AN971

REV 1

Avoiding Bus Contention in Fast Access RAM Designs

INTRODUCTION

When designing a bus oriented system the possibility of bus contention must be taken into consideration. Bus contention occurs when two or more devices try to output opposite logic levels on the same common bus line.

This application note points out common causes of bus contention when designing with fast static random access memories and describes ways to eliminate or reduce contention.

WHAT CAUSES BUS CONTENTION?

The most common form of bus contention occurs when one device has not completely turned off (output in a high-impedance state) before another device is turned on (output active). Basically, contention is a timing overlap problem that results in large, transient current spikes. These large current spikes not only generate system noise, but can also affect the long term reliability of the devices on the bus (see Figure 1).

BUS CONTENTION AND FAST STATIC RAMs

Since memory devices are primarily used in bus oriented systems, care must be taken to avoid bus contention in memory designs. Fast static RAMs with common I/O data lines (or any high frequency device with common I/O pins) are the most likely candidates to encounter bus contention. This is due to the tight timing requirements that are needed to achieve high speed operation. If timing control is not well maintained, bus contention will occur. The most common form of bus contention for memories occurs when switching from a read mode to a write mode or vice versa.

SWITCHING FROM A READ TO WRITE MODE

With $\overline{E}$ low (device selected), on the falling edge of $\overline{W}$ (write asserted) the RAM output driver begins to turn off (high impedance state). Depending on the input and output logic levels, if sufficient time is not allowed for the output to fully turn off before an input driver turns on, bus contention will occur (see Figure 2a).

Figure 2a shows an example of a RAM trying to drive a bus line low while an input driver is trying to drive the line high. If the situation were reversed (RAM output high and the input driver low), bus contention would still exist.

Of course the obvious way to avoid this type of bus contention is to make sure that the input buffer is not enabled until the write low to output high impedance (t_{WLQZ}) time is satisfied (see Figure 2b). This specification is usually given on most manufacturers' data sheets.

Another method to eliminate bus contention would be to use $\overline{E}$ to deselect the RAM before asserting $\overline{W}$ (low). This allows the RAM output extra time to go into high-impedance state before the input driver is enabled. $\overline{E}$ and $\overline{W}$ are later asserted low to begin a write cycle (see Figure 2c).

SWITCHING FROM A WRITE TO A READ MODE

With $\overline{E}$ set low (device selected), on the rising edge of $\overline{W}$ (write terminated) the address or data in changes before the device has had a chance to terminate the write mode. If this should occur, and depending on the input and output logic levels, a bus contention situation could exist (see Figure 3). To avoid address changing type bus contention requires that the address not change till the write recovery specification (t_{WHAX}) is satisfied. To avoid bus contention caused by data changing requires that the data in remains stable for the duration of the data hold specification (t_{WHDX}). Most of

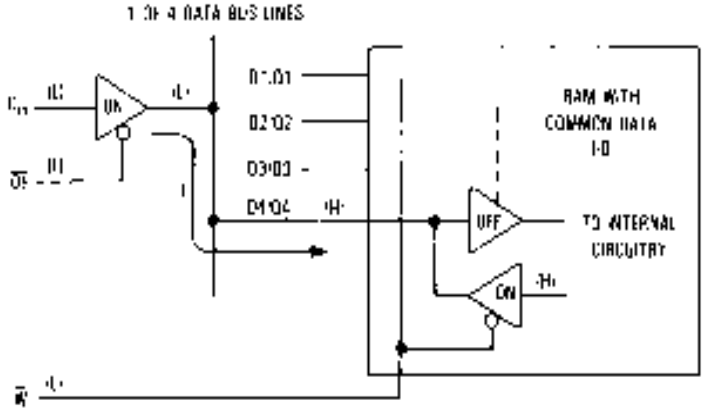

Figure 1. Common I/O Bus Contention

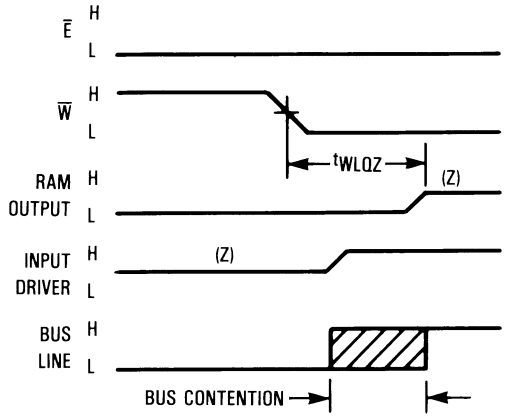

Figure 2a. Input Driver Enabled Prior to Disabling RAM Output

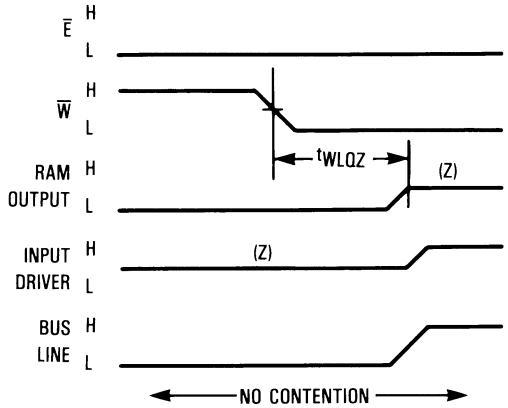

Figure 2b. Input Driver Disabled Prior to Enabling RAM Output

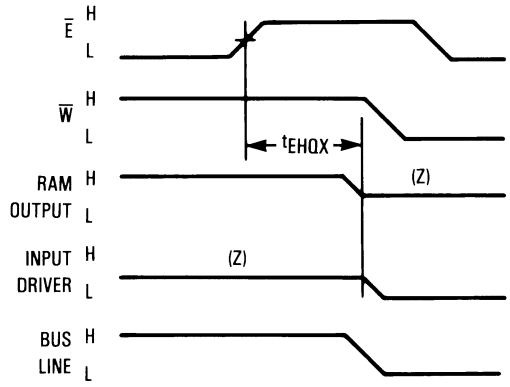

Figure 2c. Using $\overline{E}$ to Avoid Bus Contention

Motorola's fast static RAMs specify write recovery and data hold times of 0 ns. However, it is always a good practice to allow some margin to take care of possible race conditions.

Both of these types of contention could also be avoided by taking $\overline{E}$ high prior to taking $\overline{W}$ high. This will give the RAM output driver time to go to a high-impedance state before $\overline{W}$ goes high. In this case $\overline{E}$ is used to terminate the write cycle instead of $\overline{W}$ (see Figure 3c).

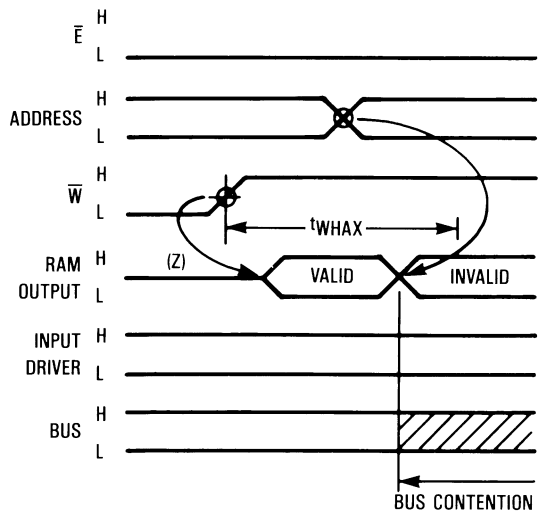

Figure 3a. Data Setup Time Violation

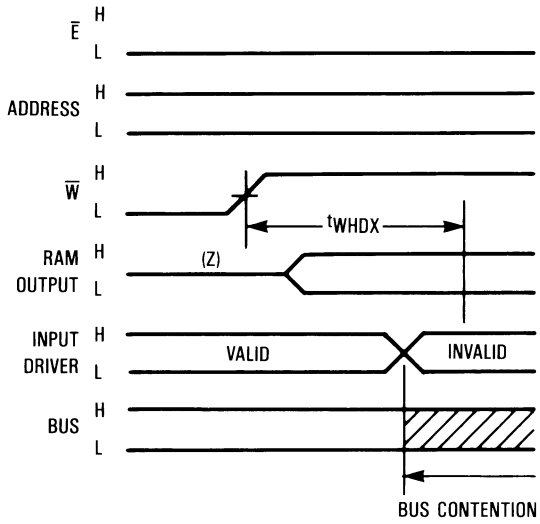

Figure 3b. Data Hold Time Violation

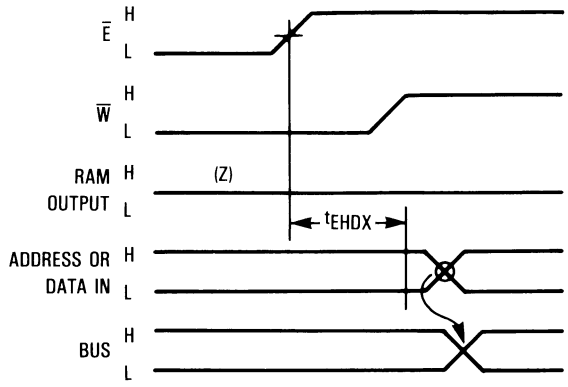

Figure 3c. Using $\overline{E}$ to Avoid Bus Contention

OTHER WAYS TO ELIMINATE BUS CONTENTION

If the RAM has an output enable pin ($\overline{G}$), synchronizing schemes can be incorporated to help eliminate bus contention. Taking $\overline{G}$ high will ensure that even when the RAM is in a read mode the output will be in a high-impedance state. This will allow the input driver to be enabled longer.

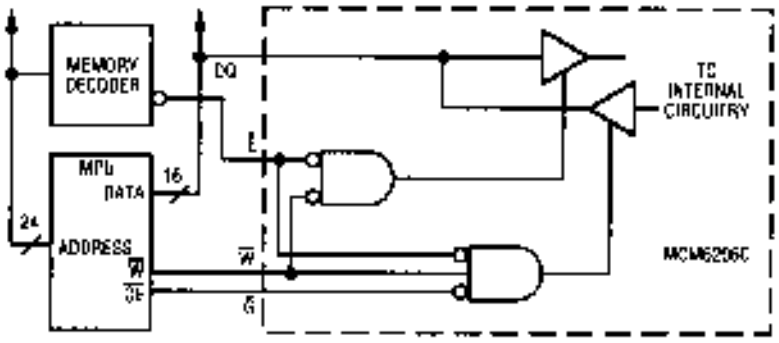

Figure 4a. Using $\overline{G}$ to Avoid Bus Contention

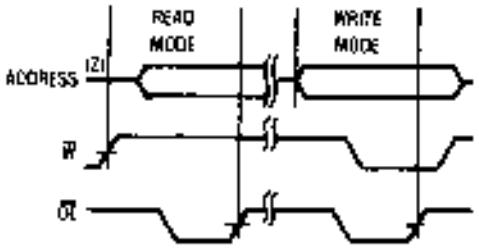

Figure 4b. Timing Diagram of MPU

Most advanced microprocessors have asynchronous bus-control signals that take advantage of fast memory devices with output enable pins. Figure 4 shows one way to avoid bus contention using a microprocessor interfaced to a Motorola 15-ns MCM6206C.

A more obvious way to eliminate bus contention is to use slow memory devices. Slow memories have loose timing requirements that allow devices to fully turn off before another device turns on. Of course this defeats the whole purpose of fast static memory devices.

Another obvious way to eliminate bus contention is to use memory devices that have separate data I/O pins. In this way the W signal from the microporcessor can control a buffer device to eliminate bus contention (see Figure 5). However, the industry is demanding RAM with common I/O because these devices cost less and save system real estate.

Common I/O devices reduce package size since fewer pins are needed. Smaller packages result in less PCB space requirement. Common I/O devices also eliminate the need for an extra buffer with its associated expense and space requirement. In general fast static RAMs configured greater than a X1 will have common data I/O pins.

Another popular way to reduce bus contention is to put a current limiting series resistor on each bus line (see Figure 6). The series resistor does not eliminate bus contention, but it helps reduce the large transient currents associated with bus contention. However, series resistors increase access time as well as increasing component count. The added access time depends on the total bus capacitance (including the capacitance of the devices on the bus) and the total bus resistance. The added delay should be added on to the point at which bus contention ceases. The following formulas can be used to determine the added access delay.

$$t_{HL} = R_L \cdot C_L \cdot \ln \frac{V_{in}(\text{initial}) - V_{in}(\text{final})}{V_{IL}(\text{max}) - V_{in}(\text{final})}$$

$$t_{LH} = R_L \cdot C_L \cdot \ln \frac{V_{in}(\text{final}) - V_{in}(\text{initial})}{V_{in}(\text{final}) - V_{IH}(\text{min})}$$

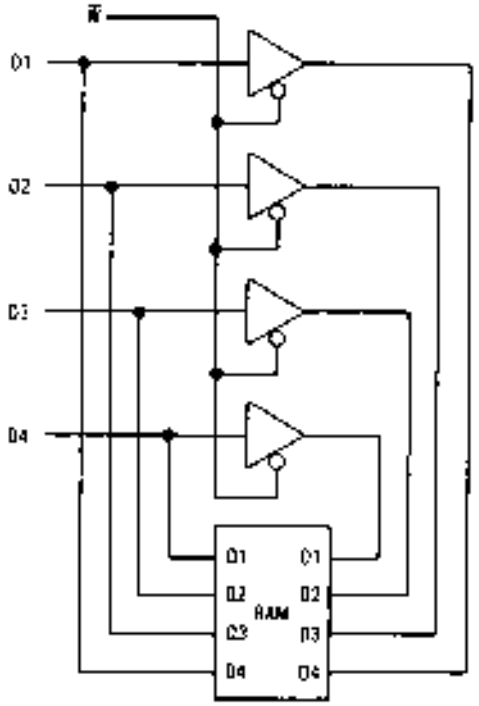

Figure 5. Separate I/O Buffer

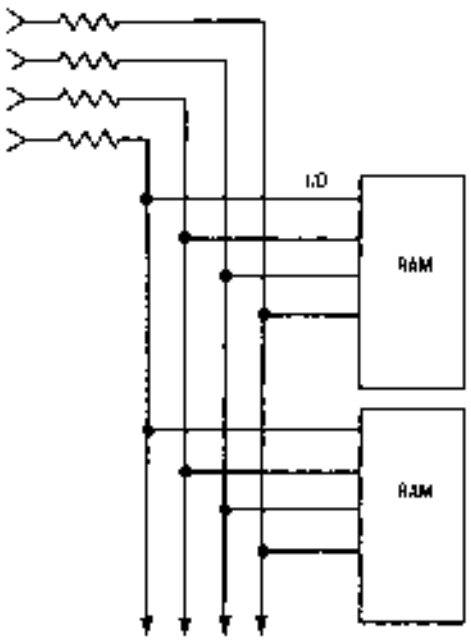

Figure 6. Using Series Terminating Resistors

Generally the value of the resistor should be around 50 ohms. The larger the resistor the less the transient current generated, but the greater the delay. Using a 150-ohm resistor will limit the current flow to less than 20 milliamperes while adding approximately 3 nanoseconds extra access time. However, note that even the series resistors bus contention duty cycle must be minimized to reduce EMI and bus ringing.

Although it is very important to reduce bus contention, CMOS memories can tolerate more bus noise generated by bus contention than can bipolar memories, due to the excellent noise immunity advantage of CMOS over bipolar technology. However, even when using CMOS memories, large destructive transient currents generated by bus contention can still occur.

CONCLUSION

Bus contention must be taken into consideration in most bus-oriented system design. The occurrence of bus contention generates large transient currents that produce system noise and could also affect the system's long term reliability.

Fast random access memories with common data I/O pins are very susceptible to bus contention due to tight timing requirements. Although it is almost impossible to totally eliminate bus contention, it must be the goal of the system designer to minimize bus contention.