protocol exceeds a protocol level rate limit value for that protocol) are dropped.

In some embodiments, one or more of the set of identifier keys, the identifier key based rate limiting value, and the protocol level rate limit value are configurable by a system operator of the network element allowing flexible control packet rate limiting. Thus, control packets from different computer end stations (and different network interfaces within the computer end stations) can be rate limited separately while an overall protocol level rate limiting for each line card is maintained. Thus, the hierarchical control packet rate limiting protects against computer end stations