

ECSE 548 (VLSI) Project: MIPS Processor On-Chip Cache Design and Integration

Abstract—In this paper, we present an on-chip cache design and integration for 8-bit MIPS processor. The cache that we adopt is a direct-mapped cache with 1 byte cache blocks. It has a size of 16 bytes and is used for both instructions and data. We apply a top-down design methodology, i.e. we start from the architecture level and go down to its layout, with testings on each level. To integrate the cache, MIPS Finite State Machine (FSM) is modified accordingly, which results in controller architecture modifications. Assembly code is also rewritten to verify cache functionality. Design quality is tested using SPICE.

I. INTRODUCTION

Cache is a small memory is used to speed-up the processor-memory operation. A cache contains the most recently accessed pieces of main memory. The question arises why we need this high speed memory?. The time for processor to fetch a data from main memory is very long or worst for the disk. So, we need some thing in between memory and processor to speed up the whole process of data fetching, instruction fetching, read and write process. For example, a memory used in Pentium its access time is typical is 60ns for main memory (DRAM). [1]. It means 100 MHz processor can execute most instructions in 1 CLK or 10 ns. Its a bottleneck of this processor. Cache memory helps by reducing the time it takes to read/write information to and from the processor. A typical access time for SRAM is 15 ns [1]. Therefore cache memory allows small portions of main memory to be accessed three to four times faster than main memory. But, How can this small piece of memory decrease the access time. In theory this concept called **Locality of Reference**. It means at any given time the processor access only a memory in a small or localized region of a memory. The cache loads this region allowing the processor to access the memory region faster. So question arises, why not replace main memory with cache. The reason for not replacing memory with cache is cost of cache because for cache cell we need six transistor to store one bit. Cache memory (SRAM) is several times more expensive than main memory (DRAM). The power consumption of SRAM is also higher than DRAM.

II. CACHE ARCHITECTURE

The MIPS processor presented in the course takes an 8-bit address line and 8-bit data line every time it reads data from external memory; to maintain a manageable project scale while ensuring basic functionality of the cache, the cache was designed to split up the address line into a 4-bit tag line and a 4-bit set line, where set signals are used for row selection in cache whereas tag signals are used for comparison to generate cache hits. The designed configuration results in a 16 8-bit data row in cache, making it capable of storing 16 bytes (4 distinctive assembly instructions) for MIPS.

The resulting design of the cache is shown in Figure 1. Set signals are used to decode data rows inside SRAM arrays, and tag signals are used to compare the tags stored in cache to generate cache hit signals. Write enable (*we* as shown in figure)

signal ensures the cache is writeable whenever it set to high. Additionally, for better stability, a validation bit (v) was added to each row of SRAM array inside the cache to implement *Compulsory Miss Strategy*, where the first read from cache is always guaranteed to generate a cache miss signal.

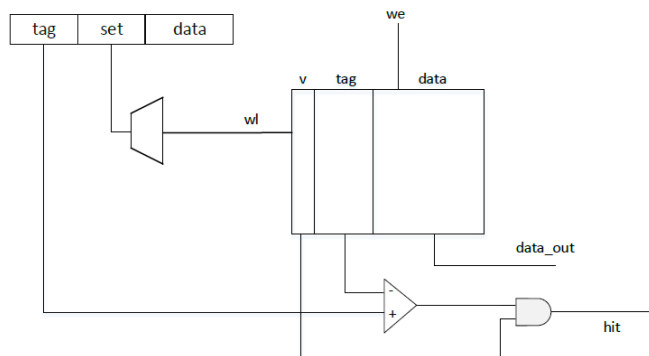


Fig. 1. Cache Microarchitecture

III. MIPS INTEGRATION ARCHITECTURE

We adopt hierarchical top-down design methodology. We go through architecture level, schematic level and layout level. At architecture level, the Finite State Machine (FSM) is modified and the controller is changed accordingly, see Figure ???. This is implemented in SystemVerilog and the functional simulation has been verified successfully before going down to schematic level. The overall MIPS microarchitecture is shown in Figure 2.

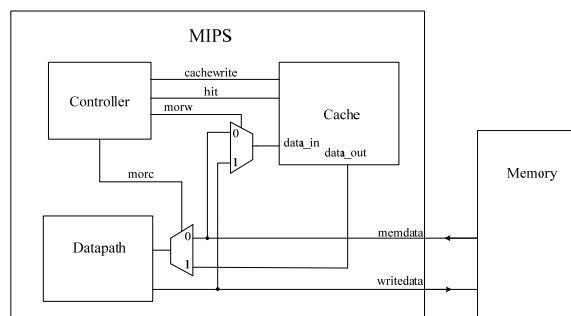


Fig. 2. MIPS Microarchitecture

Since our cache is used for both instructions and data, in following sections, when we say data, we refer to both instructions and data unless specified otherwise.

In Figure 2, three output signals (*cachewrite*, *morw*, *morc*) and one input signal (*hit*) are added to the controller.

- *cachewrite* is used to enable write/read access to the cache with a value of 1/0.
- *morw* is used to select data from memory or datapath. If a cache miss happens, it is set to 0 and the data from memory is written into the cache.

- *morc* is used to select data from memory or from cache. If there is a cache hit, it is set to 1 and the data from cache is sent to MIPS. Otherwise it is set to 0 and memory data is used.
- *hit* is used to show status of cache. 1 represents a cache hit and 0 represents a cache miss. A compulsory miss strategy was implemented for an ensured miss for a first-time read from cache.

In Figure ??, we split one state for data read access into two states. The first state is used to see if there is a cache hit. If so, at second state, data from cache is read; otherwise data is fetched from main memory.

We adopt write-through policy, so the data is always written to both cache and memory. For data write access, we still use one state.

IV. IMPLEMENTAION

This section discusses the implementation process of cache components and integration in Electric.

A. Comparator

A 4-bit comparator was implemented to compare the *tag* bits from the memory and cache to generate corresponding *cache hit* signals. The designed schematic and layout can be found in Figure 3.

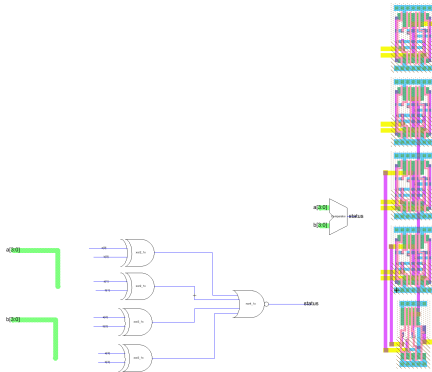


Fig. 3. The Schematic and Layout of Comparator Design

Figure 4 indicates that the comparator design was valid, passing all three design rule checks.

```

Checking schematic cell 'muddlib07:nor4_1x[sch]'
No errors found
Checking schematic cell 'muddlib07:xor2_1x[sch]'
No errors found
Checking schematic cell 'comp2_1x_4[sch]'
No errors found
0 errors and 0 warnings found (took 0.01 secs)

Checking Wells and Substrates in 'vlsi:comp2_1x_4[sch]' ...
No Well errors found (took 0.005 secs)

Hierarchical DRC every cell in the design: cell 'comp2_1x_4[sch]' cell 'comp2_1x_4[lay]'
Comparing: muddlib07:nor4_1x[sch] with: muddlib07:nor4_1x[lay]
exports match, topologies match, sizes match in 0.003 seconds.
Comparing: muddlib07:xor2_1x[sch] with: muddlib07:xor2_1x[lay]
exports match, topologies match, sizes match in 0.002 seconds.
Comparing: vlsi:comp2_1x_4[sch] with: vlsi:comp2_1x_4[lay]
exports match, topologies match, sizes match in 0.003 seconds.
Summary for all cells: exports match, topologies match, sizes match
DRC command completed in: 0.012 seconds.

```

Fig. 4. Design Rule Checks for Comparator

B. 4-to-16 Row Decoder

In order for the cache to make use of the 4-bit set signals, a row decoder was applied to decode the set signal and select 1 out of 16 8-bit data lines lying inside the cache. In order to reduce the delay and space usage of the decoder, *pre-decoding* technology was used, resulting in a design shown in Figure 5. It was worth noting that the layout of the decoder was deliberately designed to be wide with a minimum height in order to pitch-match with the sram array inside the cache.



Fig. 5. The Schematic and Layout of Decoder Design With Design Rule Check Results

It can be shown from the Figure 5 that the decoder design passed all three design rule checks and was ready for the integration into the cache design.

C. SRAM Column

An SRAM column represents a column of SRAM bits inside the SRAM array of the cache, consisting of 16 SRAM bits sharing bit and inverting bit lines. The design was presented in Figure 6.



Fig. 6. The Schematic and Layout of SRAM Column With Design Rule Check Results

The design rule check results can be found in Figure 6. It can be shown from the Figure that all three of the design rule requirements were satisfied by the design.

D. SRAM Array

The SRAM array is the most essential part of the cache, consisting of 16 *13-bit* SRAM bit rows, with each row having 1 bit for validation (compulsory miss), 4 bits for tag line and 8 bits for data storage. Each row also has a wordline buffer for a stable charging-up. The design is presented in Figure 7; the design rule check results can be found in the same figure as well.

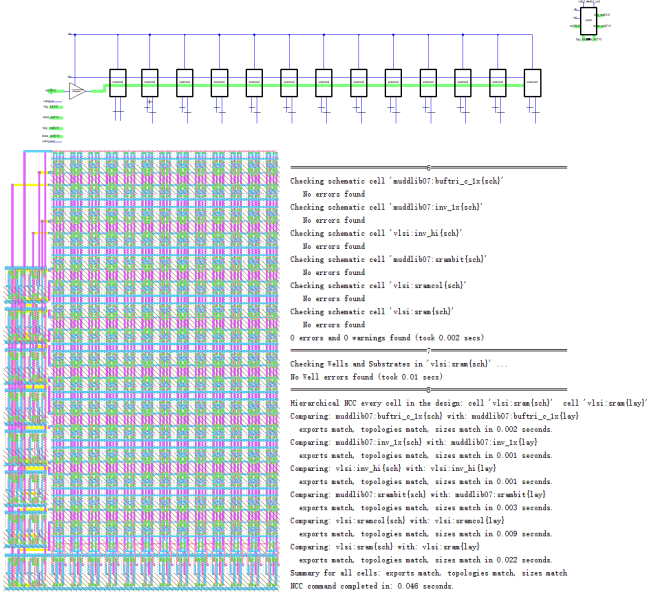


Fig. 7. The Schematic and Layout of SRAM Array With Design Rule Check Results

E. Cache

After the implementation of all circuit components, the cache was built based on the microarchitecture of the proposed cache circuit design. For easy integrations with the MIPS processor, in the layout, universal *vdd* and *gnd* tracks were added that connects *vdd* and *gnd* of sub-components together. The Cache circuit design, along with the evidence that it passes all three design checks, is presented in Figure 8.

F. PLA Controller & Controller

As indicated in Section III, with updated FSM for the controller, the PLA controller which represents the FSM logic has been modified accordingly. With an updated FSM description file, a new PLA controller was generated and re-integrated into the controller circuit of MIPS processor. New exports corresponding to cache signals have been added to the controller circuit as well. The resulting circuit is presented in the next subsection.

G. Integration

Upon the completion and tests of each component, the cache was then integrated with MIPS processor (with updated controller component), resulting in a circuit presented in Figure 9.

The pad frame was then generated from the new MIPS processor with cache implemented. To contain the much-expanded size of the MIPS, the size of the pad frame was extended from 40 pads to 64 pads. The resulting chip, along with error-free design rule check results, is shown in Figure 10. Due to page limits, a truncated version of design rule checks for the chip is presented in this report; the full check has been presented during the demo with the professor.

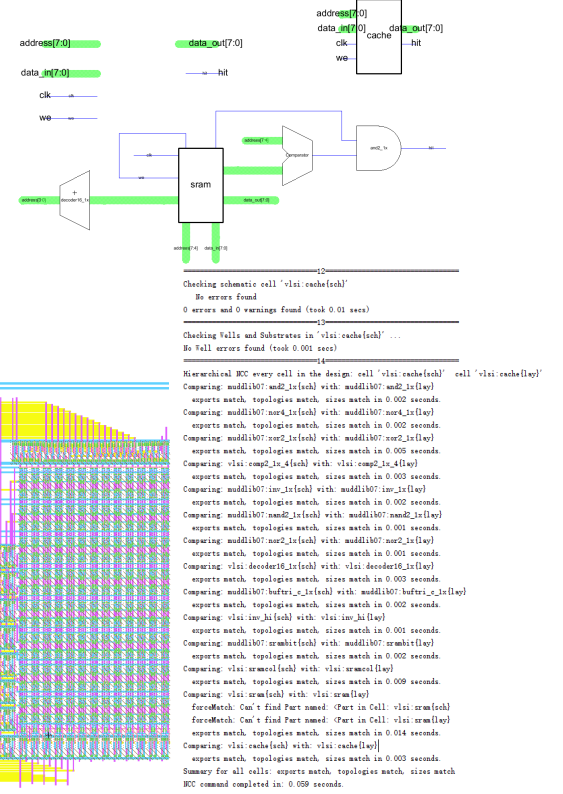


Fig. 8. The Schematic and Layout of Cache With Design Rule Check Results

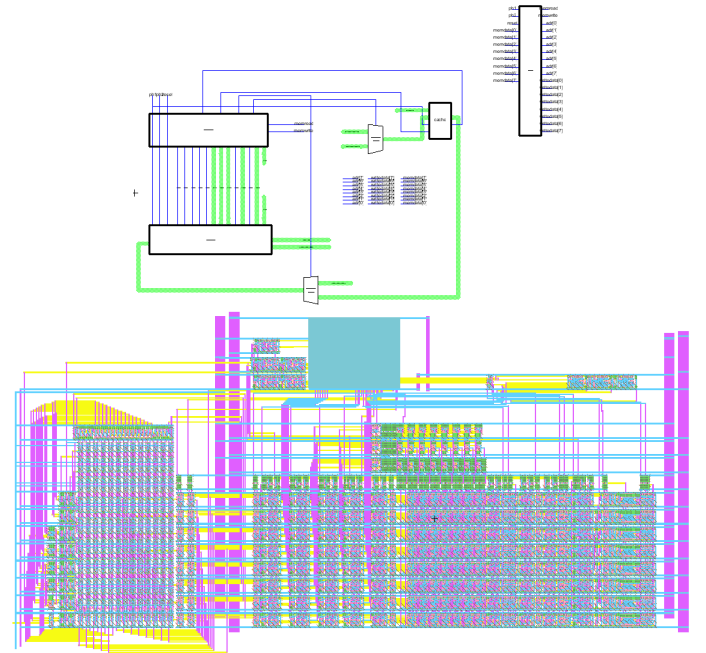


Fig. 9. The Schematic and Layout of MIPS integrated with Cache

V. TESTING

In this section, we explain our testing methodology. We tested components individually in Section V-A. After assembly, the SystemVerilog MIPS processor is simulated for functional testing in Section V-B.

A. Components Testing

The main components to be tested are shown below:

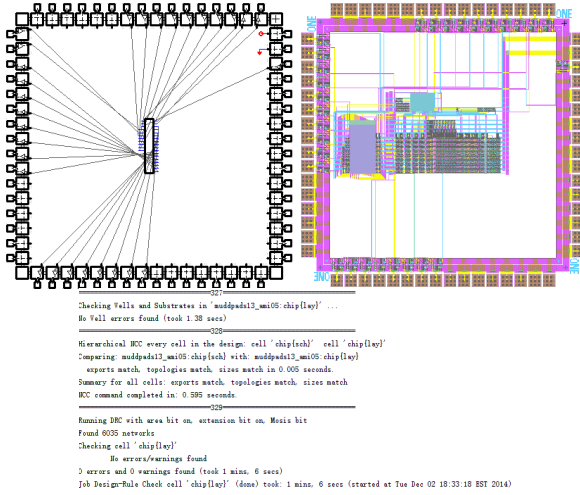


Fig. 10. The Schematic and Layout of Chip Integration With Design Rule Check Results

• Comparator

The comparator was tested in ModelSim with 7 test cases; Figure 11 indicates that the comparator was able to operate correctly, passing all test cases.

```
# a: 0000, b: 0000, status: 1
# a: 0001, b: 0001, status: 1
# a: 0110, b: 0000, status: 0
# a: 0001, b: 0000, status: 0
# a: 1010, b: 1010, status: 1
# a: 1110, b: 1110, status: 1
# a: 1000, b: 0100, status: 0
# Completed 7 tests with 0 errors.
```

Fig. 11. ModelSim Test Results for Comparator

• Decoder

The 4-to-16 decoder was tested in ModelSim with all 16 test cases; the results showing that the design was operating properly is presented in Figure 12.

```
# Input: 0000, Output: 0000000000000001, Expected: 0000000000000001
# Input: 0001, Output: 0000000000000010, Expected: 0000000000000010
# Input: 0010, Output: 0000000000000100, Expected: 0000000000000100
# Input: 0011, Output: 0000000000001000, Expected: 0000000000001000
# Input: 0100, Output: 0000000000010000, Expected: 0000000000010000
# Input: 0101, Output: 0000000000100000, Expected: 0000000000100000
# Input: 0110, Output: 0000000001000000, Expected: 0000000001000000
# Input: 0111, Output: 0000000010000000, Expected: 0000000010000000
# Input: 1000, Output: 0000000100000000, Expected: 0000000100000000
# Input: 1001, Output: 0000001000000000, Expected: 0000001000000000
# Input: 1010, Output: 0000010000000000, Expected: 0000010000000000
# Input: 1011, Output: 0000100000000000, Expected: 0000100000000000
# Input: 1100, Output: 0001000000000000, Expected: 0001000000000000
# Input: 1101, Output: 0010000000000000, Expected: 0010000000000000
# Input: 1110, Output: 0100000000000000, Expected: 0100000000000000
# Input: 1111, Output: 1000000000000000, Expected: 1000000000000000
# Completed 16 tests with 0 errors.
```

Fig. 12. ModelSim Test Results for Decoder

- SRAM: this is the storage elements in cache.
- Cache:

B. Functional Testing

In this section, the functional testing of MIPS SystemVerilog model is demonstrated. For this purpose, assembly code is written, as shown in Listing 1.

```
main: # assembly code # effect
      lb $2, 80($0)      # $2 = 5
      lb $7, 76($0)      # $7 = 3
      lb $3, 81($7)      # $3 = 12
      or $4, $7, $2      # $4 <= 3 or 5 = 7
      and $5, $3, $4      # $5 <= 12 and 7 = 4
```

```
7      add $5, $5, $4      # $5 <= 4+7 = 11
8      beq $5, $7, end     # not taken
9      slt $6, $3, $4      # $6 <= 12 < 7 = 0
10     beq $6, $0, around  # not taken
11     lb $5, 0($0)        # not taken
12     around: slt $6, $7, $2 # $6 <= 3 < 5 = 1
13     add $7, $6, $5      # $7 <= 1 + 11 = 12
14     sub $7, $7, $2      # $7 <= 12 - 5 = 7
15     add $3, $7, $0      # $3 = 7
16     loop: beq $3, $0, end # taken if $3 = 0
17     sub $3, $3, $6      # $3 = $3 - 1
18     j loop              # taken
19     lb $7, 0($0)        # not taken
20     end: sb $7, 71($2)   # write adr 76 <= 7
21     .dw 3
22     .dw 5
23     .dw 12
```

Listing 1. Assembly code

At the beginning, instructions are fetched, and there are compulsory cache misses. The assembly code contains a loop to test cache hits. When dealing with this loop, there are cache hits. In Figure 13, we can see that there is a cache miss. This happens because the instructions are used for the first time here. During program execution, cache hits occur for the loop. This is illustrated in Figure 14. The instructions in the loop are put in the cache and then fetched soon. As a result, cache hits happen here.

Apart from cache read access, we also checked cache write access, as shown in Figure 15. In this case, signal *morw* is set to 1 to select data and *cachewrite* is set to 1 to write it into cache.

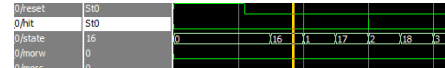


Fig. 13. Cache Miss

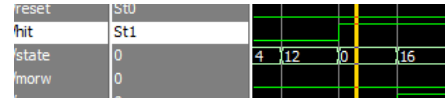


Fig. 14. Cache Hit

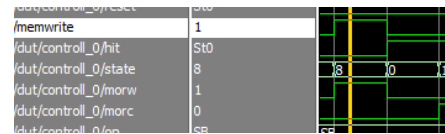


Fig. 15. Cache Write

VI. DESIGN QUALITY

VII. CONCLUSION

The Cache implementation can be mould in a number of ways, in terms of associativity which can decrease access time but increase complexity so in engineering world need to live with this trade-off. But basic working principal remains same. As discussed earlier we have successfully implemented the direct mapped cache and successful integration with MIPS. cross several initially defined boundaries. It is important to understand that the Pentium(R) Processor uses only one method to implement cache. We have successfully tested the all components their simulation verification done in ModelSim, Schematic and layout implementation and testing done in Electric. We also employed Spice simulation. In short Cache is simply a high speed memory that stores a piece of main memory which helps processor for high performance he conclusion goes here.

REFERENCES

- [1] <http://download.intel.com/design/intarch/papers/cache6.pdf> The conclusion goes here.