

LOW-VOLTAGE DIGITAL ROM CIRCUIT AND METHOD

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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In order to increase the functional capacity of digital integrated circuits (ICs), IC designers necessarily implement progressively smaller geometries for metal-oxide-semiconductor field effect transistors (MOSFETs, or FETs) and other IC devices so that more circuitry per unit area may reside on an IC die. However, generally
10 accompanying the smaller geometries and higher circuit densities are lower transistor breakdown voltages and higher power consumption, thus requiring the use of lower power supply voltages. Unfortunately, the use of a lower power supply voltage typically reduces the available amount of voltage margin, which allows an IC to operate properly in the presence of unavoidable variations in manufacturing
15 processes, supply voltage, and operating temperature. As a result, circuit designs utilized in larger geometry ICs may become less fault tolerant when the same design is translated into an IC utilizing a smaller geometry.

An example of such a design is an IC read-only memory (ROM) circuit. A ROM is commonly employed to great advantage as a functional portion of a larger IC
20 design, such as a control information store, or as a standalone IC. A typical IC ROM circuit arrangement from the prior art is shown in FIG. 1. In this case, an n -word by m -bit ROM comprises individual ROM bits 110 for each data bit to be stored. Each word of the ROM is enabled for reading by one of n separate READOUT signal lines, which are normally generated by an address decoder (not shown). At most one
25 READOUT signal line is active at any particular time. The outputs of each ROM bit 110 associated with the same data bit of each word are connected to form an OUT signal line. Each OUT signal line is then an input for a signal buffer 120 associated with that bit of the data word to be read. Thus, the outputs of all signal buffers 120 collectively represent DATA, the m -bit data word currently being read.

FIG. 2 shows ROM bit 110 and signal buffer 120 in greater detail. ROM bit 110 is implemented by a single n-channel FET (NFET) N_R , the gate of which is driven by one of the READOUT signals, $READOUT_x$. The source of NFET N_R is connected to either a ground reference via a ground connection 230, or to a power supply voltage reference V_{DD} via power supply connection 240, depending on which of the two logic states, LOW or HIGH, is to be represented by ROM bit 110. When $READOUT_x$ is HIGH, N_R turns ON, allowing the voltage at the source of N_R to pass to OUT signal line OUT_y , less the turn-on voltage across N_R . The voltage on OUT_y is then passed to the input of signal buffer 120, which in this case is a standard complementary MOS (CMOS) pair consisting of a p-channel FET (PFET) P_B and an NFET N_B . The output of signal buffer 120 drives the data signal line $DATA_y$, which indicates the logic state of ROM bit 110 when $READOUT_x$ is HIGH. The use of single NFET N_R in FIG. 2 ensures that the space required by ROM bit 110 is minimal, thereby allowing several thousand ROM bits 110 to occupy a relatively small space on the IC die. Additionally, ROM bit 110 dissipates virtually no power when $READOUT_x$ is in the LOW state, thus maintaining low overall power consumption for the ROM.

Unfortunately, as smaller device geometries are used for the ROM to increase IC functional capacity, the power supply voltage V_{DD} is normally lowered, typically causing voltage margin problems, as depicted in FIG. 3. When $READOUT_x$ becomes active, the voltage level rises from V_{OFF} substantially to V_{DD} . Assuming power supply connection 240 (of FIG. 2) is utilized in ROM bit 110, the voltage level on OUT_y becomes V_{DD} less a significant voltage drop across N_R , or V_{ON} , because the voltage on $READOUT_x$ at the gate of N_R is essentially the same as that at the source, causing N_R to drive a weak logic HIGH level. As seen in FIG. 3, V_{ON} may not be much higher than V_{TH} , the threshold voltage at which signal buffer 120 perceives the voltage on OUT_y as a logic HIGH instead of a logic LOW. The difference between V_{ON} and V_{TH} is V_M , the resulting voltage margin, which becomes smaller as the power supply voltage V_{DD} is lowered with successive IC design generations

implementing smaller device geometries. Thus, variations in the IC manufacturing process, along with variations in the operating temperature and power supply voltage of the IC, may cause V_{ON} to drop below V_{TH} , thereby causing improper operation of the ROM.

5 From the foregoing, a new IC ROM design that minimizes the die area required for each ROM bit and dissipates almost no power when not being read, while allowing for greater voltage margins in the presence of relatively low power supply voltages, is desirable.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Embodiments of the invention, to be discussed in detail below, provide a ROM architecture that comprises a means for selectively driving one of two
15 complementary logic state signal lines substantially to a voltage reference upon one of a plurality of readout signals becoming active so that a particular ROM bit may be read. The logic state of the ROM bit being read is indicated by which of the complementary logic state signal lines is being driven. A pair of inverting means is then cross-coupled with the two logic state signal lines so that the logic level of each
20 logic state signal line is inverted and driven onto the opposing logic state signal line, resulting in both lines being driven to their proper state, even though only one logic state signal line is being driven directly as a result of the active readout signal. Therefore, only one of the logic state signal lines needs to be monitored to determine the proper state of the particular ROM bit being read.

25 Other embodiments of the invention take the form of a method of storing digital read-only data as a plurality of addressable bits. First, one of a pair of complementary logic state signal lines is selectively driven substantially to a voltage reference when one of a plurality of readout signals is active. The particular complementary logic state signal line that is being driven indicates the logic state of

the ROM bit being addressed by the active readout signal. Each of the complementary logic state signal lines is then inverted and driven onto the opposing logic state signal line so that both lines are driven to their proper state, no matter which is being driven directly as a result of the active readout signal, allowing for
5 other circuitry to read the logic state of the ROM bit from either line.

Other aspects and advantages of the invention will become apparent from the following detailed description, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, illustrating by way of example the principles of the invention.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a ROM architecture according to the prior art.

FIG. 2 is a schematic diagram showing greater detail of the ROM bit and
15 signal buffer circuits of the ROM architecture of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a waveform diagram displaying the voltage margin associated with the prior art ROM architecture.

FIG. 4 is a block diagram of a ROM architecture according to an embodiment of the invention.

20 FIG. 5 is a schematic diagram showing greater detail of the ROM bit and inversion block circuits of the ROM architecture of FIG. 3, using a single NFET for the ROM bit.

FIG. 6 is a schematic diagram showing greater detail of the ROM bit and inversion block circuits of the ROM architecture of FIG. 3, using a single PFET for
25 the ROM bit.

FIG. 7 is a flow chart of a method of storing digital ROM data according to an embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The overall ROM architecture for an embodiment of the invention is displayed in FIG. 4. Instead of a single output for each ROM bit 110 (from FIG. 1), each new ROM bit 410 has two complementary logic state signal lines, BIT and nBIT. Similar to the prior art, each column of ROM bits 410 corresponds to a particular bit of a data word to be read from the ROM. Each ROM bit 410 within a particular column is individually addressable by a separate readout signal READOUT. As a result, BIT and nBIT of each ROM bit 410 of a particular column are tied together and used as input for an inversion block 420, the output of which is the data information DATA to be read from the ROM.

FIG. 5 shows specific embodiments for ROM bit 410 and inversion block 420 in greater detail. In this case, ROM bit 410 consists of a single NFET N_R . N_R represents one logic state when nBIT connection 530 is made, and represents the opposite logic state when BIT connection 540 is made. Either connection 530 or 540 is made; simultaneous presence of both connections 530 and 540 is not employed. Readout signal $READOUT_x$, connected to the gate of N_R , addresses ROM bit x,y when at a logic HIGH state, thereby turning ON N_R . Therefore, when $READOUT_x$ goes HIGH, either BIT_y or $nBIT_y$ is driven substantially to a ground reference that is attached to the source of N_R , depending on the logic state which N_R represents by way of connections 530 and 540. Hence, either BIT_y or $nBIT_y$ will be driven substantially to the ground reference, while the other is not driven to any particular voltage.

BIT_y and $nBIT_y$ from a particular column are used as inputs to an inversion block 420, which comprises two cross-coupled inverters, first inverter 500 and second inverter 510. In the embodiment of FIG. 5, inverters 500 and 510 are standard CMOS inverters using a p-channel and n-channel FET in series, with inverter 500 comprising P_{BIT} and N_{BIT} , while inverter 510 utilizes P_{nBIT} and N_{nBIT} . Other inverter circuits not discussed herein may also be utilized. Inverters 500 and 510 allow the logic state signal line that is not driven by N_R to assume the proper complementary logic state

displayed by the logic state signal line being driven by N_R . For example, when nBIT connection 530 is made, nBIT_y is driven substantially to ground, while BIT_y initially remains in an undriven state. However, second inverter 510, by virtue of nBIT_y being in a LOW logic state, forces a HIGH state onto BIT_y. First inverter 500 then takes
5 that HIGH signal to drive nBIT_y LOW, which is the same state being driven by N_R onto that signal line. Thus, BIT_y is HIGH and nBIT_y is LOW, representing the logic state of ROM bit x,y . Alternately, if BIT connection 540 is present instead of nBIT connection 530, BIT_y is driven substantially to ground, while nBIT_y is initially floating. First inverter 500 then takes the LOW logic state of BIT_y as input, and
10 forces a HIGH logic state onto nBIT_y. Consequently, second inverter 510 takes this HIGH as input, driving a LOW back onto BIT_y, which is compatible with the level being forced onto BIT_y by N_R . Hence, BIT_y is LOW while nBIT_y is HIGH, reflecting the opposite logic state for ROM bit x,y from that shown in the previous case.

In this embodiment, an additional read buffer is implemented in the form of a
15 third inverter 520. In this particular case, the input for third inverter 520 is nBIT_y. However, BIT_y can just as easily be used as input for third inverter 520, depending on the needs of the circuit utilizing the data stored in the ROM. Other types of buffers, such as a noninverting buffer, may also be used in lieu of third inverter 520. Furthermore, third inverter 520, or any other type of buffering, may not be necessary,
20 depending on the particular ROM application. In this instance, either BIT_y or nBIT_y can be used as the DATA_y output.

A benefit of this embodiment and others is that NFET N_R will be turned ON completely, thereby preventing voltage margin problems. When READOUT_x is HIGH, the voltage on the drain of N_R will not be higher than the READOUT_x signal
25 voltage on the gate of N_R , whether nBIT_y connection 530 or BIT_y connection 540 is present. Thus, regardless of which connection is made, either BIT_y or nBIT_y will be substantially driven to ground, allowing either of first inverter 500 or second inverter 510 to be driven properly with sufficient voltage margin to protect the operation of the circuit against variations in manufacturing processes, operating power supply

voltage, and operating temperature. Additionally, the embodiment of FIG. 5 uses a single NFET as in the prior art circuit of FIG. 2, providing a space-efficient solution. The embodiment also does not dissipate significant current when $READOUT_x$ is inactive, since N_R is shut OFF in that case, in similar fashion to the operation of the
5 prior art circuit.

Another embodiment of the invention involves a ROM bit based on a PFET P_R , as shown in FIG. 6. The source of P_R is connected to V_{DD} , and $READOUT_x$ is active when placed in the LOW logic state. When HIGH, $READOUT_x$ effectively shuts OFF P_R . When $READOUT_x$ goes LOW, either BIT_y or $nBIT_y$ is forced
10 substantially to V_{DD} , depending on whether $nBIT$ connection 630 or BIT connection 640 is present. As a result, either BIT_y or $nBIT_y$ will sustain a voltage close to V_{DD} because the voltage on $READOUT_x$, being close to the ground reference when active, will be lower than either the drain or source voltage of P_R , causing P_R to be completely ON. Thus, no voltage margin problem will exist when either BIT_y or
15 $nBIT_y$ drive first inverter 500 or second inverter 510, respectively. In an analogous fashion to the embodiment of FIG. 5, either BIT_y or $nBIT_y$ will be driven HIGH, while the opposing signal line will initially remain undriven. When BIT_y is HIGH as a result of BIT connection 640 being made, first inverter 500 drives $nBIT_y$ LOW, which, in turn, causes second inverter 510 to force BIT_y HIGH, in agreement with the
20 level being driven by P_R . Conversely, when $nBIT_y$ is HIGH due to $nBIT$ connection 630 being present, second inverter 510 forces BIT_y LOW, which then causes first inverter 500 to drive $nBIT_y$ HIGH, along with P_R . With both BIT_y and $nBIT_y$ being driven to their proper logic states based on $nBIT$ connection 630 and BIT connection 640, either BIT_y or $nBIT_y$ can be used as the output signal for ROM bit x,y . Also,
25 third inverter 520, or a noninverting buffer, may be used to buffer either BIT_y or $nBIT_y$ from other circuitry accessing the ROM data. Alternately, third inverter 520 may be eliminated if the buffering it provides is not required in a particular application.

In most IC process technologies, p-channel FETs require more surface area to implement than n-channel FETs. Thus, for many applications, embodiments utilizing n-channel FETs for ROM bit 110 will be more desirable.

Another embodiment of the present invention takes the form of a method of
5 storing digital read-only data. First, one of two complementary logic state signal lines is selectively driven substantially to a voltage reference upon one of a plurality of readout signals being active (step 700). Thus, the state of the ROM bit addressed by the active readout signal is exemplified by which of the two complementary logic state signal lines is being driven. Next, the logic state of each of the complementary
10 logic state signal lines is inverted to drive the other complementary signal line to the opposite logic state (steps 710 and 720). As a result, both complementary logic state signal lines are driven to the proper logic state, regardless of which is actually being selectively driven as a result of the active readout signal. Either complementary logic state signal line could then be buffered, if necessary, for use by other circuitry (step
15 730). However, depending on the particular application, such buffering may not be necessary or desirable.

From the foregoing, the embodiments of the invention have been shown to provide a ROM circuit and method that are particularly useful in low power supply voltage environments. Other specific circuits and methods embodying the invention
20 are also possible. Therefore, the present invention is not to be limited to the specific forms so described and illustrated; the invention is limited only by the claims.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A digital read-only memory circuit (400) capable of storing a plurality
2 of addressable bits, comprising:
means for selectively driving (410) exactly one of a first (BIT) and second
4 (nBIT) complementary logic state signal lines substantially to a voltage reference
when one of a plurality of readout signals (READOUT) is active, the first
6 complementary logic state signal line (BIT) indicating a first logic state, the second
complementary logic state signal line (nBIT) indicating a second logic state, the
8 complementary logic state signal line that is being driven indicating the logic state of
the bit of the read-only memory circuit addressed by the active readout signal;
10 first means for inverting (500) the logic level on the first complementary logic
state signal line (BIT) to drive the second complementary logic state signal line
12 (nBIT); and
second means for inverting (510) the logic level on the second complementary
14 logic state signal line (nBIT) to drive the first complementary logic state signal line
(BIT).
2. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 1, wherein the
2 selectively driving means is a plurality of n-channel FETs (N_R), with each n-channel
FET (N_R) representing a bit, the gate of each n-channel FET (N_R) being coupled with
4 one of the plurality of readout signals (READOUT), the source of each n-channel
FET (N_R) being connected to a ground reference, the drain of each n-channel FET
6 (N_R) being connected to exactly one of the complementary logic state signal lines
(BIT, nBIT).



3. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 1, wherein the
2 selectively driving means is a plurality of p-channel FETs (P_R), with each p-channel
FET (P_R) representing a bit, the gate of each p-channel FET (P_R) being coupled with
4 one of the plurality of readout signals (READOUT), the source of each p-channel
FET (P_R) being connected to a supply voltage reference, the drain of each p-channel
6 FET (P_R) being connected to exactly one of the complementary logic state signal lines
(BIT, nBIT).

4. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 1, wherein the
2 first inverting means (500) comprises an n-channel FET (N_{BIT}) and a p-channel FET
(P_{BIT}) connected in series as a complementary MOS pair.

5. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 1, wherein the
2 second inverting means (510) comprises an n-channel FET (N_{nBIT}) and a p-channel
FET (P_{nBIT}) connected in series as a complementary MOS pair.

6. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 1, further
2 comprising means for buffering (520) the logic level on the first complementary logic
state signal line (BIT) for use by another digital circuit.

7. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 6, wherein the
2 buffering means (520) comprises an n-channel FET (N_B) and a p-channel FET (P_B)
connected in series as a complementary MOS pair.

8. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 1, further
2 comprising means for buffering (520) the logic level on the second complementary
logic state signal line (nBIT) for use by another digital circuit.



9. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 8, wherein the
2 buffering means (520) comprises an n-channel FET (N_B) and a p-channel FET (P_B)
connected in series as a complementary MOS pair.

10. A digital read-only memory circuit (400) capable of storing a plurality
2 of addressable bits, comprising:

a plurality of n-channel FETs (N_R), with each n-channel FET (N_R)
4 representing a bit, the gate of each n-channel FET (N_R) being coupled with one of a
plurality of readout signals (READOUT), the source of each n-channel FET (N_R)
6 being connected to a ground reference, the drain of each n-channel FET (N_R) being
connected to exactly one of a first (BIT) and second ($nBIT$) complementary logic
8 state signal lines, the first complementary logic state signal line (BIT) indicating a
first logic state, the second complementary logic state signal line ($nBIT$) indicating a
10 second logic state;

a first inverter (500), the input of the first inverter (500) being coupled with
12 the first complementary logic state signal line (BIT); and

a second inverter (510), the input of the second inverter (510) being coupled
14 with the second complementary logic state signal line ($nBIT$), the input of the second
inverter (510) also being coupled with the output of the first inverter (500), the output
16 of the second inverter (510) being coupled with the input of the first inverter (500).

11. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 10, wherein the
2 first inverter (500) comprises an n-channel FET (N_{BIT}) and a p-channel FET (P_{BIT})
connected in series as a complementary MOS pair.

12. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 10, wherein the
2 second inverter (510) comprises an n-channel FET (N_{nBIT}) and a p-channel FET
(P_{nBIT}) connected in series as a complementary MOS pair.



13. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 10, further
2 comprising a read buffer (520), the input of the read buffer (520) being driven by the
output of the first inverter (500).

14. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 13, wherein the
2 read buffer (520) comprises an n-channel FET (N_B) and a p-channel FET (P_B)
connected in series as a complementary MOS pair.

15. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 10, further
2 comprising a read buffer (520), the input of the read buffer (520) being driven by the
output of the second inverter (510).

16. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 15, wherein the
2 read buffer (520) comprises an n-channel FET (N_B) and a p-channel FET (P_B)
connected in series as a complementary MOS pair.

17. A digital read-only memory circuit (400) capable storing a plurality of
2 addressable bits, comprising:
a plurality of p-channel FETs (P_R), with each p-channel FET (P_R) representing
4 a bit, the gate of each p-channel FET (P_R) being coupled with one of a plurality of
readout signals (READOUT), the source of each p-channel FET (P_R) being connected
6 to a supply voltage reference, the drain of each p-channel FET (P_R) being connected
to exactly one of a first (BIT) and second (nBIT) complementary logic state signal
8 lines, the first complementary logic state signal line (BIT) indicating a first logic
state, the second complementary logic state signal line (nBIT) indicating a second
10 logic state;
a first inverter (500), the input of the first inverter (500) being coupled with
12 the first complementary logic state signal line (BIT); and



a second inverter (510), the input of the second inverter (510) being coupled
14 with the second complementary logic state signal line (nBIT), the input of the second
inverter (510) also being coupled with the output of the first inverter (500), the output
16 of the second inverter (510) being coupled with the input of the first inverter (500).

18. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 17, wherein the
2 first inverter (500) comprises an n-channel FET (N_{BIT}) and a p-channel FET (P_{BIT})
connected in series as a complementary MOS pair.

19. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 17, wherein the
2 second inverter (510) comprises an n-channel FET (N_{nBIT}) and a p-channel FET
(P_{nBIT}) connected in series as a complementary MOS pair.

20. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 17, further
2 comprising a read buffer (520), the input of the read buffer (520) being driven by the
output of the first inverter (500).

21. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 20, wherein the
2 read buffer (520) comprises an n-channel FET (N_B) and a p-channel FET (P_B)
connected in series as a complementary MOS pair.

22. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 17, further
2 comprising a read buffer (520), the input of the read buffer (520) being driven by the
output of the second inverter (510).

23. The digital read-only memory circuit (400) of claim 22, wherein the
2 read buffer (520) comprises an n-channel FET (N_B) and a p-channel FET (N_B)
connected in series as a complementary MOS pair.



24. A method of storing digital read-only data as a plurality of addressable
2 bits, the method comprising the steps of:

selectively driving (700) exactly one of a first and second complementary
4 logic state signal lines substantially to a voltage reference when one of a plurality of
readout signals is active, the first complementary logic state signal line indicating a
6 first logic state, the second complementary logic state signal line indicating a second
logic state, the complementary logic state signal line that is being driven indicating
8 the logic state of the bit of the read-only memory circuit addressed by the active
readout signal;

10 inverting (710) the logic level on the first complementary logic state signal
line to drive the second complementary logic state signal line; and

12 inverting (720) the logic level on the second complementary logic state signal
line to drive the first complementary logic state signal line.

25. The method of claim 24, further comprising the step of buffering (730)
2 the logic level on the first complementary logic state signal line for use by another
digital circuit.

26. The method of claim 24, further comprising the step of buffering (730)
2 the logic level on the second complementary logic state signal line for use by another
digital circuit.

