also, the packet pipe uses a packet-based protocol stack with QoS provisions for service delivery instead of the conventional best effort service delivery functions used. Consequently, the packet pipe and access network are capable of providing all of the numerous services available with an IP, ATM or similar packet-based network layered architecture.

An important technical advantage of the present invention is that a packet pipe architecture is provided for an access network that can be optimized for IP, ATM or similar packet-based network packet data traffic.

Another important technical advantage of the present invention is that a packet pipe architecture is provided for an access network that can increase the efficiency of a radio air interface used.

Still another important technical advantage of the present invention is that a packet pipe architecture is provided for an access network that can minimize the complexity of the approach used.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A more complete understanding of the method and apparatus of the present invention may be had by reference to the following detailed description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings wherein:

FIGURE 1 is a block diagram of an existing protocol stack that can be used by a generic access concentrator or access network to access an IP network and convey packet data traffic therebetween;

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FIGUREs 2A and 2B are related block diagrams of a packet pipe architecture for an access network, which can be implemented in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention; and

5 FIGURE 3 is a protocol stack that can be used for the packet pipe shown in FIGUREs 2A and 2B to provide QoS differentiation support in accessing an IP network and conveying packet data traffic therebetween, in accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

10 The preferred embodiment of the present invention and its advantages are best understood by referring to FIGUREs 1-3 of the drawings, like numerals being used for like and corresponding parts of the various drawings.

Essentially, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, a packet pipe architecture is provided for an access network (e.g., can
15 provide access to an IP, ATM or similar packet-based network to convey packet data traffic therebetween), whereby the network interfaces with the packet pipe are standardized so that any packet pipe that satisfies the interface requirements can be utilized in the same access network. Also, the packet pipe uses a packet-based protocol stack with QoS provisions for service delivery instead of the conventional
20 best effort service delivery functions used. Consequently, the packet pipe and access network are capable of providing all of the numerous services available with an IP, ATM or similar packet-based network layered architecture.

Specifically, FIGUREs 2A and 2B are related block diagrams of a packet pipe architecture for an access network 100, which can be implemented in accordance with

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the preferred embodiment of the present invention. In the context of the present invention, a "packet pipe" can be a network or network component that is used primarily to convey packets of data. The exemplary network 100 includes a Terminal Equipment (TE) unit 102. For this embodiment, it can be assumed that one or more terminals located at end user premises can use an IP as a service bearer mechanism operating over an appropriate physical interface. However, the present invention is not limited to the use of such a protocol and can use other modes to transfer data, such as, for example, an ATM or other packet-based implementation (e.g., for a Base Transceiver Station (BTS) to Base Station Controller (BSC) interconnection).

10 The access network 100 also includes an Interworking Functions unit at the User Side (IWF_US) 104, which functions to map any application flows existing between a W.3 interface and a B.1 interface (to be described in detail below). For example, a B.1 to W.3 interface mapping functions to identify the type of flow, such as voice, data, streaming media, etc. Consequently, the QoS requirements for such a flow type are known and thus can be identified for use herein. This mapping also functions to identify and categorize the flow for pertinent bearer services, so that the packet pipe can schedule the flow for conveyance based on the relevant QoS requirements for that type of flow. As such, one IWF_US unit 104 can function to serve multiple users, multiple terminals, and/or multiple sessions. In this regard, the following InterWorking functions are provided between the radio access network 100 and the user (between the interface reference points W.3 and B.1): an IWF between the packet pipe and a Large Area Network (LAN) or Ethernet; an IWF between the packet pipe and one or more Plain Old Telephone System (POTS) or Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) telephones; and an IWF between the packet pipe and

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an E1 or T1 (leased) line. As such, the above-described list of IWFs is not intended to be all-inclusive.

For this embodiment, the interfaces supported by the IWF_US 104 to the user at the W.3 interface reference point are preferably open (not proprietary) interfaces based on industry-accepted standards. A generalized or generic interface can be provided at the B.1 interface reference point. For example, a W.3 interface can be generic to the extent that it is capable of handling whichever packet-based or circuit-based interface a TE provides as an input to an IWF_US and can classify QoS requirements for particular types of flows. Consequently, the IWF_US unit 104 can be used in conjunction with a plurality of different packet pipes, and conversely, one packet pipe can be used to service different IWFs.

At the B.1 interface, a predetermined set of primitives can be used with the W-Data Link Control (W-DLC) protocol layer, in order for the IWFs to be capable of requesting various services from the packet pipe and/or reserve resources. These primitives can be, for example: QoS information; fairness information; minimum traffic throughput information; resource allocation information, etc. A more detailed description of these exemplary primitives is provided below.

As such, for each of the various services to be supported by the packet pipe, a particular protocol stack can be defined. For example, for Ethernet or LAN types of services, layer 2 tunneling protocols (L2TP) may be used, or it may be more appropriate to terminate the protocols being used. In this context, the word "terminate" can mean that a particular protocol segment is not passed further along the chain. For example, an IP destination can be terminated in a router (and possibly replaced by an other IP destination). Furthermore, depending on the choice of

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physical interfaces and protocol stacks used at the W.3 and W.2.1 interfaces, the access system can be designed symmetrically so that the IWFs used at both ends of the network can be identical.

In accordance with the present invention, the packet pipe (106) provides layer
5 1 and layer 2 functions to convey packet data traffic across a radio air interface. For this exemplary embodiment, the packet pipe 106 includes a Radio Termination (RT) unit 108 on the user side of the packet pipe, a Radio Relay (RR) unit 110 coupled to the RT unit, and a Radio Nodes (RN) unit 110 coupled to the RR unit on the network side. Preferably, the packet pipe 106 has a point-to-multipoint capability, and
10 consequently, can support a plurality of different sessions from a plurality of different user terminals.

The packet pipe 106 also includes a plurality of B.x (e.g., B.1 and B.2) interfaces that operate as independently as possible from the radio technology being used. Furthermore, the packet pipe 106 is designed to provide a plurality of radio
15 bearer services to the higher protocol layers (layers 3 and above), which services are characterized by different QoS parameters that define a set of QoS levels. These QoS levels can be associated with the applications involved, such as, for example, Voice over IP (VOIP), best effort data, data synchronized with voice, etc. As such, the RT unit 108 and RN unit 112 function to terminate the protocols from the access router
20 116 and terminals 102, respectively. The RR unit 110 can be a wireless transmitter and/or receiver, or a repeater.

The network 100 also includes an Interworking Functions unit at the Network Side (IWF_NS) 114, which is coupled to the RN unit 112 of the packet pipe. The IWF_NS unit 114 functions to map the application flows existing between the B.2

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interface and W.2.1 interface (described in detail below). For this embodiment, one IWF_NS unit 114 can serve a plurality of communication sessions through a single packet pipe (106). Preferably, the IWF_NS unit maps all ongoing applications, such as, for example, voice, data, etc., from a plurality of terminals. For example, the

5 Medium Access Control (MAC) part of layer 2 (data link layer) can participate in scheduling packets from terminals operating in a shared resource (e.g., within the coverage of the packet pipe). The packets can be mapped onto relevant bearers that carry the packets in accordance with predetermined criteria, such as, for example, a

QoS requirement for latency, etc.

10 For this embodiment, an access router 116 provides connectivity to a plurality of Wide Area Networks (WANs), such as, for example, IP network 118. As such, the access router operates in a conventional manner to direct the data flowing to/from the WANs. Specifically, the primary purpose for using the access router as an "edge device" is to be able to provide (with a single access device) uniform access for a

15 multiplicity of services, along with a relatively flexible bandwidth allocation capability, for each type of packet, cell and/or voice application handled. As such, the access router 116 functions as a service access node and can provide differentiated access functions in accordance with the particular service a user has requested. For example, a conventional access router can be used to provide an authentication

20 capability which protects an authorized user's information base (in order to provide proper access service), and also avoids interference from a malicious user.

A gatekeeper unit 120 operates to handle call signalling and service functions (e.g., address resolution, bandwidth control, charging, etc.) for the end-points (e.g., terminal-to-terminal, gateway-to-terminal, or gateway-to-gateway) in, for example, an

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H.323-based (audio, video, data) network. As such, gatekeeper functions can be provided within a gateway device or by a separate gatekeeper node (e.g., handling up to several gateway devices at a time). By way of example, a gatekeeper unit can take part in the call handling processes, call signalling, conversion or mapping of IP
5 addresses to associated phone numbers or user port ID numbers, bandwidth allocation, fee charging, etc.

A Public Switched Telephone Network/ISDN (PSTN/ISDN) gateway 122 operates to provide connectivity between certain IP-based services, such as, for example, VOIP, and PSTN/ISDN native services. The PSTN/ISDN gateway can have
10 the following interfaces: a W.2.2 interface to the access router; and a W.2.3 interface to a PSTN/ISDN network using such known interfaces and protocols as, for example, ITU Standard G.703 or Synchronous Digital Hierarchy (SDH) and V5. The PSTN/ISDN gateway can provide such functions as protocol conversion, such as, for example, converting from an IP-based protocol stack to a pertinent
15 telecommunications protocol stack (e.g., PSTN/ISDN protocol stack or OSI/MTP-based protocol stack).

An ATM gateway 124 provides service connectivity between IP-based services and ATM native services. The ATM gateway can also provide gatekeeper functions. The ATM gateway can be used if ATM native services (e.g., Voice Over ATM,
20 Classical IP Over ATM, etc.) are supported by an ATM service network. An Element Management System (EMS) 126 provides monitoring and operational control functions for the elements comprising the fixed radio access network 100.

As mentioned above and shown in FIGURE 2B, the access network 100 includes a plurality of interfaces at different reference points in the network. For

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example, the W.3 interface is located between the TE unit 102 and IWF_US unit 104. Preferably, the W.3 interface is an open interface (e.g., IP over an Ethernet or USB). A B.1 interface is located between the IWF_US unit 104 and the packet pipe 106. The B.1 interface is preferably a proprietary interface, but it also can be non-proprietary for other uses. For example, a B.1 interface can be standardized in accordance with an agreement between different access technology suppliers and/or operators.

A W.1 interface (e.g., air interface) is located between the RT unit 108 and RR unit 110 or RN unit 112 (not shown). In a different embodiment, the W.1 or radio air interface can also be located between the RR unit 110 and RN unit 112. The W.1 interface can be proprietary or non-proprietary.

A B.2 interface is located between the packet pipe 106 and the IWF_NS unit 114. The B.2 interface is preferably a proprietary interface, but it can also be non-proprietary for other uses. Similar to a B.1 interface, for example, a B.2 interface can be standardized in accordance with an agreement between different access technology suppliers and/or operators.

A W.2.1 interface is located between the IWF_NS unit 114 and the edge or access router 116. The W.2.1 interface is preferably non-proprietary. A W.2.2 interface is located between the edge or access router 116 and the IP Network 118, Gatekeeper 120, PSTN/ISDN Gateway 122, and ATM Gateway 124. The W.2.2 interface is preferably a non-proprietary interface, such as, for example, IP over Frame relay, ATM, or SONET/SDH. A W.2.3 interface is located between the PSTN/ISDN Gateway 122 and PSTN/ISDN Network 128, and the ATM Gateway 124 and ATM Network 130. The W.2.3 interface is preferably a non-proprietary interface such as, for example, V5.2 or ATM forum User Network Interface (UNI).

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A B.3 interface is located between the EMS unit 126 and various components of the radio access network 100. The B.3 interface can be a proprietary or non-proprietary interface. A B.4 interface is provided between the EMS unit and the upper layer network management system. The B.4 interface can also be a proprietary or non-proprietary interface.

As mentioned above, the layer 1 and layer 2 packet pipe (106) provides a plurality of radio bearer services to the higher protocol layers, which services can be characterized by different Quality of Service (QoS) parameters. For this embodiment, the access network 100 manages QoS with the following approaches: Integrated Services (IntServ) or ReSerVation Protocol (RSVP) support; Differentiated Services (DiffServ) support; or by using a "drill down" protocol technology which can transfer QoS parameters down from the higher to the lower protocol stacks of the packet pipe 106. In accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention, a protocol stack for the packet pipe 106 which can provide QoS differentiation (DiffServ) support is shown in FIGURE 3.

As illustrated by the protocol stack shown in FIGURE 3, the IP global flows are terminated at the edges of the packet pipe 106 to provide packet classification. The RSVP services are terminated to access resource reservation parameters in order to manage sessions in the packet pipe. Also, a router-like technology is applied at the edges of the packet pipe. For example, the Edge router 116 differentiates packets in accordance with the different QoS requirements imposed. This differentiation between packets can be performed using, for example, RSVP (developed for supporting different QoS classes in IP applications, such as video-conferencing,

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multimedia, etc.), or a DiffServ classification function. Notably, various network transport mechanisms may be used with each DiffServ class.

As mentioned earlier, a primary function of the packet pipe 106 is to provide layer 1 and layer 2 functionality for conveying packetized traffic across a radio air interface (e.g., W.1 interface in this example). The interface between the packet pipe 106 and the upper layers in the overall protocol architecture also determines the type of packets (e.g., Packet Data Units or PDUs) that are submitted for transfer. As such, the primary scenarios for the packet pipe 106 can be described as follows: an IP-optimized packet pipe; an ATM-optimized packet pipe; and a packet pipe that supports both the IP and ATM models. The packet pipe provides an interface to the IWFs to reserve, remove or maintain a radio resource in agreement with the negotiated QoS.

In accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention, the packet pipe 106 can be designed to meet certain general requirements. A first requirement is that the packet pipe supports provision of different QoS classes to the higher layers. In that regard, a set of QoS classes in the packet pipe are defined. The packet pipe is then responsible for delivering satisfactory services within those QoS classes. A second requirement is that proper mechanisms exist to efficiently utilize scarce radio resources when they are allocated for different information flows, and also to obtain efficient access to the backbone network. A third requirement is that for proper radio resource capacity, the packet pipe's design should account for link budget calculations, in order to ensure that a satisfactory Bit Error Rate (BER) is secured for the Physical layer channels.

A fourth requirement for the packet pipe 106 is that mechanisms be provided to ensure that fairness principles govern when allocating radio resources to different

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sessions or users belonging to the same QoS class. In this regard, the packet pipe can prioritize packet traffic belonging to the same or a different QoS class during periods of congestion, which can leave control over the utilization of these scarce radio resources up to an operator.

5 A fifth requirement for the packet pipe 106 is that it be capable of segmenting and reassembling data transmissions. The packet pipe is required to provide efficient medium access control that also includes retransmission of erroneous data. This requires a segmentation function that splits incoming packets (N-PDUs) into smaller units prior to transmission across the radio air interface, in order to optimize the radio
10 transfer by combining the Forward Error Correction (FEC) or redundancy by coding, and the Backward Error Correction (BEC) or redundancy by retransmission. Also, by sending smaller data units over the radio air interface, the preemption granularity becomes smaller which allows a finer tuning of the radio access for different QoS classes. Finally, a packet reassembly capability is required on the receiver side.

15 Although a preferred embodiment of the method and apparatus of the present invention has been illustrated in the accompanying Drawings and described in the foregoing Detailed Description, it will be understood that the invention is not limited to the embodiment disclosed, but is capable of numerous rearrangements, modifications and substitutions without departing from the spirit of the invention as
20 set forth and defined by the following claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for network access using a communications traffic conveyor, comprising the steps of:
 - 5 standardizing a user interface for said communications traffic conveyor;
 - standardizing a network interface for said communications traffic conveyor;
 - arranging said communications traffic conveyor to comply with at least one standardization parameter for said user interface;
 - arranging said communications traffic conveyor to comply with at least one
 - 10 standardization parameter for said network interface; and
 - conveying traffic between said user interface and said network interface in compliance with said at least one standardization parameter for said user interface, and said at least one standardization parameter for said network interface, wherein said communications traffic conveyor prioritizes traffic.
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2. The method of Claim 1, wherein said communications traffic conveyor comprises a packet pipe.
3. The method of Claim 1, wherein said at least one standardization
- 20 parameter for said user interface comprises a first Quality of Service parameter.
4. The method of Claim 1, wherein said at least one standardization parameter for said user interface comprises a second Quality of Service parameter.
5. The method of Claim 1, wherein said first standardization parameter is
- 25 equal to said second standardization parameter, and said network comprises a radio network.
6. A system for network access, comprising:
 - 30 a communications traffic conveyor, said communications traffic conveyor including a termination unit coupled to a user interface on a user side, and a node coupled to a network interface on a network side;

means for said communications traffic conveyor to comply with at least one standardization parameter for said user interface;

means for said communications traffic conveyor to comply with at least one standardization parameter for said network interface;

5 means for said communications traffic conveyor to prioritize traffic; and

means for conveying said traffic between said user interface and said network interface in compliance with said at least one standardization parameter for said user interface, and said at least one standardization parameter for said network interface.

10 7. The system of Claim 6, wherein said communications traffic conveyor comprises a packet pipe.

8. The system of Claim 6, wherein said at least one standardization parameter for said user interface comprises a first Quality of Service parameter.

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9. The system of Claim 6, wherein said at least one standardization parameter for said user interface comprises a second Quality of Service parameter.

10. The system of Claim 6, wherein said first standardization parameter is equal to said second standardization parameter, and said network comprises a radio network.

11. The method of Claim 1, wherein said step of standardizing a network interface further comprises:

25 standardizing said network interface such that any communications traffic conveyor that satisfies network interface requirements can be utilized for said network access.

12. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of:
30 providing multiple transmission layers for said communications traffic conveyor to convey traffic via an interface.

13. The method of Claim 12, further comprising the step of:

supporting different Quality of Service classes to higher of said multiple transmission layers.

14. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of:
5 providing point-to-multipoint function for said communications traffic conveyor, such that said communications traffic conveyor can support a plurality of sessions from a plurality of user terminals.

15. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of:
10 mapping application flows existing between said user interface and said network interfaces.

16. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of:
dispensing a plurality of services by said communications traffic conveyor.

15 17. The method of Claim 16, further comprising the step of:
predetermining a set of primitives associated with said plurality of services dispensed by said communications traffic conveyor.

20 18. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of:
defining a set of Quality of Service classes for said communications traffic conveyor to support.

25 19. The system of Claim 6, further comprising:
a relay unit, coupled to said termination unit, for transmitting information through said communications traffic conveyor.

20. The system of Claim 18, wherein said relay unit is further coupled to said node coupled to a network interface.

30 21. The system of Claim 6, wherein said communications traffic conveyor supports a plurality of sessions from a plurality of user terminals.

22. The system of Claim 6, further comprising:
an access router on said network side, for connecting to a plurality of
networks.

5 23. The system of Claim 21, wherein said plurality of networks comprises:
Wide Area Networks.

24. The system of Claim 21, wherein said access router directs data flow to
and from said plurality of networks.

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25. The system of Claim 6, further comprising:
an Interworking Functions unit coupled to said node, said Interworking
Functions unit mapping application flows on said network side.

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26. The system of Claim 19, further comprising:
a gatekeeper unit, located on said network side, for handling call signaling and
service functions.

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27. The system of Claim 6, wherein said traffic comprises:
data.

28. The method of Claim 26, wherein said data is segmented by said
communications traffic conveyor before said data is conveyed.

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29. The method of Claim 27, wherein said data is reassembled by said
communications traffic conveyor after said data is conveyed.

30. The system according to Claim 6, wherein said communications traffic
conveyor accounts for link budget calculations.

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31. The system according to Claim 29, wherein said link budget
calculations are associated with Bit Error Rate.