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United States Patent Application Publication

20250264514

Kind Code

A1

Publication Date

August 21, 2025

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TRAILER LIGHTING OUTAGE DETECTION CIRCUIT

Abstract

A vehicle LED lighting outage detection circuit is disclosed for detecting a fault in the LED light and automatically increasing the power drawn from the light power supply in response to the fault. A complementary detection circuit is also disclosed for detecting the increased power draw and signaling a fault to an operator. The increased power draw can be selected to be in the form of a pulse that settles to a lower power draw state after a time to avoid excessive and wasteful power draw. The system can be mounted in a vehicle and, more particularly, to a semi-tractor truck.

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Appl. No.: 19/027995

Filed: January 17, 2025

Related U.S. Application Data

parent US continuation 18402033 20240102 PENDING child US 19027995

parent US continuation 17752064 20220524 parent-grant-document US 11899052 child US 18402033

parent US continuation 17062791 20201005 parent-grant-document US 11372039 child US 17752064

parent US continuation 16210236 20181205 parent-grant-document US 10794946 child US 17062791

parent US continuation 15657679 20170724 parent-grant-document US 10151784 child US 16210236

parent US division 14882779 20151014 parent-grant-document US 9995780 child US 15657679

Publication Classification

Int. Cl.: **G01R31/00** (20060101); **B60Q1/30** (20060101); **B60Q11/00** (20060101); **G01R31/44** (20200101); **H05B45/58** (20200101)

U.S. Cl.:

CPC **G01R31/006** (20130101); **B60Q1/305** (20130101); **B60Q11/005** (20130101); **G01R31/44** (20130101); **H05B45/58** (20200101); **B60Q2900/10** (20130101)

Background/Summary

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS [0001] This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 18/402,033 filed Jan. 2, 2024, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/752,064 filed May 24, 2022, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/062,791 filed Oct. 5, 2020, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/210,236 filed Dec. 5, 2018, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 15/657,679 filed Jul. 24, 2017, which is a divisional of 14/882,779 filed Oct. 14, 2015, all of which are hereby incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Many automotive vehicles have systems in place which provide a warning to the operator when an exterior lamp has failed. This can be important in large tractor-trailers, where it may be difficult or impossible for the operator to visually observe that an exterior lamp on the trailer has failed. Traditional systems have been developed which detect the resulting current drop when an incandescent lamp fails (e.g., creates as an open circuit).

[0003] More modern vehicles and trailers are increasingly utilizing light emitting diodes (LEDs) as a light source. These LEDs can also fail open in similar fashion as traditional incandescent bulbs. However, a typical LED lamp uses much less current than their incandescent counterparts. Therefore, the current drop due to a failed LED is likely much less than an incandescent bulb and may not be detectable by traditional bulb outage detection systems. For example, traditional incandescent bulb outage detection systems might detect a 2.1 Amp drop in a system when a bulb fails. New LED lamps of the same function can have a drop as little as 0.15 Amps. The issue is complicated when a single tractor may need to tow trailers having either incandescent or LED lamps at different times. The issue is further complicated by the lack of a standard within the U.S. for the reporting or detection of failed lamps.

[0004] Hella KG Hueck & Co. has patented a product, shown in German Patent publication DE10215486, which is for LED turn signals. In particular, when the turn signal LEDs are not illuminated, the lamp has an imbedded microchip which actively sends a diagnostic signal through the LED, confirming that the LED is not failed open, and, therefore, presumably: operational. A multiplexed signal reporting a detected failure is transmitted to the cab of the truck. This system requires paired electronic modules between the tractor and the trailer, adding complexity to the trailer lighting and harness system.

SUMMARY

[0005] Discussed herein are circuits for detecting failures in an LED lighting system. The circuits can include a load element electrically coupled between a power supply and a ground reference, a detection circuit configured and arranged to detect a failure in an LED lamp, and a power control circuit responsive to the detection circuit. The power control circuit can be configured and arranged to modify current flowing through the load element. The power control circuit can also be

configured to automatically increase power dissipated by the load element when the detection circuit detects a failure in the LED lamp. The load element can optionally be a thermistor and, furthermore, a Positive Temperature Coefficient (PTC) thermistor.

[0006] The circuits can be configured to detect decreased power consumption by the LED. The decreased power consumption can be less than two hundred milliamps for a twelve volt supply voltage. The circuit can alternatively be configured to monitor the current draw of the LED lamp, a voltage across the LED lamp, a voltage in series with the lamp, or a voltage in parallel with the lamp. The outage detection circuit can be electrically in series between the LED lamp and the power supply.

[0007] The detection circuit and the LED lighting system can be housed separately or, housed in the same enclosure. The enclosure can have one or more electrical contact points configured to electrically connect with corresponding terminals mounted in a lighting socket of a vehicle. The circuit can include a socket configured to retain the LED lamp, the socket having electrical terminals configured to electrically connect to the LED; an enclosure configured to retain the LED lamp, the enclosure having electrical terminals configured to electrically connect to the LED lamp and socket terminals; with the detection circuit, power control circuit, and load element are mounted in the enclosure and the enclosure.

[0008] The circuits can be configured to detect changes after the detection of a fault in the LED lamp from a first electrical current flow rate at a first time to a second electrical current flow rate at a second time, wherein the first flow rate is greater than the second flow rate and wherein the voltage at the first time is substantially equal to the voltage at the second time. The detection circuit can include a variety of circuit methods that can further be electrically connected to a positive input of the LED lamp.

[0009] Discussed are also systems for detecting a fault in a vehicle lighting system. The systems can include a fault detection circuit configured to be electrically coupled to a power: control circuit and an LED fault light, the fault detection circuit configured to detect the increased current flow caused by the power control circuit and automatically activate the LED fault light in response to the increased current flow.

[0010] The LED fault light can be mounted inside of a vehicle cabin or on the front of a trailer. If the fault detection circuit is mounted on the front of the trailer, the system does not have to be configured for a specific truck. The fault detection circuit can be configured to detect the condition where an electrical current flow changes after the detection of a fault in the LED lamp from a first electrical current flow rate at a first time to a second electrical current flow rate at a second time, wherein the first flow rate is greater than the second flow rate and wherein the voltage at the first time is substantially equal to the voltage at the second time. The fault detection circuit can optionally be configured to measure the change in voltage across a resistor.

[0011] Further forms, objects, features, aspects, benefits, advantages, and embodiments of the present invention will become apparent from the detailed description and drawings provided herewith.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram of an illustrated example of an outage detection circuit for a vehicle lamp.

[0013] FIG. 2 is a schematic diagram illustrating another example of an outage detection circuit for a vehicle lamp like the circuit shown in FIG. 1.

[0014] FIG. 3 is a schematic diagram illustrating another example of an outage detection circuit for a vehicle lamp like the circuit shown in FIG. 1.

[0015] FIG. **4** is a schematic diagram illustrating another example of an outage detection circuit for a vehicle lamp like the circuit shown in FIG. **1**.

[0016] FIG. **5** is a schematic diagram an example of an outage detection circuit for a vehicle lamp according to one embodiment.

[0017] FIG. **6** is an electrical schematic diagram of a fault detection circuit for a vehicle lamp configured for use with the outage detection circuits like those in FIG. **1-5**.

[0018] FIG. **7** is a perspective view of a semi-trailer and truck illustrating one example of a trailer and tractor with the circuits of FIGS. **1-6** installed.

[0019] FIG. **8** is a schematic view illustrating another example of the circuits of FIGS. **1-5** mounted in conjunction with an LED lamp.

[0020] FIG. **9** is a schematic view illustrating another example of the circuits of FIGS. **1-5** mounted in an outer casing.

[0021] FIG. **10** is a chart illustrating example waveforms for error reporting from the circuits of FIGS. **1-5**

[0022] FIG. **11** is a block diagram illustrating an alternate configuration using outage detection circuits like those of the preceding figures connected with a fault detection circuit.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0023] For the purpose of promoting an understanding of the principles of the invention, reference will now be made to the embodiments illustrated in the drawings and specific language will be used to describe the same. It may nevertheless be understood that no limitation of the scope of the invention is thereby intended. Any alterations and further modifications in the described embodiments, and any further applications of the principles of the invention as described herein are contemplated as would normally occur to one skilled in the art to which the invention relates. Certain embodiments of the invention are shown in great detail, although it may be apparent to those skilled in the relevant art that some features that are not relevant to the present invention may not be shown for the sake of clarity.

[0024] One example of a vehicle lamp outage system **100** is illustrated in FIG. **1**. The system **100** includes an outage detection circuit **110** which is operatively connected between a voltage supply, such as a trailer harness and lighting system **114**, and a vehicle LED **112**. A trailer harness and lighting system may be characterized as a wiring and lighting system configured to distribute power to various light sources throughout the trailer. The outage detection circuit **110** can further be subdivided into two or more other circuits. As an example, a detection circuit **102** and a control circuit (also referred to as an “increase circuit”) **104** are enumerated. The voltage supply **114** typically comprises a lighting circuit output from the vehicle, typically derived from a battery and/or alternator in a truck connected to the trailer. The trailer lighting system typically comprises an LED STT, turn, marker, or brake lamp (or combination of these) on the vehicle. Thus, it shall be understood that the system **100** may be duplicated for multiple lamps of a vehicle. In one embodiment, the LED **112** is located on a trailer and/or truck. The LED **112** optionally includes a power terminal **122** and ground terminal **124** as shown. The outage detection circuit **110** optionally includes switching devices **118** and **120**. In the illustrated embodiment, the switching devices **118** and **120** are optionally implemented as current controlled NPN bipolar junction transistors, although other types of switching devices may be used. The outage detection circuit also optionally includes resistors **127**, **128**, **130** and **136**, and positive temperature coefficient (PTC) thermistor **144** connected as shown. The PTC can be considered a load element in this circuit.

[0025] In the example shown in FIG. **1**, the system **100** operates as follows. When the LED **112** is activated by the driver, the voltage supply **114** causes current to flow to the lamp power: terminal **112**. If the lamp is functioning properly, current may flow through the lamp to the ground terminal **124**. From the ground terminal **124**, a portion of the current may be directed through resistor **127** to a control input **126** of switching device **118**. When the switching device **118** is implemented as an NPN transistor as shown, the control input **126** comprises the base of the transistor. The remaining

portion of the current from terminal **124** may flow through resistor **128** to ground **116**. The balance of current between resistors **126** and **128** may be set by selectively choosing the values of the resistors in order to ensure that control input of the switching device is not overloaded. With current supplied to input **126**, the switching device **118** may turn on and allow current to flow from the voltage supply **114**, through resistor **130**, into switching input **132** (the collector of the transistor as illustrated), out the switching output **134** (the emitter of the transistor as illustrated) and to the ground **116**. In the above normally operating state, minimal current may flow to the input **138** of switching device **120**, since the current from resistor **130** may be shunted to ground **116** by the switching device **118**. The resistor **130** may optionally be sized large enough such that only a small amount of additional current may be drawn from the supply **114** when the lamp is functioning properly. In this state, switching device **120** may be off and may allow only minimal current to flow through the load element.

[0026] However, if the LED **112** fails open, current flow to the control input **126** of switching device **118** may be interrupted. This may cause the switching device **118** to turn off, interrupting current flow from the switching input **132** to the switching output **134**. As a result, current from resistor **130** may be directed to the switching input **138** of switching device **120**. This may cause the switching device **120** to turn on, allowing current to flow from the supply **114**, through PTC thermistor **144**, into switching input **140**, and out switching output **142** to ground **116**. In the illustrated embodiment, the switching device **120** is implemented as an NPN bipolar transistor, the control input **138** is the base of the transistor, the switching input **140** is the collector of the transistor, and the switching output **142** is the emitter of the transistor. The PTC thermistor **144** may optionally be sized to allow a relatively high amount of additional current to be drawn from voltage supply **114**. This increase in current may be detected by additional vehicle circuitry as will be later disclosed to ultimately drive a corresponding indicator device to alert the driver of the failed lamp.

[0027] When the LED **112** fails, the PTC thermistor **144** may initially draw a high amount of current from the supply **114**. This high current may then be reduced as time passes. In this: example, increased current can cause the resistance of the PTC thermistor **144** to increase. When this happens, the current through the PTC thermistor **144** may decrease to an equilibrium level which is lower at this later time than the initial high current draw at the earlier time. In this way, the “high current pulse” may be provided for some period of time which may trigger additional detection circuitry. As discussed, the current draw may be reduced over time to prevent unnecessary current draw through the circuit until the lamp can be repaired or replaced.

[0028] Capacitor **150** is optionally provided to prevent a false outage indication when the lamp is initially turned on or off. More specifically, on initial startup, current may begin to flow from resistor **130** to control input **138** before switching device **118** turns on. Any such current may be temporarily shorted to ground by capacitor **150** to prevent switching device **120** from turning on and triggering a false outage indication.

[0029] Other types of current regulating devices may be used in place of PTC thermistor **144**. For example, a resettable fuse may be used which initially draws a high current, then switches open for a predetermined time before resetting. Alternatively, a simple resistor could be used to draw a relatively high current from the power supply in response to a failure. A Resistor Capacitor (RC) circuit that discharges when there is a fault detected can also be used to generate a pulse. Otherwise, a switching device can be commanded to close in response to an RC circuit or other components to alter the amount of time that the switch is closed. A higher voltage can alternatively be applied in response to a failure. For example, a transformer device such as a charge pump can be used to generate the higher voltage.

[0030] FIG. 2 illustrates a system **200** which provides a similar functionality as the system **100**, using different components. The system **100** includes an outage detection circuit **210** which is operatively connected between the voltage supply **114** and vehicle LED **112**. As shown, the circuit

210 includes a current monitor **214** and a comparator **216**. One suitable example of the current monitor **214** is the ZXCT **1009** high-side current monitor supplied by Zetex Semiconductors. In the illustrated embodiment, the current monitor **214** comprises monitor terminals **222** and **224** which are connected across a resistor **212** that may be characterized as a sense resistor. The current monitor **214** outputs a current at output terminal **226** which is proportional to the voltage across the resistor **212**. When the LED **112** is functioning properly, there may be a voltage across the resistor **212** which may result in current flowing from terminal **226**. Due to the connection of resistors **228** and **230** as shown, a voltage may be present at node: **232** and at an input **234** of comparator **216**. The resistors **228** and **230** may be selected such that the voltage at node **232** when the LED **112** is functioning properly may be greater than a reference voltage present at input **236** of comparator **216**. This may prevent current from flowing into control input **240** (base) of switching device **218** (illustrated here as an NPN bipolar transistor). However, when the LED **112** fails open, the voltage across resistor **212** may be interrupted. This may also reduce the voltage at node **232**, thereby allowing current to flow through point **238**, resistor **242**, and into control input **240**. This may cause switching device **218** to turn on (with current flowing from switching input **250** (collector) to switching output **252** (emitter), to ground **116**. When switching device **218** turns on, current may flow through PTC thermistor **220**. In a similar fashion to system **100** above, the PTC thermistor **220** may result in an initial high current pulse, followed by a reduced current draw once the PTC thermistor reaches equilibrium. Capacitor **270** and resistor **246** are optionally provided to prevent a false outage indication when the lamp is initially turned on or off in similar fashion to capacitor **150** above.

[0031] FIG. **3** illustrates a system **300** according to a further embodiment configured to provide similar functionality like system **200**, but which uses a transistor switching device **316** (shown here as an NPN bipolar transistor) in place of the comparator **216**. The system **300** includes an outage detection circuit **310** which is operatively connected between the voltage supply **114** and vehicle LED **112**. As shown, the circuit **210** optionally includes a current monitor **314** and the switching device **316**. One suitable example of the current monitor **314** is the ZXCT **1009** high-side current monitor supplied by Zetex Semiconductors. In the illustrated embodiment, the current monitor **314** comprises monitor terminals **322** and **324** which are connected across resistor **312** as shown. The current monitor **314** outputs a current at output terminal **326** which is proportional to the voltage across the resistor **312**. When the LED **112** is functioning properly, there may be a voltage across the resistor **312** which may result in current flowing from terminal **326**. This current may flow through resistors **328** and **330** and into control input (base) of switching device **334**. As a result, switching device **316** may turn on and allow current to flow from switching input **338** (collector) to switching output **340** (emitter). This may prevent current from flowing into control input **342** (base) of switching device **318**. However, when the LED **112** fails open, the voltage across resistor **312** may be interrupted. This may also reduce the voltage at node **332**, thereby allowing current to flow through resistor **336**, and into: control input **342** (via resistor **344**). This may cause switching device **318** to turn on (with current flowing from switching input **346** (collector) to switching output **348** (emitter), to ground **116**. When switching device **318** turns on, current may flow through PTC thermistor **320**. In a similar fashion to systems **100** and **200** above, operation of PTC thermistor **320** may result in an initial high current pulse drawn from supply **114**, followed by a reduced current draw once the PTC thermistor reaches equilibrium. Capacitor **370** is optionally provided to prevent a false outage indication when the lamp is initially turned on or off in similar fashion to capacitor **150** above.

[0032] FIG. **4** illustrates another example of a system like system **100**, **200**, and **300**. System **400** provides a similar functionality using a comparator **414** and additional switching device **424**. Any suitable comparator and switching device **424** may be used. For example, a comparator **414** may be an operational amplifier (or “op-amp”) as illustrated. In another example, switching device illustrated at **424** may be an n-channel Metal Oxide Field Effect Transistor (MOSFET). The system

400 includes an outage detection circuit **410** which is operatively connected between the voltage supply **114** and vehicle LED **112**. In the illustrated embodiment, the comparator **414** comprises a first input **416**, a second input **418**, and output terminal **420**. The switching device **424** comprises control input **426** (gate), switching input **428** (drain) and switching output **430** (source).

[0033] When the LED **112** is functioning properly, there may be current flowing through resistor **412**, resulting in a current drop across the resistor **412**. The comparator may drive the linear device **424** from the control input **426**, such that the voltage at the inverting input **416** may be driven about equal to the non-inverting input **418**. As illustrated in FIG. 4, this result can depend on the value of resistor **422**, resistor **432**, resistor **436** and the switching characteristics of switching device **424** as driven by comparator **414**. This results in current flow to the control input **426** which is sufficient to keep switching device **424** at least partially on to mirror the current in resistor **412**. Current is therefore allowed to flow into the control input **434** (base) of switching device **438** via the resistor divider network composed of resistors **432** and **436**, allowing current to flow from switching input **440** (collector) to switching output **442** (emitter) via resistor **444**. This may prevent current from flowing into control input **446** (base) of switching device **448**.

[0034] When LED **112** fails open, the voltage drop due to the drop in current through resistor **412** can raise the voltage at second input **418**. The voltage at **418** may then be higher than the voltage at **416**. The comparator **414** is configured to detect this differential and may change the output **420**. This change in output at **420** may prevent current from flowing to the control input **426** of switching linear device **424**, thereby turning off switching device **424** and preventing current from reaching control input **434** of switching device **438**. This may cause allow current to flow from resistor **444** through resistor **450** to control input **446** of switching device **448**. Switching device **448** may then turn on (with current flowing from switching input **452** (collector) to switching output **454** (emitter), to ground **116**). When switching device **318** turns on, current may flow through PTC thermistor **456**. In a similar fashion to system **300** above, operation of PTC thermistor **456** may result in an initial high current pulse drawn from supply **114**, followed by a reduced current draw once the PTC thermistor reaches equilibrium. Capacitor **458** is optionally provided to prevent a false outage indication when the lamp is initially turned on or off in similar fashion to capacitor **150** above.

[0035] FIG. 5 illustrates a system **500** according to a further embodiment which provides a similar functionality as the above embodiments, but which uses a current monitoring device **514** and a programmable switching device **515** (illustrated here as a microprocessor) to control activation of a load element PTC thermistor **520**. The system **500** includes an outage detection circuit **510** which is operatively connected between the voltage supply **114** and vehicle LED **112**. In the illustrated embodiment, the current monitor **514** comprises monitoring inputs **522** and **524**, which monitor the current through a sensing resistor **512**, and an output **526**. One example of an acceptable current switching device is the LT6106 high side current sense amplifier supplied by Linear Technology of Milpitas, California. The programmable switching device **515** comprises a control input **528** and a switching output **530**. One example of an acceptable programmable switching device is the ATtiny25 microprocessor supplied by Atmel Corporation of San Jose, California. The programmable switching device may be programmed to deliver or interrupt current to its output **530** depending on various conditions. The system also includes switching device **518** which is connected in series with a resistor **520**. The resistor **520** is sized to produce a current pulse which is larger than the current drawn by the LED **112** as described below. In the illustrated embodiment, the switching device **518** is an n-channel metal oxide field effect: transistor (MOSFET) having control input **542** (gate), switching input **544** (drain) and switching output **550** (source).

[0036] When the LED **112** is functioning properly, there may be current flowing through resistor **512**, which may be detected by the current sensing device **514**. The current sensing device **514** may direct current to output **526** and input **528** to signal the switching device **515** that current is flowing through resistor **512** and LED **112**. The switching device is accordingly configured to prevent

current from flowing to the control input of switching device **518**. This may keep switching device **518** turned off and prevent current flow through the resistor **520**. However, when the LED **112** fails open, the current sensing device **514** may increase the current from its output **526** to the input **528** of the programmable switching device **515**. The programmable switching device **515** may in turn direct current to its output **530** and further to the control input **542** of the switching device **542**. This may turn on switching device **518** and allow current to flow through the resistor **520**, and through switching input **544** and switching output **550** to ground **116**. Due to the size of resistor **520**, the additional current drawn by resistor **520** from the supply **114** may be high enough to be detected by additional sensing circuitry in the vehicle. The programmable switching device may be configured to interrupt current to the control input **542** after a predetermined time, to limit unnecessary current drawn once the pulse has been produced. Because the switching device **515** is programmable using software or machine readable code, the circuit can be configured for multiple system implementations without the need to replace resistors or other component value. Resistors **552**, **527**, **529**, and **531** can be chosen as needed to configure the currents and/or voltages provided to the components of this circuit. Schottky diode **554** can be optionally included to protect against ground plane disturbances such as errant voltages being present on the ground plane or “ground bounce”.

[0037] The outage detection circuits **110**, **210**, **310**, **410** can further be subdivided into two or more other circuits. As an example, a detection circuit can be selected. The detection circuit can encompass the components of the circuit that enable detection of the failure of the LED. An control circuit can also be defined. The control circuit can encompass the components that cause increased power draw from the power supply.

[0038] Optionally, two or more distinctive current signatures may be generated by outage detection circuits **110**, **210**, **310**, and/or **410**, with different signatures pertaining to different lamp locations. In this way, the system may differentiate between failures of various lamps in the: system and convey that information to the truck cabin giving them more specific information as to which lamp or lamps have failed.

[0039] The voltage signatures can take the form of multiple current pulses that can be enabled, for example, by selectively switching load elements of outage detection circuits between the power supply and respective ground reference. Alternatively, multiple load elements can be used to vary the intensity of the current signature. Using these methods, different distinctive current signatures can be generated that vary in amplitude, duration, or both. One specific example would be using a single pulse to denote outage of an LED at one location and a double pulse to denote the failure of an LED at another location. A microprocessor can be included in the outage detection circuit to effectuate the generation of these pulses.

[0040] FIG. **10** illustrates example distinctive electrical signatures that can be associated with different LED locations. Illustrated is a graph **1000**. On the horizontal axis of the graph, time t is denoted. The vertical axis can pertain to current or a corresponding voltage. The waveforms can generally be considered to represent the electrical current passing through an LED being monitored by an outage detection circuit. A default waveform **1006** is illustrated as an example standard output waveform that can be output by the outage detection circuits **110**, **210**, **310**, or **410**. It should be evident that the waveform is an idealized example to better illustrate the differences between possible output waveforms. The actual waveform output by the outage detection circuits can vary significantly. For example, the waveform output by the outage detection circuits as disclosed may not resemble a square pulse. Instead, it can take the form of a hill with gradually changing transitions. Alternatively, the output waveform does not have to return to a zero current state (for example, returning to the horizontal axis) and can instead indicate continued non-zero current conduction. Such an example waveform is illustrated as **1018**.

[0041] The default waveform **1006** is illustrated showing a specific amplitude **1024**, width **1020** occurring over a time period **1014**. Waveform **1006** may appear as a continuous current for a non-

flashing lamp. A second example waveform **1008** is illustrated where two of the default waveforms **1006** occur within a specified time period **1016**. The time periods **1014** and **1016** with corresponding waveforms **1006** and **1008** can be compared by a fault detection circuit to differentiate the two waveforms. Such a method could allow a system to detect a flashing lamp, such as a hazard or turn signal flashing mode.

[0042] A third example waveform **1010** is illustrated. The amplitude **1026** of the third example waveform **1010** differs from the amplitude **1024** of the default example waveform **1006**. The difference in amplitude can be used to differentiate the waveforms. In other words, the fault detection circuit may be configured to detect a pulse over threshold **1004** as a lamp failure. A fourth example waveform **1012** is illustrated having the same amplitude **1026** as the third waveform **1006** but of a longer duration. The third example waveform **2014** may have a different duration **1022** than the default waveform **1006** and can be used to differentiate the two waveforms.

[0043] The waveform or current signature can optionally be separately configured for each LED lamp thus configuring different waveforms corresponding to different lamps in the trailer lighting system. For example, a rear right turn signal can be manufactured and marketed that generates a unique failure signature. Alternatively, the LED lamps can have a switch, such as a Dual Inline Package (DIP) switch, to set their installation location and therefore the corresponding specific error signature that can be output. Alternatively, the LED lamps can be programmed before or after they are installed, such as wirelessly or through a CAN Bus or other multiplex port. As a further example, the outage detection circuit can receive programming information pertaining to its installed location after it is installed into a truck or trailer from a wireless or wired device.

[0044] FIG. **10** also illustrates a lower bound **1002** and an upper bound **1004** on the vertical axis. These bounds represent example minimum and maximum current draws for a circuit including a power supply, one or more LED lamps, and referenced ground. The selection of these bounds can be chosen to avoid false positives and also to avoid overcurrent conditions within the system. As an example, a standard seven-wire truck interconnection socket may include dedicated signals for the running, right turn, left turn, and backup lights respectively. Each of these signals/circuits can contain multiple lamps in parallel. The lamps can be LED lamps, incandescent lamps, or a combination. For example, a failed LED lamp may be replaced with an incandescent lamp or vice versa.

[0045] LED lamps are more commonly being used, in part, because they generally require less power to effectively generate the same amount of light compared to an incandescent bulb. It is advantageous that the current drawn from the power supply of a lamp circuit by an outage detection circuit when a lamp failure is detected be chosen such that the current draw is greater: than the current draw of a nominally operational incandescent bulb lamp (or multiple such lamps on the same circuit). In this manner, false positive fault reporting can be avoided from the use of incandescent bulbs in the lamp circuit. It has been found that a four amp minimum power draw by the outage detection circuit is a sufficient value to avoid false positives within the circuit and allow the use of incandescent bulbs.

[0046] The maximum current that can be drawn from the lamp circuit can be dictated by the wire size used in the circuit. Typically, new truck and trailer installations use **18** gauge wire. This size wire can be rated to safely carry seven amps of current when the wire is made of aluminum. Greater amperage draw may result in inadvertent fuse failure or damage to the wiring.

[0047] FIG. **6** illustrates a fault detection circuit **600** for communicating a fault using an outage detection circuit **608**, such as the previously disclosed (**110**, **210**, **310**, **410**, and **510**) circuits. A power supply **610** may power an indicator **612** configured to detect when a fault has been detected. Each LED circuit **602** can include an outage detection circuit **608** and one or more LEDs **112**. One or more LED circuits **602** can be used with the fault detection circuit **600**. FIG. **6** illustrates two such circuits **602**, however any suitable number of circuits **602** can be used.

[0048] Fault detection circuit **600** can comprise of a high side current sense amplifier and

comparator **604**. A Linear Technologies LT6108 is an example of such a device. A power supply **114** can be used to supply power to the outage detection circuits. As illustrated, the power to the LED circuit **602** flows through a resistor **606**, that may be characterized as a sense resistor. The amplifier and comparator **604** may use two inputs **624** and **626** to measure the voltage drop across the resistor **606**. A set point can be configured via selection of resistors **620** and **622** such that when the amplifier and comparator **604** detects a certain amount of current flowing through resistor **606**, the amplifier and comparator **604** activates an open collector output **628**. Open collector output **628** can be electrically connected to the gate of an NPN MOSFET **610** and forward biasing the MOSFET **610**. In this manner, current can flow from the power supply **610**, through the indicator **612**, through the diode **616**, and through the MOSFET **610**. Resistor **630** can be included to limit the amount of current passing through the output **628**. Other switching circuits known in the art can alternatively be used.

[0049] Multiple fault detection circuits **600** can be used. In this example, diodes **616** and **618** allows two fault detection circuits **600** to enable the same indicator **612**. However any suitable number of fault detection circuits **600** can be used with the addition of corresponding diodes like: **616** and **618**. In another example, each fault detection circuit **600** can use a dedicated indicator. In any of the examples disclosed above, each system **600** can include a dedicated power supply **114**, **614** or all systems **600** can share a power supply. Advantageously, for the fault detection system disclosed, the ground reference **634** for power supply **114** can also be isolated from the ground reference **632** for the fault detection circuit **600**.

[0050] In another example, the fault detection circuit **600** can include the additional feature of activating only the fault indicator **612** when a specific power profile is detected, for example, when a PTC thermistor is used as a load element in the outage detection circuit. Such a circuit could include, for example, a microprocessor in place of the amplifier and comparator **604**. Alternatively, multiple amplifier and comparators (or other devices) can be set at different values so that they can latch in a cascade fashion to detect a higher power draw and then the lower, equilibrium power draw.

[0051] FIG. 7 illustrates example implementations of the circuits described herein. In this example, a circuit for detecting and communicating fault(s) in the LED lighting **700** is located in the cabin **706** of a semi-trailer truck **712**. This fault detecting and reporting circuit **700** can include any of the circuits disclosed herein. Alternatively, a fault detecting and reporting circuit **700** can be mounted on the trailer **708** of the truck **712**. If located on the trailer **708**, an indicator can be positioned and then illuminated when a fault is detected to be visible by the operator using a rear view mirror.

[0052] LED lights or strings of lights electrically connected in series, parallel, or in any suitable combination thereof, can be associated with one or more outage detecting circuits (such as **110**, **210**, **310**, **410**, or **510**). For example, the turn signs **702** on the cabin **706** of the truck can use a fault detection circuit. Alternatively, other lights **714** on the cabin **706** can be electrically connected to any of the disclosed outage detection circuits disclosed herein. These lights may be used such as for running lights, indicator lights, brake lights and the like. The trailer **708** can also have running lights **704** and brake lights **710** electrically connected to outage detecting circuit(s) as disclosed herein. These trailer fault detection circuits can be electrically connected to the fault detecting and reporting circuit **700** so that LED failures can be communicated to the operator. The fault detecting and reporting circuit(s) may use different power supplies and/or ground references than the circuits used to power the lights. For example, the trailer **708** may have an: independent power supply to power its lights and other equipment that is isolated from the power supply of the cabin **706**.

[0053] The components of circuits **110**, **210**, **310**, **410** or **510** may be included within a single outer casing, such as a vehicle lamp outer casing. Alternatively, certain components may be located in separate outer casings or in an intermediary outer casing between the lamp outer casing and the vehicle.

[0054] FIG. 8 illustrates an exemplary mount for the outage detection circuits disclosed herein

elsewhere. One illustration shows an LED device **800** including an outage detection circuit **804** in a vehicle lamp outer casing **802**. The circuit **804** can be any suitable detection circuit, including, but not limited to, one of circuits **110**, **210**, **310**, **410**, **510**, and the like. The outer casing **802** may include an optional lens **808** for the LED **806**. Terminals **810** and **812** may be included and configured to electrically power the outage detection circuit **804** and the LED **806**. This configuration enables the LED device **800** to be used in place of traditional lamps and can be inserted into terminals configured to electrically connect the LED device to the terminal. These terminals **832** can be preexisting on vehicles, for example. Alternatively, a single LED device **800** can be used with multiple traditional LED or other lighting devices that may or may not include an outage detection circuit **804**. The LED device **800** can also contain multiple LEDs **806** that can collectively be used with a singular outage detection circuit **804**.

[0055] FIG. **9** illustrates an alternate intermediate outer casing illustration **900** is also included. In this example, a traditional LED lamp package **902** is included that has its own body portion **904**, lens **906**, LED **908**, terminal **910**, and terminal **912**. The outage detection circuit **804** may be mounted within an intermediary enclosure **914**. The intermediary enclosure **914** can include terminal **913** configured to electrically connect with terminal **912** of the LED **908**. The intermediary enclosure **914** can also include terminal **911** configured to electrically connect with terminal **910** of the LED **908**. The terminals **911** and **913** can, for example, be sockets corresponding to the terminal leads of the LED. The intermediary enclosure **914** can include a cathode terminal **916** and anode terminal **918** of its own. Advantageously, this anode **916** and cathode **918** can be substantially similar to the LED anode **912** and cathode **910**, such that the intermediary enclosure **914** can be used between an LED lamp **902** and an existing socket **920** configured to accept the LED lamp **902**. The anode **916** and cathode **918** of the intermediary enclosure **914** can also be of a different configuration than the LED anode **912** and cathode **910** to adapt a socket for use with an LED package that is not configured to be inserted directly into the socket.

[0056] FIG. **11** illustrates a block diagram of an example system **1100** that uses circuits like the circuits described herein. A power supply **1120** can be used to supply power to the various individual circuits through positive electrical connection **1110**. Power supply **1120** may optionally be provided via a fault detection circuit **1108**. Fault detection circuit **1108** may receive power from power supply **114**. The LED lamp **112**, can receive power via the positive interconnection **1110**, and may be grounded via negative interconnection **1118**.

[0057] An outage detection circuit **1102** is illustrated as also being coupled to positive interconnection **1110**. The detection circuit **1102** can detect outages in LED lamp **112** by any suitable means such as electrically, thermally, physically, via transmitted light, and/or according to any of the examples illustrated and discussed herein elsewhere. Detection circuit **1102** may be coupled to a control circuit **1104** at **1114**. When LED lamp **112** fails, detection circuit **1102** can signal control circuit **1104** to generate a change in current detectable by fault detection circuit **1108**.

[0058] The term “anode” here means the positively charged electrode by which the electrons leave a device.

[0059] The term “base” here means the control terminal of a bipolar junction transistor that controls the conductivity of the channel between the collector and emitter.

[0060] The term “cathode” here means the negatively charged electrode by which electrons enter an electrical device.

[0061] The term “collector” here means the terminal of a bipolar junction transistor into which a switched current enters when the transistor is forward biased.

[0062] The term “control input” here means an input terminal of a device where the signal received at the terminal determines the functionality of the device. Some examples include the base of an NPN bipolar junction transistor and the gate of a MOSFET transistor.

[0063] The term “diode” here means a two terminal electrical device which allows current to flow

in one direction, but prevents current from flowing in the opposite direction. Examples include p-n silicon junction diodes, light emitting diodes, Schottky diodes, and Zener diodes, to name a few.

[0064] The term “drain” here means the terminal of a field effect transistor out of which a switched current leaves the transistor when the transistor is forward biased.

[0065] The term “emitter” here means the terminal of a bipolar junction transistor out of which a switched current leaves the transistor when the transistor is forward biased.

[0066] The term “fail open” here means to stop conducting current due to an internal component failure.

[0067] The term “FMVSS **108** compliant” here means, meeting the candela, illuminated surface area and other requirements set forth by U.S. 49 C.F.R. § 571.108.

[0068] The term “Illuminated surface area” here means, per 49 C.F.R. § 571.108, the Effective projected luminous lens area (EPLLA), which means the area of the orthogonal projection of the effective light-emitting surface of a lamp on a plane perpendicular to a defined direction relative to the axis of reference. Unless otherwise specified, the direction is coincident with the axis of reference.

[0069] The term “fuse” here means a safety device a material that melts and breaks an electric circuit if the current through the material exceeds a specified safe level.

[0070] The term “gate” here means the control terminal of a field-effect transistor that controls the conductivity of the channel between the source and drain.

[0071] The term “LED” here means light emitting diode, including single diodes as well as arrays of LED's and/or grouped light emitting diodes. This can include the die and/or the LED film or other laminate, LED packages, said packages may include encapsulating material around a die, and the material, typically transparent, may or may not have color tinting and/or may or may not have a colored sub-cover. An LED can be a variety of colors, shapes, sizes and designs, including with or without heat sinking, lenses, or reflectors, built into the package.

[0072] The term “LED fault signal” here means a signal that is used to indicate the failure of an LED. The LED fault signal can take the form of power to illuminate a fault LED, a data message (such as via a serial communication protocol or other), a mechanical indicator, or other. The LED fault signal can be used to communicate a failed LED to an onboard computer or display system within a truck cabin.

[0073] The term “light” here means light which is visible to the naked human eye.

[0074] The term “node” here means an electrical junction between two or more electrical components, wherein the voltage at all physical points within the node is substantially equal.

[0075] The term “outer casing” here means a physical outer casing, terminal, insulation or sheath on the outside of a component, exposed to the surrounding environment such as outdoors and/or the inside of a trailer or trailer conduit.

[0076] The term “on-board the trailer” here means part of the trailer (inside, outside or both) and not inside a truck.

[0077] The term “resistor” here means a device having a resistance to the passage of electrical current.

[0078] The term “socket” here means an electrical device receiving light bulb or lamp to make a connection.

[0079] The term “source” here means The term “drain” here means the terminal of a field effect transistor into which a switched current enters the transistor when the transistor is forward biased.

[0080] The terms “stop-tail-turn” lamp or “STT” here means a lamp which is compliant with present legal and/or regulatory requirements in this country such as illuminated surface area, candela, and otherwise.

[0081] The term “switching device” here means a device which is capable of dynamically allowing or interrupting current flow.

[0082] The term “terminal” here means a plug, socket or other connection (male, female, mixed,

hermaphroditic, or otherwise) for mechanically and electrically connecting two or more wires or other conductors.

[0083] The term “truck” here means a powered truck (also known as a tractor or cab) for pulling a trailer.

[0084] The term “vehicle” here means a self-propelled or towed device for transportation, including without limitation, car, truck, bus, boat, tank or other military vehicle, airplane, truck trailer, truck cab, boat trailer, other trailer, emergency vehicle, and motorcycle.

[0085] Articles and phases such as, “the”, “a”, “an”, “at least one”, and “a first”, are not limited to mean only one, but rather are inclusive and open ended to also include, optionally, two or more of such elements. In terms of the meaning of words herein, literally different elements or words in dependent claims are not superfluous, and have different meaning and are not to be imported or implied or synonymous with elements or words in the claims from which they depend.

[0086] The language used in the claims and the written description and in the above definitions is to only have its plain and ordinary meaning, except for terms explicitly defined above. Such plain and ordinary meaning is defined here as inclusive of all consistent dictionary definitions from the most recently published (on the filing date of this document) general purpose Webster's dictionaries and Random House dictionaries.

[0087] While the invention has been illustrated and described in detail in the drawings and foregoing description, the same is to be considered as illustrative and not restrictive in character, it being understood that only the preferred embodiment has been shown and described and that all changes, equivalents, and modifications that come within the spirit of the inventions defined by following claims are desired to be protected. All publications, patents, and patent applications cited in this specification are herein incorporated by reference as if each individual publication, patent, or patent application were specifically and individually indicated to be incorporated by reference and set forth in its entirety herein.

Claims

1. A circuit for detecting outage of an LED, comprising: a load element electrically coupled between a power supply and a ground reference; a detection circuit adapted to detect outage of an LED; and an increase circuit responsive to one or more electrical variances of the detection circuit, the increase circuit adapted to: induce increased electrical current flowing between the load element and the ground reference; induce increased electrical current flowing between the load element and the power supply; or both, wherein the increase circuit is configured to automatically induce said increasing of current flow when said detection circuit detects a failure in the LED.
2. The circuit of claim 1, wherein said LED is illuminated using power from said power supply.
3. The circuit of claim 2, wherein the current used to power said LED and said circuit for detecting outage of an LED flows between said power supply and said ground reference.
4. The circuit of claim 1, wherein said increase circuit comprises said load element.
5. The circuit of claim 1, wherein said increase circuit induces an increased electrical current flow of at least four amps.
6. The circuit of claim 5, wherein said increase circuit induces an increased electrical current flow of less than seven amps.
7. The circuit of claim 1 wherein said load element is a positive temperature coefficient (PTC) thermistor.
8. The circuit of claim 3 wherein the detection circuit is configured to detect decreased power consumption by the LED.
9. The circuit of claim 1 wherein the detection circuit is configured to monitor the current draw of the LED, a voltage across the LED, a voltage in series with the lamp, or a voltage in parallel with the lamp.

- 10.** The circuit of claim 1 wherein the circuit for detecting outage of an LED and the LED are housed in the same enclosure.
- 11.** The circuit of claim 1, further comprising: a socket configured to retain the LED, the socket having electrical terminals configured to electrically connect to the LED; and an outer casing configured to retain the LED, the outer casing having electrical terminals configured to electrically connect to the LED and socket terminals; wherein the circuit for detecting outage of an LED is mounted in the outer casing.
- 12.** A circuit for detecting outage of an LED, comprising: means for detecting outage of an LED; said LED electrically coupled to a power supply and a ground reference wherein the LED is powered by current flowing between said power supply and said ground reference; and means for increasing current flowing between said power supply and said ground reference automatically in response to detection of said outage of an LED.
- 13.** The circuit of claim 12 wherein said increased current flow is substantially larger than the nominal current flow induced by powering said LED.
- 14.** The circuit of claim 12 wherein the current flow changes after the detection of a fault in the LED lamp from a first flow rate at a first time to a second flow rate at a second time, wherein the first flow rate is greater than the second flow rate and wherein the power supply voltage at the first time is substantially equal to the power supply voltage at the second time.
- 15.** The circuit of claim 12 wherein the detection circuit comprises a Bipolar Junction Transistor (BJT).
- 16.** The circuit of claim 15 wherein the base of the BJT is electrically connected to an anode of the LED lamp and the detection circuit is configured such that current passes from the anode to the base of the BJT.
- 17.** The circuit of claim 1, further comprising: a fault detection circuit electrically coupled to the load element and an LED fault signal, the fault detection circuit configured to detect the increased current flow caused by the increase circuit and automatically activate the LED fault signal in response to the increased current flow.
- 18.** The circuit of claim 17, wherein the fault detection circuit is mounted to a truck, the truck configured for use with a trailer.
- 19.** The circuit of claim 18, wherein the detection circuit, load element, LED, and increase circuit are mounted to a trailer.
- 20.** The circuit of claim 17, further comprising a second load element, a second LED, a second detection circuit, and a second increase circuit; wherein the second increase circuit, second load element, or a combination of the two is adapted to induce an increased current flow having a substantially different waveform than the circuit of claim 1.
- 21.** The circuit of claim 20, wherein the fault detection circuit is further adapted to differentiate between the two waveforms generated by the different increase circuit/load element combinations and activate two different LED fault signals accordingly.
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