

"Solid State Relay"

This invention relates to solid state relay and, more particularly, to a solid state relay in which a light emitting diode converts an input signal to a light signal, a photovoltaic diode array optically coupled to the light emitting diode converts the light signal to an electrical signal which is used for driving a metal-oxide-semiconductor field effect transistor (hereinafter referred to simply as "MOSFET") as an output means to obtain a contact signal as an output.

For the solid state relay of the kind referred to, there has been disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 4,390,790 to Edward T. Rodriguez a solid state relay in which a photovoltaic diode array optically coupled to a light emitting diode is connected in series with a MOSFET, across which gate and base a normally ON type junction FET is connected and an additional photovoltaic diode array is connected across the gate and source of this junction FET through a resistor. According to this solid state relay of Rodriguez, any instantaneous mistriggering apt to be occurring in the solid state relay of the kind referred to prior to Rodriguez can be prevented by the provision of the additional diode array which can drive the normally ON type junction FET. However, the increase of the chip size due to the necessity of the additional photovoltaic diode

array and the necessity of the combined circuit arrangement of the junction FET with the additional diode array has rendered a high speed relay operation to be hardly realizable.

5 As a solid state relay which renders the high speed operation realizable, there has been disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 4,804,866 to Sigeo Akiyama such solid state relay that a photovoltaic diode array is optically
10 coupled to a light emitting diode, an output MOSFET is connected in series to this photovoltaic diode array, a normally ON type driving transistor is connected across the gate and source of this output MOSFET, and a control electrode of this driving transistor is connected to a
15 connecting point between the photovoltaic diode array and an impedance element, so that, upon occurrence of a photovoltaic output at the photovoltaic diode array consequent to an input current to the light emitting diode, the driving transistor will be biased into a high impedance state by a voltage generated across the
20 impedance element. According to this relay of Akiyama, the photovoltaic output occurred at the photovoltaic diode array by the light signal from the light emitting diode is supplied across the gate and source of the output MOSFET and is made to flow as a photoelectric current through the
25 driving transistor comprising a depletion mode field effect transistor (FET).

 In an event where the output MOSFET is of N-type enhancement mode in the U.S. Patent to Akiyama, the

photovoltaic output causes a current for charging a gate electrostatic capacity of the output MOSFET as well as a current flowing through the driving transistor to flow through a bias resistor as the impedance element, the gate of the driving transistor is biased to a negative voltage by a voltage across the bias resistor, the driving transistor turns instantaneously to the high impedance state so as to have the gate electrostatic capacity of the output MOSFET charged efficiently and, accompanying this, the solid state relay is caused to vary its state across both output terminals from OFF state to ON state. In an event when the input current to the solid state relay is interrupted, further, there occurs no photovoltaic output at the photovoltaic diode array, the current flowing through the bias resistor disappears, the driving transistor returns to the ON state, a charge accumulated in the gate electrostatic capacity of the output MOSFET is discharged through the driving transistor, and the OFF state is restored across the output terminals of the relay.

In the solid state relay of Akiyama, however, it is inherent that the rising gradient of output signal responsive to the rise of the input signal to the relay is relatively steep, and the falling gradient of the output signal responsive to the falling of the input signal becomes extremely steep. This is due to that, while the charge of the gate electrostatic capacity of the output MOSFET is carried out through the bias resistor and is

thus relatively time-consuming, the discharge of the charge accumulated in the gate electrostatic capacity is performed quickly through the driving transistor made to be at the low impedance state. For this reason, the
5 known relay has involved a problem that, in the event that a capacitive load or an inductive load is connected to the relay, there arises a risk that a large current or a high voltage is caused to occur upon switching operation of the relay, which may become a cause of
10 electrical noise generation that may result in an erroneous operation of other associated circuits.

In addition, in U.S. Patent Specification No. 5151602 of Y. Idaka et al, there has been suggested a solid state relay in which a photovoltaic diode array
15 optically coupled to a light emitting diode is connected in series with an output MOSFET, a control means is connected across the gate and source of the output MOSFET so as to be at a high impedance state upon occurrence of the photovoltaic output but to be at a
20 low impedance state upon disappearance of the photovoltaic output, and a resistor is inserted in series with respect to a path for flowing a charge current from the photovoltaic diode array to the gate and source of the output MOSFET and a further path for
25 flowing a discharge current from a capacitance across the gate and source of the output MOSFET to the control means.

According to this relay, the capacity across the gate and source of the output MOSFET is charged through the inserted resistor upon turned ON, so that a response time from the rising of the input signal to the rising of the output signal will be caused to be relatively long to render the gradient of the rising of the output signal to be gentle. Upon turning OFF, on the other hand, the accumulated charge at the capacity across the gate and source of the output MOSFET is discharged through the control means and the series connected resistor, so that the response time from the input signal falling to the output signal falling will be caused to be long enough for rendering the gradient of the output signal falling to be gentle. With such arrangement, any electrical noise occurrence is prevented, and it is made possible to set the rising time upon the turning ON as well as the falling time upon the turning OFF respectively independently by means of the resistor inserted between the control means and the source of the output MOSFET as well as a diode connected in parallel to the said resistor.

In the above relay of Idaka et al, however, the resistor for regulating the rising time acts as an element for determining the lowest required input current for turning ON the solid state relay with a threshold voltage of a controlling FET, i.e., working current, and this working current is subjected to a restriction by means of the regulation of the rising time. Further, the connection of the diode in parallel to the resistor for

regulating the falling time, the voltage across the gate and source of the output MOSFET upon the turning ON is caused to be lower by a forward voltage of this diode, and it becomes necessary to increase by one cell the
5 number of cells forming the photovoltaic diode array. Further, the discharge of the accumulated charge in the gate and source capacitance of the output MOSFET upon disappearance of the photovoltaic output is to be carried out not only through the control means but also
10 through the photovoltaic diode array in the initial stage of the discharge, that is, so long as the gate voltage of the output MOSFET is higher than the forward voltage of the photovoltaic diode array, in the latter event of which there arises a problem that the discharge
15 current through the photovoltaic diode array is restricted by the resistor for the falling time regulation and the response time of the relay operation upon turning OFF is caused to be longer than that required.

20 Accordingly, a primary aim of the present invention is to provide a solid state relay which has eliminated the foregoing problems and which is capable of preventing the occurrence of the electric noise by the falling gradient of the output signal upon turning
25 OFF to be gentle and the response time of the relay operation upon the turning OFF to be of the minimum without affecting the turning ON operation.

According to the present invention, the above aim can be realized by providing a normally open solid
30 state relay with minimized response time of relay action

upon turning OFF, comprising a light emitting element which emits a light signal upon receipt of an input current, a photovoltaic diode array optically coupled to said light emitting element for generating a
5 photovoltaic output upon receipt of said light signal from the light emitting element, an impedance element connected in series with said photovoltaic diode array, an output MOSFET of normally OFF type connected to said photovoltaic diode array for being varied from first
10 impedance state to second impedance state with said photovoltaic output applied across the gate and source of said MOSFET, a normally ON type driving transistor connected across the gate and source of said output MOSFET to be biased into a high impedance state by a
15 voltage generated across said impedance element upon application of said photovoltaic output across the gate and source of said output MOSFET but turned into a low impedance state upon disappearance of the photovoltaic output, said driving transistor having a control
20 electrode connected to a connecting point between said photovoltaic diode array and said impedance element, a resistor interposed in said connection of said normally ON type driving transistor across said gate and source of said output MOSFET and located on the other side of
25 the driving transistor to the impedance element, and a constant voltage element connected in parallel with said resistor.

The invention will now be described in detail, by way of example, with reference to the drawings, in
30 which:-

FIGURE 1 shows in a circuit diagram an embodiment of the solid state relay according to the present invention;

FIG. 2 shows in a circuit diagram another embodiment of the solid state relay according to the present invention;

FIG. 3 shows in a circuit diagram still another embodiment of the solid state relay according to the present invention;

FIGS. 4a to 4d show in wave-form diagrams the operation of the solid state relay shown in FIGS. 1 to 3;

FIG. 5 shows graphically the relationship between the voltage and current of the photovoltaic diode array employed in the solid state relay according to the present invention; and

FIG. 6 shows graphically the relationship between the voltage and current of the depletion mode FET employed in the solid state relay according to the present invention.

While the present invention shall be described with reference to the preferred embodiments shown in the drawings, it will be readily appreciated that the intention is not to limit the invention only to these embodiments but rather to include all alterations, modifications and equivalent arrangements possible within the scope of appended claims.

Referring to FIG. 1, there is shown an embodiment of the solid state relay according to the present invention, in which such light emitting element 12 as a light emitting diode is connected across input terminals 11 and 11A of the solid state relay, and a photovoltaic diode array 13 is optically coupled to the light emitting diode 12. The number of diodes connected in series in the photovoltaic diode array 13 is so set that the array generates a voltage higher than a threshold voltage of an output MOSFET 15 connected at its gate G and source S in series to the photovoltaic diode array 13 through such impedance element 14 as a resistor. This output MOSFET 15 is of an N-channel type enhancement mode, and its drain D and source S form a pair of output terminals 16 and 16A of the solid state relay.

Across the gate G and source S of the output MOSFET 15, there is inserted a normally ON type driving transistor 17 of N-channel depletion mode, in parallel relation to the photovoltaic diode array 13. In this case, the driving transistor 17 is connected at its drain through a resistor 18 to the gate G of the output MOSFET 15, at its gate to a connecting point between the photovoltaic diode array 13 and the resistor 14, and at its source to the source S of the output MOSFET 15.

The operation of the solid state relay in FIG. 1 shall be referred to next. Now, as an input current is caused to flow between the input terminals 11 and 11A of

the relay, the light emitting diode 12 generates a light signal, which signal is received by the photovoltaic diode array 13, and a photovoltaic output is generated at both ends of the diode array 13. This photovoltaic output is applied across the gate G and source S of the output MOSFET 15, and is also supplied through the normally ON type driving transistor 17 and the resistor 18. At this time, a current for charging an electrostatic capacity at the gate G of the output MOSFET 15 as well as a current flowing through the driving transistor 17 and resistor 18 are caused to flow through the resistor 14 forming the impedance element. A voltage generated across the resistor 14 causes the gate electrode of the driving transistor 17 to be biased to be negative, the driving transistor 17 is instantaneously turned to a high impedance state, and, in response thereto, a high impedance state across the output terminals 16 and 16A varies to a low impedance state. Here, the resistor 18 is not to be effective to limit the charge of the electrostatic capacity at the gate G of the output MOSFET 15, and it is not possible that the relay is affected in its turning ON operation by the presence of the resistor 18.

In an event when the input current to the input terminals 11 and 11A of the relay is interrupted, the photovoltaic diode array 13 no more generates the photovoltaic output, consequent to which the current flowing through the resistor 14 disappears, the biasing

with respect to the gate of the driving transistor 17 is released, and the driving transistor 17 returns to ON state. In response to this, a charge accumulated in the gate electrostatic capacity of the output MOSFET 15 is
5 discharged gradually through the resistor 18 and the driving transistor 17, and a high impedance state is restored across the output terminals 16 and 16A of the relay. Provided that the resistor 18 was absent, the discharge of the accumulated charge at the gate
10 electrostatic capacity of the output MOSFET 15 would be instantaneously completed. With the insertion of the resistor 18 of such optimum value as several megohm, the discharge current of the gate electrostatic capacity of the output MOSFET 15 is limited by the resistor 18, so
15 that OFF time of the switching is prolonged and the fall of output wave form of the relay is made gradual.

Referring more specifically to the operation, an input of such pulse signal as shown in FIG. 4a to the input terminals 11 and 11A of the relay results, in the
20 absence of the resistor 18, in such output signal across the output terminals 16 and 16A of the relay as shown in FIG. 4b in which the fall of the wave form upon turning OFF of the relay's switching operation is very steep, so as to render the noise to be readily generated. With the
25 insertion of the resistor 18, on the other hand, the output signal across the output terminals 16 and 16A is of such wave form as shown in FIG. 4c in which the OFF time of the relay's switching operation is prolonged and the

fall of the wave form is made gradual, so as to restrict the noise generation. In the wave form of FIG. 4c, t_d denotes the time from the interruption of the input current to a starting point of the turning OFF, and t_f denotes the time from the starting point to a completing point of the turning OFF. That is, the time t_d is the one for which the voltage across the gate and source of the output MOSFET 15 decreases from the photovoltaic voltage of the diode array 13 to a required across-gate-and-source voltage $V_{GS(on)}$ for turning the output MOSFET 15 to ON state, and the time t_f is the one for which the voltage across the gate and source of the output MOSFET 15 decreases from the voltage $V_{GS(on)}$ to the threshold voltage V_{th} of the output MOSFET 15.

Further, provided that the resistor was absent in the discharge path of the gate electrostatic capacity of the output MOSFET 15, in particular, in the discharge path of the gate G and source S of the output MOSFET 15, when the inductive load is connected across the output terminals, a reverse electromotive voltage occurring upon the switching operation of the relay would be clamped to be over a breakdown voltage of the output MOSFET 15 and would exceed a load voltage, and it was required to provide a protective circuit. With the insertion of the resistor 18 in the discharge path of the gate G and source S of the output MOSFET 15, as in the embodiment of FIG. 1, the reverse electromotive voltage generated upon the relay's switching operation is made to be below the load

voltage of the output MOSFET 15, and no protective circuit is required.

In FIG. 2, there is shown another embodiment of the solid state relay according to the present invention, in which a constant-voltage element 29 is additionally connected in parallel to the resistor 28 inserted in series with the driving transistor 27, as will be clear when compared with the foregoing embodiment of FIG. 1. For this constant-voltage element 29, a Zener diode is employed, preferably, as connected to render a direction from the source S to the gate G of the output MOSFET 25 to be forward. A Zener voltage V_z of this Zener diode 29 is set to be of a balance of a subtraction of voltage drop upon turning ON of the driving transistor 27 from the across-gate-and-source voltage $V_{GS(on)}$ of the output MOSFET 25, and the discharge of the accumulated charge in the gate electrostatic capacity of the output MOSFET 25 is to be carried out as will be described in the following .

That is, when the across-gate-and-source voltage of the output MOSFET 25 is above $V_{GS(on)}$, a voltage across the ends of the Zener diode 29 is more than the Zener voltage V_z , so that the discharge of the accumulated charge at the gate electrostatic capacity of the output MOSFET 25 can be quickly performed through the Zener diode 29 and driving transistor 27. Further, in the initial stage of the discharge, a sufficiently large voltage is applied across the photovoltaic diode array 23 to keep the array in the ON state, and the discharge current is caused

to flow also through the photovoltaic diode array 23 and resistor 24. At this time, the gate electrode of the driving transistor 27 is positively biased, the driving transistor 27 is turned to a further lower impedance state with an enhancement effect of the MOSFET, and the discharge is accelerated.

When the voltage across the gate G and source S of the output MOSFET 25 becomes below $V_{GS(on)}$, the voltage across the Zener diode 29 becomes below the Zener voltage V_z , the Zener diode 29 is thereby turned to OFF state, and the discharge of the gate electrostatic capacity of the output MOSFET 25 is gradually performed through the resistor 28 and driving transistor 27.

In the embodiment of FIG. 2, such pulse signal as shown in FIG. 4a is applied across the input terminals 21 and 21A to have the light signal generated by the light emitting element 22, and the output signal across the output terminals 26 and 26A is as shown in FIG. 4d. That is, the discharge of the accumulated charge at the gate electrostatic capacity of the output MOSFET 25 is carried out quickly for a period T_0-T_1 and then gradually for a period T_1-T_2 , so that what is called the delay time t_d in the output wave form upon the turning OFF of the relay's switching operation can be shortened while the falling time t_f can be prolonged to render the falling gradient to be gentle.

While in the above the disposition of the resistor 28 has been referred to as being connected to the

drain of the driving transistor 27, the resistor 28 may be connected to the source of the driving transistor 27. However, in an event when the resistor is connected in series with the impedance-element resistor 24 to be

5 between the connecting point of the source of the driving transistor 27 to the resistor 24 and the source S of the output MOSFET 25, that is, in the same manner as in the foregoing known relay of Idaka et al, when the driving transistor 27 becomes ON state, a potential difference

10 between the gate G and the source S of the output MOSFET 25 is applied to both ends of this resistor connected in series with the resistor 24, that is, a potential at the connecting point of the source of the driving transistor 27 to the resistor 24 rises, then the discharge current at

15 the initial stage of the discharge through the photovoltaic diode array 23 and the resistor 24 cannot be flowed. More specifically with reference to FIG. 5, there flows a discharge current in accordance with a potential difference DDC between a current curve O responsive to

20 increment in the voltage in the absence of the input signal to the input terminals 21 and 21A of the relay and the other current curve N responsive to increment in the voltage in the presence of the input signal, as shown in the IV characteristics of the photovoltaic diode array 23

25 of FIG. 5, however, the potential difference between the gate G of the output MOSFET 25 and the connecting point of the source of the driving resistor 27 and the resistor 24 is made smaller due to the potential rise at the

connecting point of the source of the driving resistor 27 and the resistor 24, consequent to which the discharge of the gate electrostatic capacity of the output MOSFET 25 is made not to flow through the path of the photovoltaic diode array 23 and resistor 24, and the relay's delay time is made longer and the relay's switching is caused to be excessively time-consuming.

In the embodiment of FIG. 2, on the other hand, the discharge current flows through the photovoltaic diode array 23 and the resistor 24 and the gate electrode of the driving transistor 27 is positively biased by the discharge current flowing through the resistor 24, so that the driving transistor 27 is rendered to be further lower impedance state by the enhancement effect of the MOSFET as has been partly referred to (see FIG. 6), and the discharge can be accelerated by an increment in the discharge current which flowing through the path of the gates of the output MOSFET 25, Zener diode 29, driving transistor 27 and the sources of the output MOSFET 25. As the voltage across the gate G and source S of the output MOSFET 25 decreases to reach $V_{GS(on)}$, next, the discharge is to be carried out through the resistor 28 and driving transistor 27 in gradually as has been referred to.

Other constituents and their function in the embodiment of FIG. 2 are the same as those in the embodiment of FIG. 1.

Now, in still another embodiment of the present invention as shown in FIG. 3, the constant voltage element

in the foregoing embodiment of FIG. 2 is replaced by an enhancement type MOSFET 39 connected to be in parallel with the resistor 38 in series connection with the driving transistor 37 and to be short-circuited at the gate and drain. In the present instance, the enhancement type MOSFET 39 is kept at the low impedance state until the voltage across the resistor 38 drops to a predetermined value, so that the discharge of the accumulated charge at the gate electrostatic capacity of the output MOSFET 35 can be quickly performed. As the voltage across the resistor 38 drops to be below the predetermined value, the enhancement type MOSFET 39 turns to the high impedance state, and the discharge of the accumulated charge at the gate electrostatic capacity of the output MOSFET 35 is carried out gradually through the resistor 38. It should be appreciated that, similar to the embodiment of FIG. 2, the delay time t_d in the output wave form upon the turning OFF of the relay's switching operation can be shortened while prolonging the falling time t_f so as to render the falling gradient to be gentle.

In the embodiment of FIG. 3, all other constituents and their function are the same as those in the embodiment of FIG. 1, and the same constituents in FIG. 3 as those in the embodiment of FIG. 1 are denoted by the same reference numerals as those used in FIG. 1 but with "20" added thereto.



CLAIMS

1. A normally open solid state relay with minimized response time of relay action upon turning OFF, comprising a light emitting element which emits a light signal upon receipt of an input current, a photovoltaic diode array optically coupled to said light emitting element for generating a photovoltaic output upon receipt of said light signal from the light emitting element, an impedance element connected in series with said photovoltaic diode array, an output MOSFET of normally OFF type connected to said photovoltaic diode array for being varied from first impedance state to second impedance state with said photovoltaic output applied across the gate and source of said MOSFET, a normally ON type driving transistor connected across the gate and source of said output MOSFET to be biased into a high impedance state by a voltage generated across said impedance element upon application of said photovoltaic output across the gate and source of said output MOSFET but turned into a low impedance state upon disappearance of the photovoltaic output, said driving transistor having a control electrode connected to a connecting point between said photovoltaic diode array and said impedance element, a resistor interposed in said connection of said normally ON type driving transistor across said gate and source of said output MOSFET and located on the other side of the driving transistor to the impedance element, and a constant voltage element connected in parallel with said resistor.



2. A relay according to claim 1, wherein said constant voltage element is a Zener diode rendering a direction from the source to the gate of said output MOSFET to be forward.

3. A relay according to claim , wherein said constant voltage element is an enhancement type MOSFET connected at its drain and source across said resistor and short-circuited at its gate and drain.

4. A solid state relay substantially as described herein with reference to the drawings.