METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR MAINTAINING A FINGERPRINT FOR A WIRELESS NETWORK

Claim of Priority under 35 U.S.C. §119

[0001] The present Application for Patent claims priority to Provisional Application No. 60/702,591 entitled, "ASSISTED WIRELESS NETWORK ACCESS POINT SEARCH IN WIRELESS COMMUNICATION NETWORKS", filed July 25, 2005, and Provisional Application No. 60/750,920 entitled, "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR LOCATING A WIRELESS LOCAL AREA NETWORK IN A WIDE AREA NETWORK," filed December 16, 2005, and Provisional Application No. 60/750,919 entitled, "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR MAINTAINING A FINGERPRINT FOR A WIRELESS NETWORK," filed December 16, 2005, and assigned to the assignee hereof and hereby expressly incorporated by reference herein.

BACKGROUND

Field

[0002] The present disclosure relates generally to telecommunications, and more particularly, to systems and methods to support a mobile communications device capable of communicating via two different types of communication networks.

Background

[0003] The demand for wireless information services has led to the development of an ever increasing number of wireless networks. CDMA2000 1x is just one example of a wireless network that provides wide area telephony and data services. CDMA2000 1x is a wireless standard promulgated by the Third Generation Partnership Project 2 (3GPP2) using code division multiple access (CDMA) technology. CDMA is a technology that allows multiple users to share a common communications medium using spread-spectrum processing. A competing wireless network that is commonly employed in Europe is Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM). Unlike CDMA2000 1x, GSM uses narrowband time division multiple access (TDMA) to support wireless telephony and data services. Some other wireless networks include General Packet Radio Service (GPRS) which supports high speed data services with

data rates suitable for e-mail and web browsing applications, and Universal Mobile Telecommunications System (UMTS) which can deliver broadband voice and data for audio and video applications.

[0004] These wireless networks can generally be thought of as wide area networks employing cellular technology. Cellular technology is based on a topology in which the geographic coverage region is broken up into cells. Within each of these cells is a fixed base transceiver station (BTS) that communicates with mobile users. A base station controller (BSC) is typically employed in the geographic coverage region to control the BTSs and route communications to the appropriate gateways for the various packet-switched and circuit-switched networks.

[0005] As the demand for wireless information services continue to increase, mobile devices are evolving to support integrated voice, data, and streaming media while providing seamless network coverage between wide area cellular networks and wireless local area networks (LAN). Wireless LANs generally provide telephony and data services over relatively small geographic regions using a standard protocol, such as IEEE 802.11, Bluetooth, or the like. The existence of wireless LANs provides a unique opportunity to increase user capacity in a wide area cellular network by extending cellular communications to the unlicensed spectrum using the infrastructure of the wireless LAN.

[0006] Recently, various techniques have been employed to enable mobile devices to communicate with different wireless networks. Additional techniques have been employed to allow a mobile device to search for the presence of a wireless LAN to determine if one is available to connect to. However, frequent or continuous searching for a wireless LAN unnecessarily consumes power and can quickly discharge batteries in the mobile device. Accordingly, improvements in power consumption and battery life for mobile devices may be realized by intelligently searching for available wireless LANs. One way to improve searching efficiency is to adaptively refine the criteria used to determine whether or not a wireless LAN is close by.

SUMMARY

[0007] One aspect relates to a wireless communications device that includes a memory configured to store information relating to a location of a first communications network.

The device also includes a processor configured to modify the information stored in the memory based on one or more reference signals from a second communications network.

[0008] Another aspect relates to a wireless communications device that includes a processor and a memory, the memory configured to store a first fingerprint of a first communications network based on one or more reference signals of a second communications network. The processor is configured to determine a second fingerprint of the wireless device based on the one or more reference signals and to modify the first fingerprint based on the second fingerprint.

[0009] Yet a further aspect relates to a method of communications which includes storing information relating to the location of a first communications network; and modifying the stored information based on one or more reference signals of a second communications network.

[0010] It is understood that other embodiments of the present disclosure will become readily apparent to those skilled in the art from the following detailed description, wherein it is shown and described only various embodiments of the disclosure by way of illustration. As will be realized, the disclosure is capable of other and different embodiments and its several details are capable of modification in various other respects, all without departing from the spirit and scope of the present disclosure. Accordingly, the drawings and detailed description are to be regarded as illustrative in nature and not as restrictive.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] Various aspects of a wireless communications system are illustrated by way of example, and not by way of limitation, in the accompanying drawings, wherein:

[0012] FIG. 1A is a conceptual block diagram of an embodiment of a wireless communications system;

[0013] FIG. 1B is a conceptual block diagram of another embodiment of a wireless communications system;

[0014] FIG. 2 is a functional block diagram illustrating an example of a mobile device capable of supporting both cellular and wireless LAN communications; and

[0015] FIG. 3A depicts a flowchart of an exemplary method to create fingerprints on a mobile communications device;

[0016] FIG. 3B depicts a flowchart of an exemplary method to compare fingerprints of different locations;

[0017] FIG. 4 depicts a flowchart of an exemplary method to refine an existing fingerprint for a known location.

[0018] FIG. 5 depicts a flowchart of an exemplary method for selecting a wireless communications network;

[0019] FIG. 6 depicts a flowchart of an exemplary method for performing a global search for a wireless network;

[0020] FIG. 7 depicts a flowchart of an exemplary method for performing a fingerprint search for a wireless network;

[0021] FIG. 8 depicts a flowchart of an exemplary method for performing a hand-off search for a wireless network using fingerprints and neighbor lists.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0022] The detailed description set forth below in connection with the appended drawings is intended as a description of various embodiments of the disclosure and is not intended to represent the only embodiments in which the disclosure may be practiced. The detailed description includes specific details for the purpose of providing a thorough understanding of the disclosure. In some instances, well known structures and components are shown in block diagram form in order to avoid obscuring the concepts of the disclosure.

[0023] In the following detailed description, various techniques will be described in connection with the handoff of a mobile user from one network to another. A number of these techniques will be described in the context of a mobile communications device traveling through a wide area WAN with one or more wireless LANs dispersed throughout the WAN coverage region. The mobile communications device may be any suitable device capable of wireless telephony or data communications, such as a cellular phone designed for operation in a CDMA2000 1x network. The mobile communications device may be capable of employing any suitable protocol for

accessing a wireless LAN, including, by way of example, IEEE 802.11. While these techniques may be described in the context of a WAN phone capable of communicating with an IEEE 802.11 network, these techniques can be extended to other mobile communication devices capable of accessing multiple networks. For instance, these techniques may be applied to a mobile communications device capable of switching between a CDMA2000 1x network and a GSM network. Accordingly, any reference to a cellular phone capable of communicating with an IEEE 802.11 network, or any other specific embodiment, is intended only to illustrate various aspects of the present disclosure, with the understanding that these aspects have a wide range of applications.

[0024] FIG. 1A is a conceptual block diagram of an embodiment of a wireless communications system. A mobile device 102 is shown moving through a WAN 104 by a series of broken lines. The WAN 104 includes a BSC 106 supporting a number of BTSs dispersed throughout the WAN coverage region. A single BTS 108 is shown in FIG. 1 for simplicity of explanation. A mobile switching center (MSC) 110 may be used to provide a gateway to a public switched telephone network (PSTN) 112. Although not shown in FIG. 1, the WAN 104 may employ numerous BSCs each supporting any number of BTSs to extend the geographic reach of the WAN 104. When multiple BSCs are employed throughout the WAN 104, the MSC 110 may also be used to coordinate communications between the BSCs.

[0025] The WAN 104 may also include one or more wireless LANs dispersed throughout the wide area wireless coverage region. A single wireless LAN 114 is shown in FIG. 1. The wireless LAN 114 may be an IEEE 802.11 network, or any other suitable network. The wireless LAN 114 includes an access point 116 for the mobile device 102 to communicate with an IP network 118. A server 120 may be used to interface the IP network 118 to the MSC 110, which provides a gateway to the PSTN 112.

[0026] When power is initially applied to the mobile device 102, it will attempt to access either the WAN 104 or the wireless LAN 114. The decision to access a particular network may depend on a variety of factors relating to the specific application and overall design constraints. By way of example, the mobile device 102 may be configured to access the wireless LAN 114 when the service quality meets a minimum

threshold. To the extent the wireless LAN 114 can be used to support mobile telephony and data communications, valuable bandwidth may be freed up for other mobile users.

[0027] The mobile device 102 may be configured to continuously or periodically search for a beacon from the access point 116, or any other access point of a wireless LAN. The beacon is a periodic signal transmitted by the access point 116 with synchronization information. WLAN beacon search requires the mobile device to in turn tune to possible WLAN channels, in one or more operable bands of a WLAN system, and conduct either an active scan or a passive scan on the channel. In a passive scan the mobile device just tunes to the channel and receives for a specific period of time waiting for a beacon transmission. In an active scan, the mobile device tunes to the channel and transmits a probe request after following the access procedures to avoid colliding with existing devices on the channel. On receipt of the probe request the access point transmits a probe response to the mobile device. In the event that the mobile device 102 cannot detect a beacon or receives no probe response to a probe request, which might be the case if power is applied to the mobile device 102 at location A, then the mobile device 102 attempts to access the WAN 104. With respect to FIG. 1B, described later, the mobile device 102 does not continuously (or periodically) scan for a WLAN access point but, instead, scans for a WLAN access point only when it determines it is close to the wireless LAN 114. The mobile device 102 may access the WAN 104 by acquiring a pilot signal from the BTS 108. Once the pilot signal is acquired, a radio connection may be established between the mobile device 102 and the BTS 108 by means well known in the art. The mobile device 102 may use the radio connection with the BTS 108 to register with the MSC 110. Registration is the process by which the mobile device 102 makes its whereabouts known to the WAN 104. When the registration process is complete, the mobile device 102 may enter into an idle state until a call is initiated, either by the mobile device 102 or the PSTN 112. Either way, an air traffic link may be established between the mobile device 102 and the BTS 108 to set up and support the call.

[0028] When the mobile device 102 moves through the WAN 104 from location A to location B in the depicted embodiment, it is now able to detect a beacon from the access point 116. Once this occurs, a radio connection may be established between the two by means well known in the art. The mobile device 102 then obtains the IP address of the

server 120. The mobile device 102 may use the services of a Domain Name Server (DNS) to determine the server's IP address. The domain name of the server 120 may be delivered to the mobile device 102 over the WAN 104. With the IP address, the mobile device 102 can establish a network connection with the server 120. Once the network connection is established, information from the server 120 can be used in conjunction with local measurements to determine whether the service quality of the wireless LAN 114 is sufficient to handoff the mobile device 102 to the access point 116.

[0029] It should be noted, that while FIG. 1A is generally descriptive of a cellular WAN, other WANs may be utilized. This may include those that do not utilize MSCs or other cellular structures, and those WANs utilizing other communication protocols including wideband CDMA (WCDMA), TD-CDMA, GSM, or the like.

[0030] Referring now to FIG. 1B, the wireless LAN 114 and BTS 108 are shown in the context of a larger WAN having multiple BTS 122, 124, 126 and also multiple wireless LANs 129, 131 and associated access points 128, 130. As shown in FIG. 1B, the mobile device 102 is within the coverage area of any wireless LAN. Accordingly, searching for a beacon signal while in this location will prove fruitless and unnecessarily consume power. Even though the mobile device may frequently enter a sleep or idle mode to conserve power, searching for wireless LAN beacon signals can quickly consume power. In a typical 802.11 network configuration, the beacon signals occur at intervals measured in tens of milliseconds; thus, the mobile device must remain awake and searching for at least that period of time per channel and considering that the wireless LAN access point may be configured for different frequency ranges and channels within those ranges, the mobile device 102 must remain awake a significant amount of time to search for available wireless LAN access points. Similarly, in the case of an active scan, the mobile device must stay awake to follow the channel access procedures on the channel, then transmit a probe request and stay awake to receive a probe response. It must conduct this procedure on each channel. In this case as well, the mobile device 102 must remain awake a significant amount of time to search for available wireless LAN access points, which may result in increased power consumption and processing overhead.

[0031] As is known in the art, the mobile device 102 monitors beacon and pilot signals from the base stations of the cellular network. These signals can include pilot and

paging signals. The mobile device monitors these signals to measure primary and neighbor signal strengths to perform hand-offs between base stations. Also, in networks where the base stations are synchronized, the mobile device may also measure a phase of each pilot signal to assist with hand-off determination. Thus, at any location within the network 104, the mobile device 102 observes up to *n* base stations with measurable signal strengths which can be characterized as two vectors $x_1, \ldots, x_n$, and $y_1, \ldots, y_n$. Where each x value is a signal strength of a pilot signal from a base station and each y value is a phase of the pilot signal from a base station. When there are fewer than n observed signals, the remaining values are set to null. Because the pilot signals have a pilot phase offset associated with them, the signal strengths and phases may be easily identified as originating from a particular base station. In other WAN technologies like GSM, the neighbors base stations may be identified by their frequency channel or other base station identifier and a signal strength associated with each base station.

[0032] In WCDMA, base stations may not be synchronized. As in CDMA, when the mobile camps in the idle state on the paging channel of a particular base station, it scans for neighbor base station signals. In the case of CDMA each base station uses offsets of the same pseudo-random spreading sequence. In the case of WCDMA, each base station transmits a number of signals designed to allow the mobile station to rapidly acquire synchronization with the signals transmitted by that base station and once synchronized determine the spreading code group and spreading code in use by that base station. The set of spreading codes and their signal strengths may be used to create the fingerprint to identify a location in WCDMA coverage corresponding topilot offsets and pilot signal strengths in the CDMA system. Relative timing offsets of neighbor base stations may also be used corresponding to pilot phases in CDMA, however, if the base stations are not synchronized, their clocks may have relative drift making the timing offset an unreliable indicator.

[0033] However, by limiting searching for beacon signals to periods when the mobile device is within the area 140, a significant savings in power consumption may be realized. Thus, when the mobile device 102 periodically awakes to listen to the paging channel or a quick paging channel in the WAN it may also determine its location. If it determines that its location is within the area 140, then it can search for a wireless LAN beacon signal. Otherwise, it can avoid unnecessarily searching for the beacon signal.

[0034] A mobile device 102 may monitor beacon and pilot signals from the base stations of the WAN. These signals can include pilot and paging signals. The mobile device monitors these signals to measure primary and neighbor signal strengths to perform hand-offs between base stations. Also, in networks where the base stations are synchronized, the mobile device may also measure a phase of each pilot signal to assist with hand-off determination. Thus, at any location within the network 104, the mobile device 102 observes up to *n* base stations with measurable signal strengths which can be characterized as two vectors $x_1, \ldots, x_n$, and $y_1, \ldots, y_n$. Where each x value is a signal strength of a pilot signal from a base station and each y value is a phase of the pilot signal from a base station. When there are fewer than n observed signals, the remaining values are set to null. Because the pilot signals have a pilot phase offset associated with them, the signal strengths and phases may be easily identified as originating from a particular base station. In other WAN technologies like GSM, the neighbors base stations may be identified by their frequency channel or other base station identifier and a signal strength associated with each base station. In certain aspects, any signal utilized for acquisition, timing, or the like may be utilized as the signal that is utilized to obtain the measurements to form the one or more vectors described above. Further, the vectors need not be formed, stored, or utilized as two vectors as described, or include the information in the format described above. Thus, in some aspects, information that identifies a source and at least one characteristic of the reference signal, e.g. pilot or paging signal, is utilized.

[0035] The information may be utilized as a conceptual a fingerprint, or a signature, of a location of the mobile device 102. Thus, if locations within the area 140 have a certain known fingerprint, then the mobile device can determine its current fingerprint and compare it to the known fingerprint to determine whether the mobile device is located within the area 140. While the above discussion merely mentions using two attributes of the WAN (i.e., pilot signal strength and phases). Further, as discussed above, other dynamic attributes of the WAN may be used instead of, or in combination with, these two attributes. For example, pilot offset values may be used as a fingerprint; even the number of pilot signals available is a possible attribute to be used for a fingerprint. Furthermore, the attributes that make up the fingerprint do not necessarily have to be attributes of the WAN. For example, many mobile devices have GPS

receivers that can be used to determine the location of the mobile device relative to a wireless LAN. The GPS information may be used directly or even indirectly. As one example of the latter case, a base station ID along with phase measurements of GPS signals from different satellites may be used to define a fingerprint that corresponds to a location of the mobile device. Thus, in its broadest sense, a fingerprint is a collection of attributes of a first communication network that change based on location and can be used by the mobile device to determine the proximity of a second communication network. In addition, the fingerprint can also include characteristics of the transmitters of the second communication networks (e.g. MAC ID, Band, Channel, RSSI information of the WiFi access points.) In such an instance, the WAN parameters may be thought of as trigger parameters such that a match of the parameters triggers a WLAN search. The WLAN parameters can be used during the search as the search parameters for the triggered search.

[0036] The attributes may be calculated in a variety of different ways without departing from the scope of the present disclosure. For example, an instantaneous measurement may be taken of such attributes as pilot signal strength and phase and used as the fingerprint. However, even when the mobile device is stationary, the values of these attributes vary because of environmental variability. Accordingly, multiple measurements may be taken and averaged together or otherwise combined in some statistically significant manner in order to generate the fingerprint.

[0037] FIG. 2 is a functional block diagram illustrating an example of a mobile device capable of supporting both WAN and wireless LAN communications. The mobile device 102 may include a WAN transceiver 202 and a wireless LAN transceiver 204. In at least one embodiment of the mobile device 102, the WAN transceiver 202 is capable of supporting CDMA2000 1x, WCDMA, GSM, TD-CDMA, or other WAN communications with a BTS (not shown), and the wireless LAN transceiver 204 is capable of supporting IEEE 802.11 communications with an access point (not shown). It should be noted, that the concepts described in connection with the mobile device 102 can be extended to other WAN and wireless LAN technologies. Each transceiver 202, 204 is shown with a separate antenna 206, 207, respectively, but the transceivers 202, 204 could share a single broadband antenna. Each antenna 206, 207 may be implemented with one or more radiating elements.

[0038] The mobile device 102 is also shown with a processor 208 coupled to both transceivers 202, 204, however, a separate processor may be used for each transceiver in alternative embodiments of the mobile device 102. The processor 208 may be implemented as hardware, firmware, software, or any combination thereof. By way of example, the processor 208 may include a microprocessor (not shown). The microprocessor may be used to support software applications that, among other things, (1) control and manage access to the wide area wireless communication network and wireless LAN, and (2) interface the processor 208 to the keypad 210, display, 212, and other user interfaces (not shown). The processor 208 may also include a digital signal processor (DSP) (not shown) with an embedded software layer that supports various signal processing functions, such as convolutional encoding, cyclic redundancy check (CRC) functions, modulation, and spread-spectrum processing. The DSP may also perform vocoder functions to support telephony applications. The manner in which the processor 208 is implemented will depend on the particular application and the design constraints imposed on the overall system. It should be noted that the hardware, firmware, and software configurations may interchangeable under these circumstances, and how best to implement the described functionality for each particular application.

[0039] The processor 208 may be configured to execute an algorithm to trigger a handoff from one network to another. The algorithm may be implemented as one or more software applications supported by the microprocessor based architecture discussed earlier. Alternatively, the algorithm may be a module separate from the processor 208. The module may be implemented in hardware, software, firmware, or any combination thereof. Depending on the specific design constraints, the algorithm could be integrated into any entity in the mobile device 102, or distributed across multiple entities in the mobile device 102.

[0040] For certain purposes known in the art, the signal strength from the access point may be measured at the mobile device 102 with a received signal strength indicator (RSSI) block 216. The RSSI is most likely a measure of strength of an existing signal that is fed back to the wireless LAN transceiver 204 for automatic gain control, and therefore, can be provided to the processor 208 without increasing the circuit complexity of the mobile device 102. Alternatively, the quality of the radio connection may be determined from the beacon. Since the beacon is a spread-spectrum signal that

is known, *a priori*, a replica of the beacon can be stored in memory 211 at the mobile device 102. The demodulated beacon may be used with the replica beacon stored in memory to estimate the energy of the transmitted beacon by means well known in the art.

[0041] Referring back to the previously mentioned fingerprints, the mobile device 102 also includes an algorithm executable by the processor 208 for creating multiple fingerprints and comparing different fingerprints to one another. For example, using the keypad 212, a user of the mobile device 102 may select a key that causes the mobile device 102 to create a current fingerprint and store that fingerprint in memory 211. If at the time the fingerprint is created, the mobile device is connected to a wireless LAN, then the stored fingerprint may be associated with that wireless LAN access point. In addition, the fingerprint can also be recorded automatically on a periodic basis or at programmatic events such as successful access, successful access with desired quality of service, etc.

[0042] As a result of the above process, the memory 211 may contain a wireless LAN search table arranged, for example, similar to the following table:

WAN ID	WLAN SSID	WLAN BSS ID	Signal Strength	Phase
A	I1	A_1	$s_1(A_1) \ldots s_n(A_1)$	$p_1(A_1) \ldots p_n(A_1)$
		A_2	$s_1(A_2) \ldots s_n(A_2)$	$p_1(A_2) \ldots p_n(A_2)$
	I2	A_3	$s_1(A_3) \ldots s_n(A_3)$	$p_1(A_3) \ldots p_n(A_3)$
B	I1	B_1	$S_1(B_1) \ldots s_n(B_1)$	
	I2	B_2	$S_1(B_2) \ldots s_n(B_2)$	

[0043] The first column of the table refers to the WAN ID of the WAN. The WAN ID identifies the system and network for the WAN known as the SID/NID in the wide area wireless system. The particular base stations in the WAN may be identified by the pilot offsets, pilot signal strengths or other attribute which are part of the finger print as

discussed below. The fingerprint identifies the location of the mobile device. The second column refers to the text identifier of the WLAN network. The third identifier refers to wireless LAN access points (also known as BSS). In the exemplary table there are three access points (A_1, A_2, A_3) within the first coverage area of base station A. Similarly, there are two access points within the coverage area of the base station B. There may, of course, be many more wireless LANs within the areas covered by any WAN ID but the user of the mobile device may not be interested in those access points because they are associated with wireless LANs that the user may not be permitted to access. Accordingly, the table may merely include a fingerprint for those access points to which the user typically connects.

[0044] The two remaining columns include the values that comprise the fingerprint itself. In this example table the fingerprints for the access points A_1, A_2, and A_3 include both strength and phase information. However, the fingerprints for the access points B_1 and B_2 comprise only signal strength information. Also note that although each fingerprint in this table is denoted by a vector of length n, there may be less than n non-null components of the vector. That is, several values may be null so that the fingerprint comparison is restricted to the vector components that ate not null. In operation, a mobile device may awaken from a sleep or idle mode and calculate a fingerprint for its current location and compare it to the information in columns 4 and 5 in the table. The mobile device typically limits the fingerprint match to entries corresponding to the WAN ID with which it is currently registered. Thus, when registered with WAN ID A, only fingerprints associated with WAN ID A in the table are used for matching. The fingerprint creation and comparison may take place during ongoing calls as well. Based on the comparison, the mobile device may determine that an access point with SSID and BSSID indicated in columns 1 and 2 is near enough to search for its beacon signal; otherwise it may return to idle mode without bothering to search for a wireless LAN beacon signal.

[0045] The above table is exemplary in nature and does not describe all the possible information that may be used to characterize a fingerprint nor all the different combinations of WAN IDs versus access point IDs. or example, since most areas are covered by multiple WAN service providers each with its own WAN ID (SID/NID), a table entry for an access point may occur multiple times associated with different WAN

IDs with a respective signature in each. In addition to the table depicted above, a separate table (or possibly additional entries in the original table) may be used to store information about the corresponding access point (i.e., the BSS ID). For example, a wireless LAN access point typically is configured to operate on one particular channel in a particular frequency band. Rather than requiring a mobile device to search through the different possible combinations, the table can contain that operational information for the access point so that the mobile device can use it to search for the beacon signal. Other information about the access point may include its capabilities such as security, quality of service, throughput and networking information.

[0046] The creation of the fingerprint table is described with reference to the flowchart of FIG. 3A. In block 302, the mobile device connects to a wireless LAN. Without the benefit of any pre-stored fingerprints, the mobile device scans for a WLAN access point in the typical way. Once the mobile device has connected with the access point, the user may, in block 304, signal to the device to capture the current fingerprint. This function may typically be user-initiated because the user may want only certain wireless LANs to be stored in the fingerprint database such as those wireless LANs that the user normally subscribes to or connects. However, the creating of a fingerprint may be automatically initiated by the mobile device as one of the many functions performed when connecting to the wireless LAN.

[0047] In block 306, the mobile device captures the values for those attributes that comprise the fingerprint and, in block 308, the device stores the fingerprint in a database. Along with the fingerprint, it is advantageous to store attributes of the currently connected wireless LAN as well.

[0048] The comparison of a current fingerprint to a stored fingerprint can be performed in a variety of ways without departing from the scope of the present disclosure. One particular technique is described below. However, many alternative, but functionally equivalent, techniques may be used as well.

[0049] The attributes that make up the fingerprint may have values that vary (even for the same location) or are difficult to measure with a high degree of accuracy. Thus, a comparison between fingerprints should not rely on exact duplicity as a test to determine a match. Similarly, the region 140 may reflect an operational decision to

place more importance on detecting access points earlier at the expense of false alarms. In other words, if the region 140 is selected to be much larger than the region 114, then a mobile device 102 will determine that it should search for a beacon signal at time when it is not within the region 114 (i.e., a false alarm). If, however, the region 140 is selected to closely mimic the region 114, then there will be instances where the mobile device should be searching for a beacon signal but the fingerprint matching algorithm has not yet instructed it to search.

[0050] To handle such variability of the fingerprints, a "deviation" amount is defined that helps control the determination of whether a fingerprint matches a stored fingerprint.

WAN ID	WLAN BSS ID	Signal Strength	Strength Deviation	Phase	Phase Deviation
A	A_1	$s_1(A_1) \ldots s_n(A_1)$	$d_1(A_1) \ldots d_n(A_1)$	$p_1(A_1) \ldots p_n(A_1)$	$q_1(A_1) \ldots q_n(A_1)$
	A_2	$s_1(A_2) \ldots s_n(A_2)$	$d_1(A_2) \ldots d_n(A_2)$	$p_1(A_2) \ldots p_n(A_2)$	$q_1(A_2) \ldots q_n(A_2)$
	A_3	$s_1(A_3) \ldots s_n(A_3)$	$d_1(A_3) \ldots d_n(A_3)$	$p_1(A_3) \ldots p_n(A_3)$	$q_1(A_3) \ldots q_n(A_3)$

[0051] The above table includes a deviation value for the signal strength and a separate deviation value for the phase portion of the fingerprint. Use of these values is explained with respect to the flowchart of FIG. 3B. In block 320, the mobile device awakens or is otherwise controlled to capture a fingerprint of its current location. Continuing the example where the fingerprint has a vector for signal strengths and one for phases, a pair of vectors are collected $x_1 \ldots x_n$ and $y_1 \ldots y_n$.

[0052] In block 322, the current WAN ID is checked and the table entries for access points associated with that WAN ID are determined. Further search refinements are possible by searching the database for identifiers of the observable pilots. For the CDMA network the search criterion can be PN phase offsets of the observable pilots. Next the fingerprint for each of these access points is then compared, in block 324, to the current fingerprint to determine if there is a match. Algorithmically, the comparison and determination is performed by:

For i = 1 to n:

determine if $|x_i - s_i(\cdot)| < d_i(\cdot)$

determine if $|y_i - p_i(\cdot)| < q_i(\cdot)$

Thus, the deviation values d and q can be used to select how closely the current finger print (x and y vectors) must match a stored finger print (s and p vectors). The larger the deviation values, the more the values can differ and there still be a match.

[0053] If there is a match at block 324, in block 326 an optional comparison may be made to determine whether the sum of all differences for a given access point (e.g. $| x_i - s_i(\cdot)|$ and $| y_i - p_i(\cdot)|$) also fall below a respective threshold (e.g., X and Y). This additional test can help catch certain scenarios where the individual differences may show a match but when the fingerprint is considered in total, it can be determined that there is no match.

[0054] If the tests of blocks 324 and 326 are satisfied for a wireless LAN access point in the table, then the mobile device is controlled so as to search for the beacon signals of that access point. If there is no match at blocks 324 or 326, the mobile device continues to look for a match on another fingerprint for another BSS ID. In an instance where possibly more than one access point fingerprint matches the current location fingerprint, then the sizes of the differences, or the sum of the differences, or some other determination may be made to select the access point with the fingerprint that most closely matches the current fingerprint. In this case of multiple matches, when the mobile device scans for WLAN access points it may locate one or more access points.

[0055] FIG. 4 depicts a flowchart of an exemplary method for refining a fingerprint entry. In block 402, the mobile device, after searching for and acquiring the beacon signal, connects to the access point of the wireless LAN as is known in the art. The access point has a MAC address that is used as its BSS ID. Other identifiers may be used to differentiate between different access points; however, the BSS ID is a convenient value. Thus, in block 404, the mobile device determines if the access point to which it is connected has an entry in the fingerprint table. If not, a current fingerprint can be generated (see FIG. 3A) and then stored, in block 406. If a fingerprint entry already exists for the access point, then the current fingerprint may be used to refine the stored fingerprint, in block 408. As part of the refinement process, the deviations values, if present , may be refined as well, in block 410.

[0056] The refinement process uses the current fingerprint to modify the stored fingerprint so that the stored fingerprint, instead of representing merely the first time that access point was found, actually benefits from the values measured during the multiple times the access point was found. One example of such a refinement may be described with reference to the signal strength parameter but applies equally well to the phase parameter or any other attribute that is used to create the fingerprint. According

to this method, a record of the number of times the fingerprint has been updated is maintained as well. In this example, the fingerprint for access point A_1 is updated for the K^{th} time. The fingerprint includes the vector $s_1(A_1)$ ... $s_n(A_1)$ and the current fingerprint includes the vector x_1, ..., x_n. Each value of the **s** vector is updated according to the formula:

$$\text{new } s_i = [(K-1)(\text{old } s_i) + x_i] / K$$

This type of running average refinement is merely exemplary in nature and there are many accepted mathematical techniques that could be used to refine a fingerprint value without departing from the scope of the present disclosure. A refinement to the fingerprint may also be accomplished by adding values for a new attribute (e.g., the number of measurable pilot signals) to the fingerprint instead of, or in addition to, changing existing values.

[0057] The deviation values may be refined as well. For example, the initial deviation values may be a default value. Such as, for example, 10 dB (for signal strength) or the default value for a deviation may be variable such as 5% of the fingerprint value. In this example, the measured deviation vector between the **x** and **s** vectors is a vector m_1, ..., m_n. The new deviation value d_i is calculated by MAX[(previous d_i), m_i, (default d_i/SQRT(K))].

[0058] In the above examples, the mobile device generates the fingerprints and stores a fingerprint database. However, some or all of the fingerprints may alternatively be stored somewhere further up the wide area wireless communication network such as a database 111 accessible by the MSC 110. In this instance, the processing requirements and storage requirements may be reduced for the mobile device. In operation, the mobile device would create a current fingerprint and transmit that fingerprint to the MSC (or BSC possibly if the database was there). The MSC would then perform the fingerprint comparison and instruct the mobile device whether or not to search for an access point beacon signal. In this arrangement, the MSC could receive fingerprints from multiple mobile devices and have a much larger database of available access points than would be found in a single mobile device. Alternatively, a personalized fingerprint database may be created for each user of the wide area wireless communication network and stored at their home system.

[0059] FIG. 5 depicts an exemplary algorithm that is performed once a mobile device determines that it should search for a wireless LAN. In block 502, the mobile device determines if there are any fingerprints available for comparison. While this determination may be made as to whether there are any available fingerprints at all; it may also be a determination as to whether there are any fingerprints associated with the current base station ID. If there are fingerprints available for comparison, then a current fingerprint is generated, in block 504 and used to search against stored fingerprints for a match, in block 506. If a match is found, then the mobile device can scan for the access point associated with the matching fingerprint and connect, in block 508, with that access point. Once connected, the mobile device remains connected until a hand-off trigger is encountered which causes it to perform a hand-off search in block 516.

[0060] If no fingerprints are available for searching in block 502 or no stored fingerprints match the current fingerprint, then the mobile device may perform a global search in block 510. Through the global search, the mobile device may discover an accessible wireless LAN, in block 512, and connect to the wireless LAN in block 514. Once connected, the mobile device remains connected until a hand-off trigger is encountered which causes it to perform a hand-off search in block 516.

[0061] FIG. 6 depicts a flowchart of an exemplary method for performing the global search of block 510. As described in the previously mentioned and incorporated applications, the mobile device may develop a list of available bands and channels to scan in order to locate a nearby wireless LAN. Thus, in block 602, the mobile device begins scanning the scan list. Once an access point for a wireless LAN is found, in block 604, a connection can be negotiated and connected. Although not shown in the flowchart of FIG. 6, the scanning of the scan list may be limited by a timer or some other parameter so that scanning does not constantly and continuously occur. In block 606, the mobile device determines if the newly discovered access point has a corresponding entry in the fingerprint database. If it does not, then that access point information and fingerprint are added.

[0062] FIG. 7 depicts a flowchart of an exemplary method for performing the fingerprint search of block 506. In block 702, the mobile device, or some other network system, determines a list of access point fingerprints that potentially match the current location fingerprint. With reference to this figure, one possible alternative matching

algorithm is described as compared to that of FIG. 3B. In this example, a fingerprint includes, for each pilot signal, the CDMA bandclass, the pilot PN offset, the pilot strength, and the pilot phase. The pilots are sorted by strength in descending order. Using the PN offset value of the strongest pilot of the current fingerprint, find matching fingerprints in the stored fingerprints. If more than a predetermined maximum number of potentially matching fingerprints are found, then they can be reduced using the previously described method involving pilot strength and pilot phase (if available). In this manner a list of potentially matching fingerprints is generated. If no matches are found, then a global search is performed in block 704.

[0063] In block 706, the scan list is scanned sequentially until a wireless LAN is discovered and connected to in block 708. If no wireless LAN is discovered, then scanning of the list continues, in block 710, until the list is exhausted or a timer expirers. If this occurs, then a global search may be performed in block 714. However, when a wireless LAN is discovered and connected to, the current fingerprint is used, in block 712, to refine the fingerprint for this access point.

[0064] Eventually a mobile device will encounter conditions where it may no longer stay connected to the access point to which it is connected. In these instances, the wireless device, or some other network component, initiates a hand-off trigger even that causes the mobile device to perform a hand-off search for neighboring wireless LANs. FIG. 8 depicts a flowchart of an exemplary algorithm for performing the hand-off search of block 516.

[0065] In block 802 a scan list is created of all the access points to search for to try to discover a nearby wireless LAN. As described in the earlier mentioned and incorporated applications, the network may maintain a neighbor list for a wireless LAN. Using this list, the searching for nearby wireless LANs to hand-off to may be performed more quickly and efficiently. For an 802.11 wireless LAN, for example, the neighbor list typically includes an SSID, BSSID, band, channel, and mode. With this information, a mobile device can narrowly search for the access point without scanning through a lot of unnecessary alternatives. In block 802, the typical neighbor list is augmented with information from the fingerprint database. For example, the current fingerprint may be used to eliminate one or more of the access points on the neighbor list based on their respective fingerprints. Alternatively, the current fingerprint may be

used to select the one or two most likely candidates from the neighbor list. In general, though, in block 802, the neighbor list and the fingerprint information are used conjunctively to determine a scan list. In block 804, the access points in the scan list are scanned and if a wireless LAN is found, a connection is made in block 806. Once a connection is made, the fingerprint database may be changed. If the wireless LAN already has a fingerprint entry, then the entry is refined. If the wireless LAN access point does not have a fingerprint entry, then a new entry is added to the database.

[0066] The various illustrative logical blocks, modules, circuits, elements, and/or components described in connection with the embodiments disclosed herein may be implemented or performed with a general purpose processor, a digital signal processor (DSP), an application specific integrated circuit (ASIC), a field programmable gate array (FPGA) or other programmable logic component, discrete gate or transistor logic, discrete hardware components, or any combination thereof designed to perform the functions described herein. A general-purpose processor may be a microprocessor, but in the alternative, the processor may be any conventional processor, controller, microcontroller, or state machine. A processor may also be implemented as a combination of computing components, e.g., a combination of a DSP and a microprocessor, a plurality of microprocessors, one or more microprocessors in conjunction with a DSP core, or any other such configuration.

[0067] The methods or algorithms described in connection with the embodiments disclosed herein may be embodied directly in hardware, in a software module executed by a processor, or in a combination of the two. A software module may reside in RAM memory, flash memory, ROM memory, EPROM memory, EEPROM memory, registers, hard disk, a removable disk, a CD-ROM, or any other form of storage medium known in the art. A storage medium may be coupled to the processor such that the processor can read information from, and write information to, the storage medium. In the alternative, the storage medium may be integral to the processor.

[0068] The previous description provides certain exemplary aspects and embodiments. Various modifications to these embodiments and aspects are within the scope of the disclosure and the generic principles defined herein may be applied to other embodiments. Thus, the claims are not intended to be limited to the embodiments shown herein, but is to be accorded the full scope consistent with the language claims,

wherein reference to an element in the singular is not intended to mean "one and only one" unless specifically so stated, but rather "one or more." All structural and functional equivalents to the elements of the various embodiments described throughout this disclosure that are known or later come to be known to those of ordinary skill in the art are expressly incorporated herein by reference and are intended to be encompassed by the claims. Moreover, nothing disclosed herein is intended to be dedicated to the public regardless of whether such disclosure is explicitly recited in the claims. No claim element is to be construed under the provisions of 35 U.S.C. §112, sixth paragraph, unless the element is expressly recited using the phrase "means for" or, in the case of a method claim, the element is recited using the phrase "step for."

CLAIMS

1. A wireless communications device, comprising :

a memory configured to store information relating to a location of a first communications network; and

a processor configured to modify the information stored in the memory based on one or more reference signals from a second communications network.

2. The wireless communications device of claim 1, wherein the information includes a fingerprint of the first communications network.

3. The wireless communications device of claim 2, wherein the fingerprint includes a deviation information related to the virtual size of the coverage region for an access point in the first communications network.

4. The wireless communications device of claim 3, wherein the processor is further configured to modify the fingerprint by adjusting the deviation information based on the one or more reference signals.

5. The wireless communications device of claim 2, wherein the fingerprint comprises phase information for the one or more reference signals.

6. The wireless communications device of claim 5, wherein the processor is further configured to modify the fingerprint by adjusting the phase information based on the current phase information for the one or more reference signals.

7. The wireless communications device of claim 2, wherein the fingerprint comprises signal strength information for the one or more reference signals.

8. The wireless communications device of claim 7, wherein the processor is further configured to modify the fingerprint by adjusting the signal strength information based on the current signal strength information for the one or more reference signals.

9. A wireless communications device :

a memory configured to store a first fingerprint of a first communications network based on one or more reference signals from a second communications network; and

a processor configured to

a) determine a second fingerprint of the wireless communications device based on the one or more current reference signals, and

b) modify the first fingerprint based on the second fingerprint.

10. The wireless communications device of claim 9, wherein the processor is further configured to establish a connection between the wireless communications device and the first communications network and determine the second fingerprint after establishing the connection.

11. The wireless communications device of claim 9, wherein the first fingerprint includes deviation information related to the virtual size of the coverage region for an access point in the first communications network.

12. The wireless communications device of claim 11, wherein the processor is further configured to modify the first fingerprint by adjusting the deviation information based on deviation information for the second fingerprint.

13. The wireless communications device of claim 9, wherein the first fingerprint comprises phase information for the one or more reference signals.

14. The wireless communications device of claim 13, wherein the processor is further configured to modify the first fingerprint by adjusting the phase information based on phase information for the second fingerprint.

15. The wireless communications device of claim 9, wherein the first fingerprint comprises signal strength information for the one or more reference signals.

16. The wireless communications device of claim 15, wherein the processor is further configured to modify the first fingerprint by adjusting the signal strength information based on signal strength information for the second fingerprint.

17. A method of communications comprising:

storing information relating to the location of a first communications network; and

modifying the stored information based on one or more reference signals from a second communications network.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein the information includes a fingerprint of the first communications network.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein the fingerprint includes a deviation information related to the virtual size of the coverage region for an access point in the first communications network.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the fingerprint is modified by adjusting the deviation information based on the one or more reference signals.

21. The method of claim 18, wherein the fingerprint comprises phase information for the one or more reference signals.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein the fingerprint is modified by adjusting the phase information based on the current phase information for the one or more reference signals.

23. The method of claim 18, wherein the fingerprint comprises signal strength information for the one or more reference signals.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein the fingerprint is modified by adjusting the signal strength information based on the current signal strength information for the one or more reference signals.