

TITLE OF INVENTION**METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR A LOAD ADAPTIVE PAD DRIVER****DESCRIPTION****BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION****1. Field of the Invention**

The present invention generally relates to integrated circuit (IC) output pad driving circuitry and, more specifically, to a method and apparatus for a load adaptive pad driver for integrated circuits.

2. Description of the Related Art

Digital logic integrated circuits -- also known as "die" and "chips" -- such as microprocessors and memories, generate output signals as either a HIGH logic state, sometimes referred to as a "1," or a LOW logic state, sometimes referred to as a "0." Each logic state output signal is a predetermined, steady-state, signal level, for example, five volts DC for HIGH and zero volts for LOW. Typically, an IC output driver stage includes field effect transistors (FET) connected in series through a resistor to a selected IC output terminal, referred to as the "pad." This prior art is shown in FIGURE 1. The logical signal to be output, "DATA," is applied to the gates of the FETs and, along with an OUTPUT ENABLE signal for the specified pad, drive the output pad. That is, it is the function of the output driver to switch the pad between data output signal levels.

This basic output driver circuit is designed to have an output resistance of 10 to 100 ohms and to have driver FETs that are relatively small. In this case, this circuit is designed to drive a minimum load capacitance at or near to the design specification speed.

While the task seems simple enough, in state-of-the-art of integrated circuit fabrication technology where transistor gates are measured in a fraction of a micron, many factors affect operations, including the process used for fabrication (e.g., bipolar vs. CMOS, 0.5 micron vs. 0.35 micron, and the like), voltage and current loads, electrostatic discharge (ESD) surges, operating temperatures, load capacitance, and the like. When there is a current transition, di/dt , in a chip, electromagnetic inductive noise (EMI) is generated. When there are a large number of pads on the chip, there can be a large inductance in the chip's ground bus. When the signal on a number of pads switches state simultaneously, a large noise spike in the ground line occurs. Therefore, the system architecture designer must account for such contingencies in constructing output drivers.

For example, noise on chip pads is addressed by U.S. Patent No. 5,039,874 (Anderson; assigned to the common assignee of the present invention) by selectively adding a second driver to increase signal transition speed on the output pad. Current surge problems are addressed by U.S. Patent No. 4,825,099 (Barton) by using a controllably switched current mirror circuit. Prevention of load current peaks is addressed in EP 591750 (DE4233850) in which the pad is driven as a current controlled element during a first range of the output transistor output voltage and as a voltage controlled element during a second voltage range. However, none of these methodologies provide an active feedback with respect to determining whether output load conditions

require auxiliary pad driving during an output pad signal transition between a HIGH and LOW data output signal level.

Therefore, there is a need for a load adaptive pad driver apparatus that will generate a substantially constant output signal transition speed at an IC output pad regardless of the load attached to any specific pad on the chip.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In its basic aspects, the present invention provides an apparatus for driving an integrated circuit output pad in response to a data output signal that switches between a first data signal having a first predetermined value and second data signal having a second predetermined value, the pad having a load connected thereto. The apparatus includes, a first driver, having an input connected for receiving the data signals, and an output for transmitting the data signals to the pad of such that the pad switches from the first data signal to the second data signal and from the second data signal to the first data signal at a rate of transition at the pad that is dependent upon the load; signal generator for generating a predetermined reference signal having a slope such that the slope is positive-going when the data signal transition is positive-going and is negative-going when the data signal transition is negative-going; comparator, having a first input connected to the signal generator and a second input coupled to the first driver, for comparing the slope of the predetermined reference signal to the rate of transition of a switching data signal at the pad; and second driver, having an input coupled to the comparator and an output coupled to the pad, for driving the pad at a rate dependent upon the reference signal when the rate of transition is slower than the slope of the reference signal.

Further, the invention includes a method for driving an integrated circuit output

pad responsive to an integrated circuit data output signal which switches between a first logic state level representative of a "1" and a second logic state level representative of a "0," including the steps of: comparing a data output signal to a predetermined reference signal having a predetermined rate of transition; driving said output pad with said data output signal when said data output signal level rate of transition between said logic state levels is greater than or equal to said predetermined reference signal rate of transition; and driving said output pad with said predetermined reference signal when said data output signal level rate of transition between said logic state levels is less than said predetermined reference signal rate of transition.

It is an advantage of the present invention that it will provide a substantially constant output speed as a pad driver for a large range of capacitive loads.

It is another advantage of the present invention that it will reduce EMI conductance when the pad is in a steady state.

It is another advantage of the present invention that output speed will be substantially compensated for process, voltage, and temperature variations.

It is yet another advantage of the present invention that at a point where the pad voltage is near the supply limit values, namely the chips bias voltage, V_{DD} , and ground, the output will be resistive and the current will be low, resulting in a reduction of ringing at the finish of the transition.

It is still another advantage of the present invention that di/dt will be less than other designs, leading to less EMI.

Other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent upon consideration of the following detailed description and accompanying

drawings, in which like reference designations represent like features throughout the FIGURES.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGURE 1 (Prior Art) is a typical output driver circuit for an integrated circuit pad.

FIGURE 2 is a schematic diagram of the apparatus of the present invention.

FIGURE 3 is a schematic diagram of an alternative embodiment of the present invention as shown in FIGURE 2.

FIGURES 4A-D are waveform diagrams for comparison of a typical output driver circuit output transition against the load adaptive pad driver circuit of the present invention as shown in FIGURE 2 in which:

FIGURE 4A is the pad voltage transition for a typical output driver circuit as shown in FIGURE 1 for three different capacitive loads,

FIGURE 4B is the ground current waveform for the transitions shown in FIGURE 4A,

FIGURE 4C is the pad voltage transition for an load adaptive pad driver of the present invention as shown in FIGURE 3, and

FIGURE 4D is the ground current waveform for the transitions shown in FIGURE 4C.

The drawings provided with this description should be understood as not being drawn to scale except if specifically noted.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Reference is made now in detail to a specific embodiment of the present invention, which illustrates the best mode presently contemplated by the inventor(s) for practicing the invention. Alternative embodiments are also briefly described where applicable.

FIGURE 2 depicts a load adaptive integrated circuit output pad driver apparatus 201 in accordance with the present invention. On a chip, a number of integrated circuit output pads 203 will be coupled to specific loads. The loads may have a range of capacitive values, e.g., 10 to 140 picofarads (pF). A resistive-based output driver circuit 205 includes an output resistor R_i (see FIGURE 1 for detail of the output driver circuit 205, where $R_i = R_{out}$). Because the loads connected to each pad may vary, an output driver circuit 205 is designed to drive the pad 203 for the minimum capacitive load and at the slowest speed. That is, when a DATA transition and OUTPUT ENABLE signals are input to the output driver circuit 205, the output driver circuit 205 will tend to drive the pad 203 in accordance with its design for the minimum load of the range. When the load capacitance is larger, the output driver circuit 205 will still drive at the same strength; that is, it will not adapt each pad in accordance with the specific load attached to that pad. The apparatus 201 of the present invention includes the needed adaptive capability by providing a reference slope signal generator, used to provide a signal having a predetermined reference signal output to compare to the rate of transition of the DATA output signal at the pad 203 (which will be dependent upon the load) to the slope of the reference signal.

In the embodiment shown in FIGURE 2, the signal to the gates of each of the FETs of the output driver circuit 205 are respectively coupled to a positive-going,

reference slope signal generator 207 (to P_i gate) and a negative-going, reference slope signal generator 209 (to N_i gate). Thus, during an OUTPUT ENABLE and DATA transition event, one of the slope signal generators 207, 209 receives a START signal; namely the positive-going, reference slope signal generator 207 is triggered when it receives the START signal when the pad 203 is to transit from a LOW to a HIGH output state and the negative-going, reference slope signal generator 209 receives the START signal when the pad 203 is to transit from a HIGH to a LOW output state. It has been found that the output at the pad 203 can be substantially normalized if each slope signal generator 207, 209 is provided with a process, voltage, and temperature (PVT) bias signal. The purpose of the PVT bias inputs is so that the reference slope signal that is generated will have the same slope, or "speed" of transition, regardless of the process and voltage in which the chip was designed and for environmental operating temperature changes. That is, the PVT bias is predetermined such that the signal generator will give a flat response regardless of the process of fabrication, the voltage levels employed, and the operational temperature. While, as it will be recognized by a person skilled in the art, there are many possible implementations for generating the PVT bias, it is suggested that this reference slope signal be generated by having the PVT bias generate a constant current to discharge a fairly large gate capacitance. Thus, the reference slope signal will generate a standard slope voltage, starting at V_{dd} or ground and ending at the other supply voltage in a predetermined time from the start signal.

The output PAD 203 signal and the output of the appropriately selected slope signal generator 207 or 209 are routed to a comparator 211 (for generator 207), 213 (for generator 209), respectively. That is, for a LOW to HIGH transition, comparator 211

compares the reference slope signal from positive-going slope signal generator 207 to the signal transition occurring at the PAD (203); for a HIGH to LOW transition, comparator 213 compare the reference slope signal from negative-going slope signal generator 209 to the signal transition occurring at PAD.

The comparators are tied to an auxiliary output driver that is connected to the pad 203. The output of comparator 211 is fed to the gate of a FET P_2 . The source of FET P_2 is connected to the circuit bias voltage, V_{DD} and the drain of the FET P_2 is connected to the input of pad 203. The output of comparator 213 is fed to the gate of a FET N_2 . The source of FET N_2 is connected to the circuit ground and the drain of the FET N_2 is connected to the input of pad 203. FETs P_2 and N_2 are relatively large in comparison to the FETs P_1 and N_1 of the output driver circuit 205 (see also FIGURE 1), for example, by a factor of 3 or 10 times. Thus, note that because FETs P_2 and N_2 are much larger, and therefore require more input to turn on, when the pad 203 is pulling through resistor R_1 and transiting between digital output levels at the same rate as the signal output of a signal generator 207, 209 as determined by a comparator 211, 213, the FETs P_2 or N_2 will not turn on.

When the load capacitance is larger than the minimum for which the output driver circuit 205 is designed, namely, where the output driver circuit 205 will not drive the pad transition fast enough -- namely, as fast as it would with the minimum design loads -- the comparators 211, 213 will drive their respective FETs P_2 , N_2 to assure that the slope of the pad 203 transition matches the slope of the reference slop generated by the applicable slope generator 207, 209, respectively. The comparators 211, 213 can be P-type transistors having a source and substrate tied to the most positive of the two signals to be

compared. This will allow the comparator transistor to turn on when the pad voltage lags the reference slope; this can be amplified to drive the appropriate FET P_2 or N_2 . The design of the comparators 211, 213 is such that at the point where the pad 205 voltage is approaching a difference of one volt from the supply limit (V_{DD} or ground), the output will start to turn off the large FET P_2 or N_2 and at approximately 0.6 volt from the supply limit, the large FET will be completely off, leaving the task of pulling the pad voltage the rest of the way to the supply limit to the output driver 205. In addition to adapting the pad transition speed to match the load, this feature allows the current required to switch the pad 203 to reach a very small value before the pad is at zero volts, thereby greatly reducing ringing at the end of the transition.

It will be recognized by a person skilled in the art that the present invention as just described can be implemented in a variety of circuit designs. While the embodiment as shown in FIGURE 2 is designed in P/N-type logic, an alternative embodiment, shown in FIGURE 3 is designed in N-type logic.

A typical output driver (e.g., FIGURE 1), of comparable speed pad LOW to HIGH transition (at $t = 50.0$) and HIGH to LOW transition (at $t = 100.0$) is shown in FIGURE 4A where waveforms 1, 2, and 3 are pad signal transition waveforms for loads of 20pF, 75pF, and 150pF, respectively, and waveform 4 is the DATA output signal transition at pad . Ground current is shown in FIGURE 4B. Output waveforms in accordance with the present invention are shown in FIGURES 4C and 4D.

In FIGURE 4A, note that for different loads at $t = 50$ when the DATA signal 4 goes from LOW to HIGH, the pad voltage 1, 2, 3 lags in transition and that the pad transition is slower with each increasing load capacitance, where pad 3 has the highest

capacitive load. At $t = 100$ when the DATA signal 4 goes from HIGH to LOW, there is not only a differing lag for each increasing load, but also a significant ringing for lower capacitance loads when the pad reaches the supply limit. In FIGURE 4B, note that a very sharp current transition, di/dt , occurs at $t = 100+$ (see arrow 400). This quick change in current is a source of electromagnetic interference (EMI).

Now compare FIGURE 4C and 4D for the present invention. While in FIGURE 4A the typical output driver showed three disparate rise times from LOW to HIGH, FIGURE 4C shows that each of the pads reach a HIGH at approximately $t = 60.0$, or about ten nanoseconds following the DATA signal switch. Similarly, in a HIGH to LOW transition, FIGURE 4A shows a different fall time for each pad dependent upon the load. It should also be noted that with the present invention, there is no ringing at $t = 100+$ whereas the prior art driver exhibits significant settling difficulty.

Moreover, in comparing the ground current waveforms, note that where the prior art device shows a rapid di/dt from zero to a peak of three hundred milliamps (FIGURE 4B at $t = 100.1$ to 100.25) which leads to undesirable EMI, the present invention exhibits a changing slope over a longer time (FIGURE 4D at $t = 100.1$ to 100.7) and peaks at only two hundred seventeen milliamps.

Thus, a load adaptive pad driver has been demonstrated which not only compensates for varying loads on the output pads of a particular chip, but also decreases EMI and inductive bouncing of the pad signal at the transition time. The foregoing description of the preferred embodiment of the present invention has been presented for purposes of illustration and description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise form disclosed. Obviously, many modifications and variations

will be apparent to practitioners skilled in this art. Similarly, any process steps described might be interchangeable with other steps in order to achieve the same result. The embodiment was chosen and described in order to best explain the principles of the invention and its best mode practical application to thereby enable others skilled in the art to understand the invention for various embodiments and with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated. It is intended that the scope of the invention be defined by the claims appended hereto and their equivalents.

What is claimed is:

CLAIMS

1. Apparatus (201) for driving an integrated circuit output pad (203) in response to a data output signal (DATA) that switches between a first data signal having a first predetermined value and second data signal having a second predetermined value, said pad (203) having a load connected thereto (TO LOAD), comprising:

first driver means (205), having an input connected for receiving said data signals, and an output for transmitting said data signals to said pad (203) such that said pad (203) switches from said first data signal to said second data signal and from said second data signal to said first data signal at a rate of transition at said pad (203) that is dependent upon said load;

signal generator means (207, 209) for generating a predetermined reference signal having a slope such that said slope is positive-going when said data signal transition is positive-going and is negative-going when said data signal transition is negative-going;

comparator means (211, 213), having a first input connected to said signal generator means (207, 209) and a second input coupled to said first driver means (205), for comparing said slope of said predetermined reference signal to said rate of transition of a switching data signal at said pad (203); and

second driver means (P2, N2), having an input coupled to said comparator means (211, 213) and an output coupled to said pad (203), for driving said pad (203) at a rate dependent upon said reference signal when said rate of transition is slower than said slope of said reference signal.



2. The apparatus (201) as set forth in claim 1, further comprising:

said signal generator means (207, 209) generating said predetermined reference signal such that said slope is a function of process, voltage range, and operating temperature range variables of said integrated circuit.

3. The apparatus (201) as set forth in claim 1, further comprising:

said first driver means (205) controlling said rate of transition when said data signal at said pad (203) is within a predetermined tolerance of said first and second predetermined values, respectively.

4. A method for driving an integrated circuit output pad (203) responsive to an integrated circuit data output signal (DATA) which switches between a first logic state level representative of a "1" and a second logic state level representative of a "0," comprising:

comparing (211, 213) a data output signal (205, R1) to a predetermined reference signal (207, 209) having a predetermined rate of transition;

driving said output pad (203) with said data output signal when said data output signal level rate of transition between said logic state levels is greater than or equal to said predetermined reference signal rate of transition; and

driving said output pad (203) with said predetermined reference signal when said data output signal level rate of transition between said logic state levels is less than said predetermined reference signal rate of transition.

