CLAIMS

1. A gap blocking system for an amusement park ride, comprising:

a loading platform having a gap separating a first portion of the loading platform from a second portion of the loading platform, wherein the first portion of the loading platform comprises a moving portion;

a ride vehicle coupled to a transport extending through the gap, wherein the transport is configured to propel the ride vehicle along a loading path of the loading platform;

a panel assembly coupled to the moving portion of the first portion of the loading platform and comprising a plurality of panels configured to rotate with the moving portion, wherein each panel of the plurality of panels is coupled to a respective biasing mechanism coupled to the first portion of the loading platform and configured to bias each panel towards a closed configuration in which each panel extends radially away from the first portion of the loading platform; and in order to block access to the gap,

a stationary post coupled to the loading platform and positioned within the gap, wherein the stationary post is configured to contact and exert an opposing force on at least one individual panel of the plurality of panels to overcome a biasing force of the biasing mechanism and to move the at least one individual panel out of the closed configuration into an open configuration to expose a portion of the gap to permit entry of the ride vehicle into the exposed portion of the gap.

2. The gap blocking system of claim 1, wherein at least a portion of the plurality of panels overlap adjacent panels such that a top surface of one panel is partially covered by a first adjacent panel and a second adjacent panel when the one panel and the adjacent panels are in the closed configuration.

3. The gap blocking system of claim 1, wherein the plurality of panels comprise a first set of panels and a second set of panels, wherein the panel assembly alternates between a panel of

the first set and a panel of the second set such that an individual panel of the first set is adjacent to and overlaps individual panels of the second set when in the closed configuration.

4. The gap blocking system of claim 3, wherein the first set of panels comprises panels having a first thickness and the second set of panels comprises panels having a second thickness greater than the first thickness.

5. The gap blocking system of claim 4, wherein a panel of the first set does not contact a bottom surface of any panel of the second set when the panel of the first set is the closed configuration or in the open configuration.

6. The gap blocking system of claim 5, wherein a panel of the first set comprises a top surface and a bottom surface, wherein the bottom surface has a lower friction coefficient than the top surface.

7. The gap blocking system of claim 1, wherein each respective panel is configured to pivot to transition between the closed configuration and the open configuration.

8. The gap blocking system of claim 7, wherein each panel of the plurality of panels is configured to pivot from a maximum radial extension in the closed configuration to the open configuration in which each panel is not at the maximum radial extension in response to the opposing force of the stationary post.

9. The gap blocking system of claim 7, wherein a portion of each panel is positioned underneath or within the first portion of the loading platform and wherein lateral edges of each respective panel taper towards the pivot point in the portion of each panel positioned underneath or within the first portion of the loading platform.

~~12.~~10. The gap blocking system of claim 1, wherein the ride vehicle comprises a plow structure configured to be positioned at least partially within the gap and to exert a force to hold the at least one individual panel in the open configuration after the at least one individual panel rotates with the first portion of the loading platform away from the stationary post.

~~13.~~11. The gap blocking system of claim 1, wherein the stationary post is located at a junction of an attraction path, which is coupled to ~~with~~ the loading path to overcome the biasing force of the biasing mechanism and to move the at least one individual panel out of the closed configuration into the open configuration to expose the portion of the gap to permit entry of the ride vehicle into the exposed portion of the gap.

~~14.~~12. A method of operating a gap blocking system for an amusement park ride, comprising:

providing a plurality of panels extending radially from a loading platform to block access to a gap formed between portions of the loading platform;

moving a moving portion of the loading platform to contact at least one individual panel of the plurality of panels with a stationary post coupled to the loading platform, wherein the contacting overcomes a biasing force of a biasing mechanism of the at least one individual panel to cause the at least one individual panel to move from a closed configuration into an open configuration, wherein the contacting causes the at least one individual panel to slide over or under an adjacent panel in order to block access to the gap; and

controlling a ride vehicle to enter an opening providing access to the gap created by the at least one individual panel being in the open configuration.

~~15.~~13. The method of claim 12, wherein the loading platform is a turntable and further comprising:

rotating the turntable to move the at least one individual panel out of contact with the stationary post and to move a different panel into contact with the stationary post to cause the different panel to move from the closed configuration into the open configuration.

~~20.~~14. The method of claim 13, further comprising:

controlling the ride vehicle to travel along ~~the~~ a loading path at approximately a same speed as the moving portion of the loading platform such that the ride vehicle maintains contact with the at least one individual panel subsequent to the at least one individual panel moving out of contact with the stationary post.

~~21.~~15. The method of claim 13, further comprising:

contacting an adjacent panel of the at least one individual panel with a plow structure of the ride vehicle to cause the adjacent panel to at least partially move from the closed configuration to the open configuration.

~~22.~~16. The method of claim 12, wherein the contacting causes the at least one individual panel to slide over an adjacent panel.

~~23.~~17. The method of claim 12, wherein the contacting causes the at least one individual panel to slide under an adjacent panel.

~~24.~~18. A gap blocking system for an amusement park ride, comprising:

a loading platform having a gap separating a first portion of the loading platform from a second portion of the loading platform, wherein the first portion of the loading platform comprises a moving portion; and

a panel assembly coupled to the moving portion and comprising a plurality of panels configured to rotate with the moving portion, wherein each panel of the plurality of panels is coupled to a respective biasing mechanism coupled to the first portion of the loading platform and configured to bias each panel towards a closed configuration in which each panel extends radially away from the first portion of the loading platform in order to block access to the gap, wherein the plurality of panels is arranged to alternate between a first type of panel and a

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second type of panel such that the first type of panel is positioned to overlap a portion of respective top surfaces of adjacent panels of the second type when the plurality of panels are in the closed configuration.

~~25.~~19. The gap blocking system of claim 18, wherein the loading platform comprises a turntable or an in-line loading arrangement.

~~26.~~20. The gap blocking system of claim 18, wherein the second portion of the loading platform comprises a slot configured to receive the plurality of panels when the plurality of panels is in the closed configuration.