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AUTOMATED STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL SYSTEM

Abstract

An automated storage and retrieval system includes a track system, a plurality of storage columns, a container handling vehicle, a replaceable power supply, and a charging station. The track system includes a first set of parallel tracks arranged in a horizontal plane and extending in a first direction, and a second set of parallel tracks arranged in the horizontal plane and extending in a second direction which is orthogonal to the first direction, said first and second sets of tracks forming a grid pattern in the horizontal plane comprising a plurality of adjacent grid cells, each grid cell comprising a grid opening defined by a pair of adjacent tracks of the first set of tracks and a pair of adjacent tracks of the second set of tracks. The plurality of storage columns are located beneath the track system. Each storage column is located vertically below a grid opening and arranged to store a stack of storage containers. The container handling vehicle is for lifting at least one storage container stacked in the stacks. The container handling vehicle is configured to move laterally on the track system above the storage columns to access the storage containers via the grid openings, wherein the container handling vehicle comprises a lower part comprising at least one storage compartment for storing a storage container, an upper part arranged vertically above the lower part, a wheel assembly for guiding the container handling vehicle along the track system and a power supply compartment for accommodating a replaceable power supply. The replaceable power supply is for accommodation in the power supply compartment, having a power supply charging connection. The charging station is for charging of the replaceable power supply, the charging station comprising a charging station charging connection configured to create an electrical connection with the power supply charging connection and a power supply support for releasably supporting the power supply during charging. The container handling vehicle includes an auxiliary battery to allow movement of the container handling vehicle when void of the replaceable power supply.

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Background/Summary

BENEFIT CLAIM [0001] This application claims the benefit under 35 U.S.C. § 120 as a continuation of application Ser. No. 18/666,455, filed May 16, 2024, which is a continuation of application Ser. No. 16/981,465, filed Sep. 16, 2020, which is a § 371 National Stage entry of PCT/EP2019/053875, filed Feb. 15, 2019, which claims priority to Norwegian application No. 20180586, filed Apr. 25, 2018, the entire contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference as if fully set forth herein. Applicant hereby rescinds any disclaimer of claim scope in the application(s) of which the benefit is claimed and advises the USPTO that the present claims may be broader than any application(s) of which the benefit is claimed.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present invention relates to an automated storage and retrieval system for storage and retrieval of containers using a charging station and a method thereof.

BACKGROUND

[0003] FIG. 1 discloses a typical prior art automated storage and retrieval system 1 with a framework structure 100 and FIGS. 2 and 3 discloses two different prior art container handling vehicles 201,301 suitable for operating on such a system 1.

[0004] The framework structure 100 comprises a number of upright members 102 and a number of horizontal members 103 which are supported by the upright members 102. The members 102, 103 may typically be made of metal, e.g. extruded aluminum profiles.

[0005] The framework structure 100 defines a storage grid 104 comprising storage columns 105

arranged in rows, in which storage columns **105** storage containers **106**, also known as bins, are stacked one on top of another to form stacks **107**. The storage grid **104** guards against horizontal movement of the stacks **107** of storage containers **106**, and guides vertical movement of the containers **106**, but does normally not otherwise support the storage containers **106** when stacked. [0006] The automated storage and retrieval system **1** comprises a rail system **108** arranged in a grid pattern across the top of the storage **104**, on which rail system **108** a plurality of container handling vehicles **201,301** are operated to raise storage containers **106** from, and lower storage containers **106** into, the storage columns **105**, and also to transport the storage containers **106** above the storage columns **105**. The rail system **108** comprises a first set of parallel rails **110** arranged to guide movement of the container handling vehicles **201,301** in a first direction X across the top of the frame structure **100**, and a second set of parallel rails **111** arranged perpendicular to the first set of rails **110** to guide movement of the container handling vehicles **201,301** in a second direction Y which is perpendicular to the first direction X. In this way, the rail system **108** defines grid columns **112** above which the container handling vehicles **201,301** can move laterally above the storage columns **105**, i.e. in a plane which is parallel to the horizontal X-Y plane.

[0007] Each prior art container handling vehicle **201,301** comprises a vehicle body **201a,301a**, and first and second sets of wheels **201b,301b,201c,301c** which enable the lateral movement of the container handling vehicles **201,301** in the X direction and in the Y direction, respectively. In FIGS. **2** and **3** two wheels in each set are fully visible. The first set of wheels **201b,301b** is arranged to engage with two adjacent rails of the first set **110** of rails, and the second set of wheels **201c,301c** is arranged to engage with two adjacent rails of the second set **111** of rails. Each set of wheels **201b,301b 201c,301c** can be lifted and lowered, so that the first set of wheels **201b,301b** and/or the second set of wheels **201c,301c** can be engaged with the respective set of rails **110, 111** at any one time.

[0008] Each prior art container handling vehicle **201,301** also comprises a lifting device (not shown) for vertical transportation of storage containers **106**, e.g. raising a storage container **106** from, and lowering a storage container **106** into, a storage column **105**. The lifting device comprises one or more gripping/engaging devices (not shown) which are adapted to engage a storage container **106**, and which gripping/engaging devices can be lowered from the vehicle **201,301** so that the position of the gripping/engaging devices with respect to the vehicle **201,301** can be adjusted in a third direction Z which is orthogonal the first direction X and the second direction Y.

[0009] Conventionally, and also for the purpose of this application, Z=1 identifies the uppermost layer of the grid **104**, i.e. the layer immediately below the rail system **108**, Z=2 the second layer below the rail system **108**, Z=3 the third layer etc. In the exemplary prior art grid disclosed in FIG. **1**, Z=8 identifies the lowermost, bottom layer of the grid **104**. Similarly, X=1 . . . n and Y=1 . . . n identifies the position of each grid column **112** in the horizontal plane. Consequently, as an example, and using the Cartesian coordinate system X, Y, Z indicated in FIG. **1**, the storage container identified as **106'** in FIG. **1** can be said to occupy grid location or cell X=10, Y=2, Z=3. The container handling vehicles **201,301** can be said to travel in layer Z=0, and each grid column **112** can be identified by its X and Y coordinates.

[0010] Each prior art container handling vehicle **201,301** comprises a storage compartment or space for receiving and stowing a storage container **106** when transporting the storage container **106** across the rail system **108**. The storage space may comprise a cavity arranged centrally within the vehicle body **201a** as shown in FIG. **2** and as described in e.g. WO2015/193278A1, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0011] FIG. **3** shows an alternative configuration of a container handling vehicles **301** with a cantilever construction. Such a vehicle is described in detail in e.g. NO317366, the contents of which are also incorporated herein by reference.

[0012] The central cavity container handling vehicles **201** shown in FIG. **2** may have a footprint

that covers a area with dimensions in the X and Y directions which is generally equal to the lateral extent of a grid column **112**, i.e. the extent of a grid column **112** in the X and Y directions, e.g. as is described in WO2015/193278A1, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference. The term 'lateral' used herein may mean 'horizontal'.

[0013] Alternatively, the central cavity container handling vehicles **101** may have a footprint which is larger than the lateral area defined by a grid column **112**, e.g. as is disclosed in WO2014/090684A1.

[0014] The rail system **108** may be a single rail system, as is shown in FIG. 4. Alternatively, the rail system **108** may be a double rail system, as is shown in FIG. 5, thus allowing a container handling vehicle **201** having a footprint generally corresponding to the lateral area defined by a grid column **112** to travel along a row of grid columns even if another container handling vehicle **201** is positioned above a grid column neighboring that row. Both the single and double rail system, or a combination comprising a single and double rail arrangement in a single rail system **108**, forms a grid pattern in the horizontal plane P comprising a plurality of rectangular and uniform grid locations or grid cells **122**, where each grid cell **122** comprises a grid opening **115** being delimited by a pair of tracks **110a**, **110b** of the first tracks **110** and a pair of tracks **111a**, **111b** of the second set of tracks **111**. In FIG. 5 the grid cell **122** is indicated by a dashed box.

[0015] Consequently, tracks **110a** and **110b** form pairs of tracks defining parallel rows of grid cells running in the X direction, and tracks **111a** and **111b** form pairs of tracks defining parallel rows of grid cells running in the Y direction.

[0016] As shown in FIG. 6, each grid cell **122** has a width W_c which is typically within the interval of 30 to 150 cm, and a length L_c which is typically within the interval of 50 to 200 cm. Each grid opening **115** has a width W_o and a length L_o which is typically 2 to 10 cm less than the width W_c and the length L_c of the grid cell **122**.

[0017] In the X and Y directions, neighbouring grid cells are arranged in contact with each other such that there is no space there-between.

[0018] In a storage grid **104**, a majority of the grid columns **112** are storage columns **105**, i.e. grid columns **105** where storage containers **106** are stored in stacks **107**. However, a grid **104** normally has at least one grid column **112** which is used not for storing storage containers **106**, but which comprises a location where the container handling vehicles **201,301** can drop off and/or pick up storage containers **106** so that they can be transported to an access station (not shown) where the storage containers **106** can be accessed from outside of the grid **104** or transferred out of or into the grid **104**. Within the art, such a location is normally referred to as a 'port' and the grid column **112** in which the port is located may be referred to as a 'port column' **119,120**. The transportation to the access station may be in any direction, that is horizontal, tilted and/or vertical. For example, the storage containers **106** may be placed in a random or dedicated grid column **112** within the storage grid **104**, then picked up by any container handling vehicle and transported to a port **119,120** for further transportation to an access station. Note that the term 'tilted' means transportation of storage containers **106** having a general transportation orientation somewhere between horizontal and vertical.

[0019] The grid **104** in FIG. 1 comprises two port columns **119** and **120**. The first port column **119** may for example be a dedicated drop-off port column where the container handling vehicles **201,301** can drop off storage containers **106** to be transported to an access or a transfer station, and the second port column **120** may be a dedicated pick-up port column where the container handling vehicles **201,301** can pick up storage containers **106** that have been transported to the grid **104** from an access or a transfer station.

[0020] The access station may typically be a picking or a stocking station where product items are removed from or positioned into the storage containers **106**. In a picking or a stocking station, the storage containers **106** are normally never removed from the automated storage and retrieval system **1**, but are returned into the grid **104** once accessed. A port can also be used for transferring

storage containers out of or into the grid **104**, e.g. for transferring storage containers **106** to another storage facility (e.g. to another grid or to another automated storage and retrieval system), to a transport vehicle (e.g. a train or a lorry), or to a production facility.

[0021] A conveyor system comprising conveyors is normally employed to transport the storage containers between the ports **119,120** and the access station.

[0022] If the ports **119,120** and the access station are located at different levels, the conveyor system may comprise a lift device with a vertical component for transporting the storage containers **106** vertically between the port **119,120** and the access station.

[0023] The conveyor system may be arranged to transfer storage containers **106** between different grids, e.g. as is described in WO2014/075937A1, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0024] When a storage container **106** stored in the grid **104** disclosed in FIG. **1** is to be accessed, one of the container handling vehicles **201,301** is instructed to retrieve the target storage container **106** from its position in the grid **104** and transport it to the drop-off port **119**. This operation involves moving the container handling vehicle **201,301** to a grid location above the storage column **105** in which the target storage container **106** is positioned, retrieving the storage container **106** from the storage column **105** using the container handling vehicle's **201,301** lifting device (not shown), and transporting the storage container **106** to the drop-off port **119**. If the target storage container **106** is located deep within a stack **107**, i.e. with one or a plurality of other storage containers **106** positioned above the target storage container **106**, the operation also involves temporarily moving the above-positioned storage containers prior to lifting the target storage container **106** from the storage column **105**. This step, which is sometimes referred to as “digging” within the art, may be performed with the same container handling vehicle that is subsequently used for transporting the target storage container to the drop-off port **119**, or with one or a plurality of other cooperating container handling vehicles. Alternatively, or in addition, the automated storage and retrieval system **1** may have container handling vehicles specifically dedicated to the task of temporarily removing storage containers from a storage column **105**. Once the target storage container **106** has been removed from the storage column **105**, the temporarily removed storage containers can be repositioned into the original storage column **105**. However, the removed storage containers may alternatively be relocated to other storage columns.

[0025] When a storage container **106** is to be stored in the grid **104**, one of the container handling vehicles **201,301** is instructed to pick up the storage container **106** from the pick-up port **120** and transport it to a grid location above the storage column **105** where it is to be stored. After any storage containers positioned at or above the target position within the storage column stack **107** have been removed, the container handling vehicle **201,301** positions the storage container **106** at the desired position. The removed storage containers may then be lowered back into the storage column **105** or relocated to other storage columns.

[0026] For monitoring and controlling the automated storage and retrieval system **1**, e.g. monitoring and controlling the location of respective storage containers **106** within the grid **104**, the content of each storage container **106**; and the movement of the container handling vehicles **201,301** so that a desired storage container **106** can be delivered to the desired location at the desired time without the container handling vehicles **201,301** colliding with each other, the automated storage and retrieval system **1** comprises a control system which typically is computerized and which typically comprises a database for keeping track of the storage containers **106**.

[0027] However, with the above described storage system there is an undesired robot standstill due to the need of recharge, thereby reducing the operational cycle of the storage system as a whole to typically 16 hours per day.

[0028] In WO2015/104263A2, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference, a storage system is described solving the undesired standstill by arranging a number of charging

stations at the perimeter of the storage grid. Each charging station has the capability of charging a power storage source on each vehicle. However, the solution disclosed in WO 2015/104263A2 have disadvantages in that the power supply arrangement reduces both the available space for the storage containers and the overall stability of the vehicles. Further, the hook system used to connect the power storage source to the charging station is quite complex and thus more service intensive and prone to failure. In addition, the prior art hook system limits the potential lateral extent of a connected power storage source due to limited support of the power storage source in the lateral direction.

[0029] The inventive solutions described herein may be considered as representing a further development of the storage system as disclosed in WO2015/104263A2, where the above-mentioned disadvantages concerning space and stability are mitigated.

SUMMARY

[0030] The present invention is set forth and characterized in the independent claims, while the dependent claims describe other characteristics of the invention.

[0031] In a first aspect, the present invention provides an automated storage and retrieval system comprising: [0032] a track system comprising a first set of parallel tracks arranged in a horizontal plane and extending in a first direction, and a second set of parallel tracks arranged in the horizontal plane and extending in a second direction which is orthogonal to the first direction, said first and second sets of tracks forming a grid pattern in the horizontal plane comprising a plurality of adjacent grid cells, each grid cell comprising a grid opening defined by a pair of adjacent tracks of the first set of tracks and a pair of adjacent tracks of the second set of tracks; [0033] a plurality of storage columns located beneath the track system, wherein each storage column is located vertically below a grid opening and arranged to store a stack of storage containers; [0034] a container handling vehicle for lifting at least one storage container stacked in the stacks, the container handling vehicle being configured to move laterally on the track system above the storage columns to access the storage containers via the grid openings, wherein [0035] the container handling vehicle comprises a lower part comprising at least one storage compartment for storing a storage container, an upper part arranged vertically above the lower part, a wheel assembly for guiding the container handling vehicle along the track system and a power supply compartment for accommodating a replaceable power supply; [0036] a replaceable power supply for accommodation in the power supply compartment, having a power supply charging connection; and [0037] a charging station for charging of the replaceable power supply, the charging station comprising a charging connection configured to create an electrical connection with the power supply charging connection and a power supply support for releasably supporting the power supply during charging; wherein [0038] the power supply compartment is arranged in the upper part of the container handling vehicle and is configured to receive the replaceable power supply via an opening facing towards the first direction or the second direction.

[0039] In other words, the power supply compartment is arranged at a level above the level of the at least one storage compartment. The power supply compartment may extend directly above the at least one storage compartment.

[0040] In an embodiment of the system, the power supply support is arranged to extend into the power supply compartment to retrieve a discharged power supply or insert a charged power supply.

[0041] The power supply support is arranged such that the supported power supply may only be released in an upwards direction relative the power supply support.

[0042] By having the power supply support arranged to extend into the power supply compartment, the power supply may be introduced to a position within the vehicle being laterally separate from a side (or the horizontal circumference) of the container handling vehicle while at the same time being kept sufficiently stable for reliable coupling of the power supply to a connector of the vehicle

[0043] In an embodiment of the system, the power supply compartment comprises a power supply locking assembly arranged to hold the power supply in place within the power supply

compartment.

[0044] In other words, the power supply assembly is arranged to prevent an accommodated power supply from moving relative to the power supply compartment. In other words, the power supply locking assembly prevents the power supply from moving laterally/horizontally relative the power supply compartment.

[0045] In an embodiment of the system, the power supply locking assembly is moveable between a first position, in which the power supply locking assembly may hold the power supply in place, and a second position, wherein the power supply may be moved.

[0046] In an embodiment of the system, the power supply locking assembly is locked in the first position by a releasable locking mechanism.

[0047] In an embodiment of the system, the power supply support is arranged to interact with the releasable locking mechanism and/or the power supply locking assembly, such that the power supply locking assembly may move into the second position when the power supply support is extended into the power supply compartment to retrieve a discharged power supply or insert a charged power supply.

[0048] The releasable locking mechanism may comprise at least one pivot arm arranged to interact with the power supply support, such that the locking mechanism is released.

[0049] In an embodiment of the system, the power supply locking assembly is pivotably connected to the upper part of the container handling vehicle, such that the power supply locking assembly may pivot between the first and second position.

[0050] In an embodiment of the system, the power supply support comprises two laterally extending guide arms between which the replaceable power supply may be supported.

[0051] At least a section of each guide arm may be arranged to extend into the power supply compartment and/or at least an end section of at least one guide arm may be arranged to extend into the power supply compartment and/or at least the section of the guide arms between which the power supply may be supported is arranged to extend into the power supply compartment

[0052] In an embodiment of the system, at least one of the guide arms comprises an end for interaction with the releasable locking mechanism and/or the power supply locking assembly.

[0053] In other words, at least one of the guide arms may comprise an end for interaction with the releasable locking mechanism and/or the power supply locking assembly, such that the power supply locking assembly may move into the second position. The end of at least one of the guide arms may be wedge-shaped.

[0054] In an embodiment of the system, the replaceable power supply comprises a support rib arranged on each of two opposite sides of the power supply, each support rib arranged to interact with a corresponding guide arm of the power supply support. The support ribs may extend laterally/horizontally at opposite sidewalls of the power supply.

[0055] In an embodiment of the system, each support rib comprises a recess or protrusion for interaction with a corresponding protrusion or recess, respectively, arranged on the guide arms.

[0056] In an embodiment of the system, the interacting recesses and protrusions are arranged such that the power supply is prevented from lateral movement when supported by the power supply support.

[0057] In an embodiment of the system, the power supply locking assembly comprises locking elements, the locking elements arranged to interact with the power supply, optionally via support ribs arranged on each of two opposite sides of the power supply, when the power supply is arranged in the power supply compartment and the power supply locking assembly is in the first position, such that the power supply is prevented from moving in at least a lateral direction.

[0058] In an embodiment of the system, the locking elements are arranged on two longitudinal sidewalls interconnected by a structural element, such that the sidewalls are fixed relative to each other.

[0059] In an embodiment of the system, the structural element is a power supply cover arranged to

at least partly cover the power supply when the power supply is arranged in the power supply compartment and the power supply locking assembly is in the first position.

[0060] In an embodiment of the system, the power supply locking assembly is pivotably connected to the upper part of the container handling vehicle via the two longitudinal sidewalls, the structural element or the power supply cover.

[0061] In an embodiment of the system, the wheel assembly comprises a first set of wheels, arranged to engage with the first set of tracks, and a second set of wheels, arranged to engage with the second set of tracks, the first set of wheels is moveable between an upper and a lower wheel position, such that the first set of wheels engage with the first set of tracks in the lower wheel position and the second set of wheels engage with the second set of tracks in the upper wheel position.

[0062] In other words, the first set of wheels is moveable between an upper and lower position relative the upper part of the container handling vehicle, such that the level of the power supply compartment relative the first and second set of tracks is moveable between a lower and an upper level, respectively.

[0063] In an embodiment of the system, the power supply locking assembly is arranged to be in the first position when the power supply support extends into the power supply compartment and the first set of wheels is in the lower wheel position.

[0064] In an embodiment of the system, the power supply locking assembly is arranged to be in the second position when the power supply support extends into the power supply compartment and the first set of wheels is in the upper wheel position.

[0065] In an embodiment of the system the power supply is arranged to be supported by the power supply support, when the power supply support extends into the power supply compartment and the first set of wheels is in the upper wheel position.

[0066] In an embodiment of the system, the power supply is arranged to be separate from the power supply support and supported by at least one support surface arranged inside the power supply compartment, when the power supply support extends into the power supply compartment and the first set of wheels is in the lower wheel position. The at least one support surface may be an upwards facing surface.

[0067] In an embodiment of the system, the power supply support is arranged at a fixed level relative the track system, and the charging connection is movable between a lower connection position and an upper connection position relative the track system;

[0068] in the lower connection position, the charging connection is arranged at a level corresponding to the level of the power supply charging connection when the power supply is supported by the power supply support; and

[0069] in the upper connection position, the charging connection is arranged at a level corresponding to the level of the power supply charging connection when the power supply is accommodated in the power supply compartment and the first set of wheels is in the lower wheel position.

[0070] The charging connection may also be defined as being movable between the lower connection position and the upper connection position relative the power supply support.

[0071] In an embodiment of the system, the charging connection is biased towards the upper connection position.

[0072] In other words, when the power supply support does not support a power supply, the charging connection will be in the upper connection position. The charging connection may be biased towards the upper connection position by any suitable resilient element, such as a spring.

[0073] The charging connection and the power supply charging connection may be a plug/socket connection. The charging connection may be a charging socket and the power supply charging connection may be a corresponding power supply charging plug, or vice versa.

[0074] In a second aspect, the present invention provides a charging station for a replaceable power

supply comprising a power supply charging connection, wherein the charging station comprises a charging connection configured to create an electrical connection with the power supply charging connection and a power supply support for releasably supporting the power supply during charging, wherein the charging connection may move between a lower connection position and an upper connection position relative the power supply support; and

[0075] in the lower connection position, the charging connection is arranged at a level corresponding to the level of the power supply charging connection when the power supply is supported by the power supply support; and

[0076] the charging connection is biased towards the upper connection position, such that the charging connection is in the upper connection position when the power supply support is not supporting a power supply.

[0077] In an embodiment of the charging station, the power supply support comprises two laterally extending guide arms by which the replaceable power supply may be supported, at least one guide arm comprises a wedge-shaped end extending beyond a section of the guide arms by which the power supply may be supported.

[0078] In an embodiment of the charging station, the power supply support comprises two laterally extending guide arms between which the replaceable power supply may be supported, at least one guide arm comprises a wedge-shaped end extending beyond a section of the guide arms between which the power supply may be supported.

[0079] In an embodiment of the charging station, each guide arm comprises a wedge-shaped end extending beyond the section of the guide arms between, or by, which the power supply may be supported.

[0080] In an embodiment of the charging station, the section of each guide arm comprises at least one recess or protrusion for interaction with the power supply, such that lateral movement of a supported power supply is prevented. In other words, the section of each guide arm comprises at least one recess or protrusion for interaction with the power supply, such that lateral movement of a supported power supply relative the charging connection is prevented.

[0081] The charging station may comprise any of the features present in the charging station of the system according to the first aspect.

[0082] In a third aspect, the present invention provides a container handling vehicle for an automated storage system according to any embodiment of the first aspect, featuring a lower part comprising at least one storage compartment for storing a storage container, an upper part arranged vertically above the lower part, a wheel assembly for guiding the container handling vehicle along a track system and a power supply compartment for accommodating a replaceable power supply, wherein the wheel assembly comprises a first set of wheels, arranged to engage with a first set of tracks of the track system, and a second set of wheels, arranged to engage with a second set of tracks of the wheel system, the first set of wheels can be moved between an upper and a lower position, such that the first set of wheels engage with the first set of tracks in the lower position and the second set of wheels engage with the second set of tracks in the upper position, wherein the power supply compartment is arranged to receive the replaceable power supply via an opening facing in the direction in which the vehicle may move when the first set of wheels are in the lower position.

[0083] In an embodiment of the container handling vehicle, the power supply compartment comprises a power supply locking assembly arranged to hold the power supply in place within the power supply compartment, the power supply locking assembly is pivotably connected to the upper part of the container handling vehicle, such that the power supply locking assembly may pivot between a first position, in which the power supply locking assembly may hold the power supply in place, and a second position, wherein the power supply may be moved.

[0084] In an embodiment of the container handling vehicle, the power supply locking assembly is locked in the first position by a releasable locking mechanism.

[0085] The container handling vehicle may comprise any of the features present in the container handling vehicle of the system according to the first aspect.

[0086] A method of charging a power supply accommodated within a power supply compartment of a container handling vehicle using a charging station comprising a power supply support, [0087] the container handling vehicle being configured to move on a track system comprising a first set of parallel tracks arranged in a horizontal plane and extending in a first direction, and a second set of parallel tracks arranged in the horizontal plane and extending in a second direction which is orthogonal to the first direction, said first and second sets of tracks forming a grid pattern in the horizontal plane comprising a plurality of adjacent grid cells, each grid cell comprising a grid opening defined by a pair of adjacent tracks of the first set of tracks and a pair of adjacent tracks of the second set of tracks; [0088] the method comprises the following steps: [0089] moving the container handling vehicle to a position where the power supply support of the charging station is at least partly entering the power supply compartment containing the power supply and where at least one charging connection of the charging station is set in electrical contact with at least one power supply charging connection of the power supply, [0090] transferring the power supply from the power supply compartment of the container handling vehicle to the power supply support and [0091] reversing the container handling vehicle, leaving the power supply at charge on the charging station.

[0092] In an embodiment of the method, the transfer of the power supply from the power supply compartment of the container handling vehicle to the power supply support is achieved by adjusting the height of the power supply compartment relative to the underlying track system.

[0093] In an embodiment of the method, the power supply compartment is in an upper position relative to the track system during step a).

[0094] In an embodiment of the method, the container handling vehicle comprises a lower part displaying at least one storage compartment for storing a storage container and an upper part arranged vertically above the lower part, wherein the power supply compartment is located in the upper part of the container handling vehicle.

[0095] In the method according to the third aspect, the container handling vehicle and the charging station may comprise any of the features defined in the embodiments of the first, second and third aspect.

[0096] In an embodiment of the method, the wheel assembly comprises a first set of wheels, arranged to engage with the first set of tracks, and a second set of wheels, arranged to engage with the second set of tracks, the first set of wheels is moveable between an upper and a lower wheel position, such that the first set of wheels engage with the first set of tracks in the lower wheel position and the second set of wheels engage with the second set of tracks in the upper wheel position.

[0097] In an embodiment of the method, the first set of wheels is moved to the upper wheel position in step b), and in the lower wheel position during step a).

[0098] The charging station may further comprise a power supply support for releasably supporting, or releasably holding, or releasably suspending, the power supply during charging. In this configuration, the power supply support may be arranged at a vertical height D above the track system in level with, or approximately in level with, the corresponding vertical height of the at least one opening of the power supply cover of the container handling vehicle, or in vertical height with the at least one power supply compartment.

[0099] The charging station is preferably arranged at, or adjacent to, a perimeter of the track system and extend a distance into the track system along the horizontal plane (P). Note however that the charging station may in general be placed anywhere on or outside the track system as long as the charging station is within reach of the container handling vehicle.

[0100] In addition to the power supply support, the charging station may further comprise a charging station column comprising a lower end attached directly or indirectly to the track system.

In this configuration, the power supply support is preferably arranged on, at, or near, the charging station column at a vertical height D relative to the track system being equal or higher than the corresponding vertical height of the lower part of the container handling vehicle. With this configuration, the power supply may enter the power supply department arranged above the storage compartment without the need of, or a minimum need of, additional vertical adjustments during power supply exchange.

[0101] The power supply support of the charging station may be arranged at a vertical distance D from the track system being equal or near equal to the vertical height of the power supply within the container handling vehicle, wherein the power supply support is configured to releasably support the power supply during charging.

[0102] Further, the charging station may comprise a charging station column comprising a lower end fixed at or near the horizontal plane of the track system.

[0103] The power supply support may comprise two guiding pins (i.e. guiding arms) having a horizontal separation, wherein the two guiding pins extends a distance L from an outer perimeter of the charging station column. The end of each guiding pin opposite the upper end may advantageously be wedge-shaped, to aid the insertion into the power supply compartment and/or to activate a release mechanism allowing a successful insertion of the power supply in the power supply compartment. Note that wedge-shaped is defined as a tapered end surface relative to the guiding pins' upper and lower surfaces.

[0104] The power supply may have a depth corresponding to the size of the power supply in the first direction (X), a width corresponding to the size of the power supply in the second direction (Y) and a height corresponding to the size of the power supply perpendicular to the horizontal plane (P), the horizontal separation distance between the above mentioned two guiding pins is preferably equal or less than the power supply width.

[0105] Further, the lower end of the charging station column may comprise a charging station base plate arranged within or on the first set of parallel tracks and the second set of parallel tracks of the track system.

[0106] The charging connection may vertically displaceable relative to the track system, for example resiliently connected to the charging station column.

[0107] The invention also concerns a method of charging a power supply arranged within a power supply compartment of a container handling vehicle using a charging station comprising a power supply support.

[0108] The power supply may be any device capable of generating electrical power such as a battery or a capacitor.

[0109] The charging station may comprise a charging station column which further comprises a lower end adapted for being mounted to a track system comprising a first set of parallel tracks arranged in a horizontal plane (P) and extending in a first direction (X), and a second set of parallel tracks arranged in the horizontal plane (P) and extending in a second direction (Y) which is orthogonal to the first direction (X) and an upper end extending a distance from the lower end. The distance may be equal or higher than the vertical height of the lower part of the container handling vehicle when operating on the track system, for example equal or higher than 20 cm or 25 cm or 30 cm. The latter heights represent typical heights of storage containers stored within an automated storage and retrieval system. Alternatively, the distance may be equal or higher than the height of the container handling vehicle.

[0110] The height of the container handling vehicle is hereinafter defined as the vertical distance from the lowermost position contacting the track system to the uppermost position of the vehicle, excluding any sharp protruding parts such as antennas or the like.

[0111] The charging station further comprises a power supply support fixed either on the upper end, at the upper end or at a location near the upper end, for example within a distance from the termination of the upper end being equal or less than 20% of the total distance of the charging

station column. A distance D from the lower end of the charging station column to the power supply support may equal or near equal to the vertical height of the power supply arranged above the lower part of the container handling vehicle when operating on the track system. The distance D may for example be equal or higher than typical heights of the storage containers stored within the automated storage and retrieval system, i.e. equal or higher than 20 cm, or 25 cm, or 30 cm. [0112] The power supply support may be configured to releasably support, hold or suspend the power supply during charging.

[0113] The power supply support may extend a distance L from an outer perimeter of charging station column, preferably the outer perimeter of the upper end, wherein the distance L is equal or near equal a geometrical size of the power supply, the geometrical size being one of the length, the width, the diagonal and the diameter. For example, if the power supply has an overall shape as a rectangular box with a width, height and depth, the depth being the length between the front wall and the back wall of the power supply, the distance L can be equal or near equal to the depth of the power supply.

[0114] In addition, or alternatively, the distance L may be the distance from the outer perimeter of the charging station column, for example the outer perimeter of the upper end, to the horizontal centre point of the vehicle, or near the horizontal centre point of the vehicle, when the vehicle is in a charging position.

[0115] The term 'near the horizontal centre point' may for example be defined as a horizontal distance from the true horizontal centre point being less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the horizontal extent of the vehicle in the direction of the power supply support.

[0116] Moreover, the power supply support may comprise two guiding pins (i.e. guiding arms) extending a distance L from an outer perimeter of the charging station column. The horizontal separation between the two guiding pins may be equal or near equal to a geometrical size of the power supply as mentioned above, for example equal or near equal to the width of the power supply in case of a rectangular box shape. The two guiding pins are preferably mutually aligned in the horizontal plane (P).

[0117] The ends of the guiding pins may have a distinct form, such as wedge-shape, to interact with a release mechanism arranged at or near the entrance opening of the power supply compartment within the container handling vehicle during operation. The wedge shape may for example activate pivoting of a pivot arm constituting part of the release mechanism, and where the pivoting movement of the pivot arm allows the power supply to slide into the power supply compartment. Other mechanism may however be envisaged such as a release mechanism based on translational movements or a combination of pivoting movements and translational movements.

[0118] The lower end of the charging station column may comprise a charging station base plate to allow a stable coupling to the track system. The charging station base plate is configured to be fitted within the first set of parallel tracks and the second set of parallel tracks of the track system. For example, the perimeter of the base plate may be fixed to two or more inner side walls of the tracks within a grid cell. Alternatively, or in addition, the base plate may be mounted on the tracks, but such that the base plate is not interfering with the wheels of the container handling vehicle when the vehicle enters the respective grid cell.

[0119] The charging station may further comprise a charging connection such as an electrical socket or an electrical plug arranged on the charging station column, preferably on the upper half of the charging station column, more preferably on a location of the column laying within a distance from the termination of the upper end being equal or less than 25% of the total distance of the charging station column. The charging connection is adapted for establishing electrical communication with the power supply to be charged via a corresponding power supply charging connection arranged on the power supply.

[0120] Further, the charging connection may advantageously be vertically displaceable relative to the charging station column. In one configuration, the charging connection may be resiliently

connected to the charging station column, for example by a spring system where the charging connection is biased towards an upper position.

[0121] The container handling vehicle may comprise a container-receiving storage space for accommodating a storage container; a lifting device arranged to transport a storage container vertically between a storage position in a stack and a transport position in the storage space. The lifting device may comprise a gripping device being configured to releasably grip a storage container; and a lifting motor being configured to raise and lower the gripping device relative to the storage space.

[0122] The container-receiving storage space may be arranged centrally within the lower part of the container handling vehicle.

[0123] The rolling device may comprise wheels which are arranged around the periphery of the storage space.

[0124] By arranging the power supply compartment and the power supply above the storage compartment, the power supply may be placed deeper into the vehicle without reducing the available storage space for the container.

[0125] In addition, the arrangement of the power supply deeper into the horizontal extension of the vehicle, that is, nearer or at to the vehicle's gravitational centre axis, the overall stability conditions for the vehicle is increased.

[0126] In the following, numerous specific details are introduced by way of example only to provide a thorough understanding of embodiments of the claimed charging station, the system and the method. One skilled in the relevant art, however, will recognize that these embodiments can be practiced without one or more of the specific details, or with other components, systems, etc. In other instances, well-known structures or operations are not shown, or are not described in detail, to avoid obscuring aspects of the disclosed embodiments.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0127] Following drawings are appended to facilitate the understanding of the invention. The drawings show embodiments of the invention, which will now be described by way of example only, where:

[0128] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a grid of a prior art automated storage and retrieval system.

[0129] FIG. 2 is a perspective view of a prior art container handling vehicle having a centrally arranged cavity for containing storage containers therein.

[0130] FIG. 3 is a perspective view of a prior art container handling vehicle having a cantilever for containing storage containers underneath.

[0131] FIG. 4 is a top view of a prior art single rail grid.

[0132] FIG. 5 is a top view of a prior art double rail grid.

[0133] FIG. 6 is a top view of a track system of the automated storage and retrieval system according to FIG. 1.

[0134] FIG. 7 is a perspective view of an automated storage and retrieval system comprising two container handling vehicles according to one exemplary embodiment of the invention.

[0135] FIG. 8 is a top view of the automated storage and retrieval system of FIG. 7.

[0136] FIG. 9 is a side view of the automated storage and retrieval system according to FIGS. 7 and 8.

[0137] FIG. 10 is a perspective view of a container handling vehicle according to FIGS. 7 to 9, in which view a top cover and a side panel of the vehicle are removed.

[0138] FIG. 11 is a side view of the container handling vehicle according to FIG. 10.

[0139] FIG. 12 is a cross-sectional side view of the container handling vehicle according to FIGS.

10 and 11.

[0140] FIG. **13A-13C** are views of an automated storage and retrieval system according to another embodiment of the invention, comprising a charging station installed on a storage grid, where FIG. **13A** is a perspective view of the charging station and FIGS. **13B** and **13C** are side views of the charging station along X direction and Y direction, respectively.

[0141] FIG. **14A-14F** are perspective views of the automated storage and retrieval system according to FIG. **13** comprising the container handling vehicle according to FIGS. **7** to **9**, where FIG. **14A-14F** show in sequence a power storage source being transferred from the charging station to a power storage source compartment of the vehicle.

[0142] FIG. **15A-15D** are side views of an exemplary automated storage and retrieval system showing one example of a sequence for inserting a charging station mounted power storage source into the power storage source compartment of the vehicle.

[0143] FIG. **16** is a side view of a container handling vehicle releasably connected to a charging station in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

[0144] FIG. **17** is a perspective view of a chargeable power storage source.

[0145] FIG. **18** is a cross sectional view along the X direction of the chargeable power storage source of FIG. **17** arranged in operative position within a battery compartment of a container handling vehicle.

[0146] FIG. **19** is a perspective view of a container handling vehicle according to a second embodiment of the invention.

[0147] FIGS. **20A** and **20B** are perspective side views of a container handling vehicle of a third embodiment of the invention.

[0148] FIG. **21** is a perspective view of an embodiment of a charging station according to the invention.

[0149] FIG. **22** is a detailed view of the charging station in FIG. **21**.

[0150] In the drawings, like reference numerals have been used to indicate like parts, elements or features unless otherwise explicitly stated or implicitly understood from the context.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0151] In the following, embodiments of the invention will be discussed in more detail with reference to the appended drawings. It should be understood, however, that the drawings are not intended to limit the invention to the subject-matter depicted in the drawings.

[0152] The framework **100** of the automated storage and retrieval system **1** is constructed in accordance with the prior art framework **100** described above in connection with FIG. **1-6**, i.e. a number of upright members **102** and a number of horizontal members **103**, which are supported by the upright members **102**, and further that the framework **100** comprises a track system **108** of parallel tracks **110,111** in X direction and Y direction arranged across the top of storage columns **105**/grid columns **112**. The horizontal area of a grid column **112**, i.e. the area along the X and Y directions, may be defined by the distance between adjacent rails **110** and **111**, respectively (see FIG. **4-6**).

[0153] In FIG. **1** the grid **104** is shown with a height of eight cells. It is understood, however, that the grid **104** in principle can be of any size. In particular it is understood that grid **104** can be considerably wider and/or longer and/or deeper than disclosed in FIG. **1**. For example, the grid **104** may have a horizontal extent of more than 700×700 grid cells and a depth of more than twelve grid cells.

[0154] One embodiment of the automated storage and retrieval system according to the invention will now be discussed in more detail with reference to FIGS. **7** to **12**.

[0155] The exact configuration of the container handling vehicle **3** shown in the figures may vary. However, all vehicles **3** of the automated storage and retrieval system **1** comprise a vehicle body **17** and a wheel assembly **18** (or any other rolling means/rolling device) arranged in a lower section or part **17a** (see FIG. **12**) of the vehicle body **17** to enable the lateral movement of the container

handling vehicle **3**, i.e. the movement of the vehicle **3** in the X and Y directions (see FIG. 7-8).

[0156] The wheel assembly/rolling device **18** comprises a first set of wheels **19**, which is arranged to engage with a pair of tracks **110a**, **110b** of the first set of tracks **110**, and a second set of wheels **20**, which is arranged to engage with a pair of tracks **111a**, **111b** of the second set of tracks **111** (see FIG. 8). At least one of the set of wheels **19**, **20** can be lifted and lowered, so that the first set of wheels **19** and/or the second set of wheels **20** can be brought to engage with the respective set of tracks **110**, **111** at any one time. The lifting/lowering procedure can for example be performed by lifting side plates **25** (see FIG. 12) attached to the respective wheels **19,20** by use of a lifting motor arranged in the upper part **17b** of the vehicle **3**.

[0157] Each set of wheels **19**, **20** comprises four wheels **19a**, **19b**, **19c**, **19d**; **20a**, **20b**, **20c**, **20d** arranged along the sides of the vehicle **3**. The wheels **19a** and **19b** are arranged in a first vertical plane, and the wheels **19c** and **19d** are arranged in a second vertical plane which is parallel to the first vertical plane and arranged at a distance from the first vertical plane which corresponds to the distance between rails **110a** and **110b** (see e.g. FIG. 8). The wheels **20a** and **20b** are arranged in a third vertical plane, which is orthogonal to the vertical planes in which the wheels **19a**, **19b**, **19c** and **19d** are arranged, and the wheels **20c** and **20d** are arranged in a fourth vertical plane which is parallel to the third vertical plane and arranged at a distance from the third vertical plane which corresponds to the distance between the rails **111a** and **111b**.

[0158] At least one of the wheels in each set **19**, **20** is motorized in order to propel the vehicle **3** along the track system **108**. Advantageously, the at least one motorized wheel in each set **19**, **20** comprises a hub motor, i.e. an electric motor that is coupled to, or incorporated into, the hub of a wheel and drives the wheel directly. An example of a container handling vehicle with such a motor is disclosed in WO2016/120075A1, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0159] Each container handling vehicle **3** comprises a storage compartment or bin storage space **24** arranged within the lower part **17a** of the vehicle body **17** (see FIG. 12) for receiving and holding a storage container **106** when transporting the storage container **106** across the track system **108** (see FIG. 8). The bin storage space **24** can be accessed from below, i.e. from an opening at the bottom of the container handling vehicle **3**. In the particular vehicle configuration shown in FIG. 7-16, the bin storage space **24** is arranged centrally or substantially centrally within the vehicle body **17**.

[0160] Each container handling vehicle **3** also comprises a lifting device **21** (see FIGS. 10 and 12) for vertical transportation of a storage container **106**, e.g. lifting a storage container **106** from a storage column **105** and bringing it into the bin storage space **24**, and also for lowering a storage container **106** from the storage space **24** into a storage column **105**. The lifting device **21** comprises a gripping device **22** which is arranged to releasably engage with a storage container **106**. The lifting device **21** also comprises a motorized lifting mechanism **23** for lowering and raising the gripping device **22** so that the position of the gripping device **22** with respect to the vehicle body **17** can be adjusted in a third direction Z, i.e. orthogonal the first direction X and the second direction Y (see also FIG. 7). In the vehicle configuration illustrated in FIGS. 10 and 12 the gripping device **22** comprises remotely operated claws **22a** attached underneath a lifting plate **22b**. The lifting plate **22b** may be connected to a plurality belts (not shown) constituting part of the motorized lifting mechanism **23**.

[0161] The motorized lifting mechanism **23** is arranged in the upper part **17b** of the vehicle body **17** (see FIG. 12), below a battery cover or house **27** for mounting of a chargeable battery **28** (see FIG. 10) and above the lower part **17a** with the bin storage space **24**.

[0162] When a storage container **106** stored in the storage grid **104** is to be accessed, one of the container handling vehicles **3** is instructed to retrieve the target storage container **106** from its position in the storage grid **104** and to transport the target storage container **106** to an access station (not shown) where it can be access from outside of the storage grid **104** or transferred out of the storage grid **104**. This operation involves moving the container handling vehicle **3** to the grid cell **122** above the storage column **105** in which the target storage container **106** is positioned and

retrieving the storage container **106** from the storage column **105** using the container handling vehicle's lifting device **21**. The lifting device **21** lifts the storage container **106** from the storage column **105** through the grid opening **115** of the grid cell **122** and into the storage space **24** of the vehicle **3**.

[0163] If the target storage container **106** is located deep within a stack **107** (shown in FIG. **1**), i.e. with one or a plurality of other storage containers positioned above the target storage container **106**, the operation also involves temporarily moving the above-positioned storage containers prior to lifting the target storage container **106** from the storage column **105**. This step, which is sometimes referred to as “digging” within the art, may be performed with the same container handling vehicle **3** that is subsequently used for transporting the target storage container **106** to the access station, or with one or a plurality of other cooperating container handling vehicles **3**. Alternatively, or in addition, the automated storage and retrieval system **1** may have container handling vehicles specifically dedicated to the task of temporarily removing storage containers from a storage column **105**, for example the multi-container handling vehicle **5** shown in FIG. **19**. Once the target storage container **106** has been removed from the storage column **105**, the temporarily removed storage containers can be repositioned into the original storage column **105**. The removed storage containers may alternatively, or in addition, be relocated to other storage columns.

[0164] Once the target storage container **106** has been brought into the storage space **24** of the container handling vehicle **3**, the vehicle **3** transports the storage container **106** to the access station where it is unloaded. The access station may typically comprise a grid location at the periphery of the storage grid **104** where the storage container **106** can be accessed manually or transported further using a suitable conveyor system (not shown).

[0165] When a storage container **106** is to be stored in the storage grid **104**, one of the container handling vehicles **3** is instructed to pick up the storage container **106** from a pick-up station (not shown), which may also double as an access station, and transport it to a grid cell **122** above the storage column **105** where it is to be stored. After any storage containers positioned at or above the target position within the storage column stack **107** have been removed, the container handling vehicle **3** positions the storage container **106** at the desired position. The removed storage containers may then be lowered back into the storage column **105** or relocated to other storage columns within the storage grid **104**.

[0166] For monitoring and controlling the automated storage and retrieval system **1** so that a desired storage container **106** can be delivered to the desired location at the desired time without the container handling vehicles **3** colliding with each other, the automated storage and retrieval system **1** comprises a control system, which typically is computerised and comprises a database for monitoring and controlling e.g. the location of the respective storage containers **106** within the storage grid **104**, the content of each storage container **106** and the movement of the container handling vehicles **3**. Each vehicle **3** should thus be equipped with onboard control and communication system **35** comprising suitable transmission and receiving means (i.e. a transmitter-receiver system) to enable transmission and receipt of signals from and to the remotely situated control system. The container handling vehicles **3** typically communicate with the control system via wireless communication means, e.g. via a WLAN operating under an IEEE 802.11 (WiFi) standard and/or utilising a mobile telecommunication technology such as 4G or higher.

[0167] Each container handling vehicle **3** comprises a battery **28** (i.e. a replaceable power supply) which provides power to onboard equipment, including the motorised rolling device **18**, the motorised lifting mechanism **23** and the onboard control and communications systems **35**.

[0168] Each of the container handling vehicles **3** shown in FIG. **7-12** and FIG. **14A-16** has a footprint, i.e. a contact area against the track system **108**, which has a horizontal extension or area which is equal to or less than the horizontal area of a grid cell **122**. In other words, when the vehicle **3** is positioned above a grid cell **122**, e.g. for lifting a storage container **106** from or lowering a container **106** into a storage column **105**, the footprint of the vehicle **3** will not extend

beyond the grid cell **122** into a neighbouring grid cell **122**. The wheels **19a-19d**, **20a-20d** are arranged around the periphery of the bin storage space **24**, and the footprint of the vehicle **3** is larger than the storage space **24** only enough to accommodate the wheels **19a-19d**, **20a-20d**. In this way, the footprint of the vehicle **3** takes up the minimum possible amount of space in the X-Y plane. Since the bin storage space **24** is positioned between the pair of wheels, i.e. the pairs **19a** and **19b**, **19c** and **19d**, **20a** and **20b** and **20c** and **20d**, the centre of gravity of the vehicle **3** will be located within the footprint **30** also when a storage bin **106** is raised into the storage space **24**. [0169] Further, the vehicle **3** comprises generally vertical side walls **26a-26d** (see FIGS. 7, 9-11 and 14-16), which are co-planar to the vertical planes in which the wheels **19a-19d**; **20a-20d** are arranged. Consequently, the lower part of the container handling vehicle **3** has a generally cuboid shape.

[0170] As mentioned above, the upper part **17b** of the vehicle **3** (see FIG. 12) includes a battery cover **27** which may protrude horizontally in the X direction beyond the otherwise generally vertical side walls **26c** and **26d** (see e.g. FIGS. 7, 9 and 10). This protruding battery cover **27** is configured to house the battery **28** of the vehicle **3** (see FIG. 10).

[0171] Note that any kind of power storage source may be covered by the battery cover **27** or positioned within the battery compartment **27a**, such as one or more replaceable batteries, one or more fixed batteries, one or more capacitors, or a combination thereof.

[0172] Positioning the battery **28** (or any other power storage source) in this manner, that is protruding from the vehicles' side walls, may be advantageous since it allows charging and/or battery exchange stations **40** easy access to the battery **28** for charging or battery replacement. In particular, if a battery exchange scheme is used, in which case the protruding battery cover **27** covers a battery compartment or slot **27a** (e.g. see FIG. 12), the protruding character of the battery cover **27** may provide advantageous guiding for the battery **28** during battery exchange operation. However, it is clear from the present description that the battery cover **27** is not in any way required to protrude from a side wall of the vehicle to provide a highly advantageous system for charging and replacing batteries. In alternative embodiments of the vehicle, the battery cover may also be spaced from a side wall of the vehicle. Further, by arranging the battery cover **27** and the battery **28** fully above the bin storage space **24**, within the upper part **17b**, the battery **28** may be placed deeper into the vehicle **3** without causing a significant reduction in the available storage space for the bin **106**. In addition to enable the use of larger batteries **28**, a deeper arrangement of the batteries compared to the prior art solutions where the batteries are arranged at the vehicles' side walls, increases the overall stability conditions for the vehicle **3**. The term 'deeper' is herein defined relative to the outermost perimeter of the vehicle **3** in the X-Y directions, that is, in a lateral direction towards the vertical axis going through the vehicle's **3** centre of gravity.

[0173] Alternatively, or in addition, the protruding battery cover **27** may hold downward-looking sensors (not shown), which may be used to establish the position of the vehicle on the track system **108**, e.g. the alignment of the vehicle vis-à-vis a grid cell **122**, or to establish the position of the vehicle vis-à-vis other vehicles on the track system **108**, e.g. when operating the vehicles as a train of vehicles, e.g. as is disclosed in the international patent publication WO 2017/037095 A1, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0174] When the vehicle **3** is positioned above a grid cell **122**, e.g. to access a container **106** in the storage column **105** located vertically below the grid cell **122**, the battery cover **27** will in this particular embodiment extend over a neighbouring grid cell **122**. In other words, even though the vehicle **3** has a contact area against the rail system **108** which does not extend beyond the horizontal extension of one grid cell **122**, it has a vertical projection which occupies more than one grid cell **122**.

[0175] Such a configuration would normally prevent a second vehicle **3** from travelling over the neighbouring grid cell **122**, i.e. the grid cell into which the protruding battery cover **27** of the first vehicle **3** extends. This could be a problem since it could reduce the overall capacity of the

automated storage and retrieval system **1**.

[0176] In order to solve this particular problem, the container handling vehicle **3** comprises a recessed section **29** which is arranged in the upper part **17b** opposite to the protruding battery cover **27** (see FIG. **12**). In other words, the protruding battery cover **27** and the recessed section **29** are arranged at opposite sides of the container handling vehicle **3**. The recessed section **29** is capable of accommodating the protruding battery cover **27** of other vehicles when they pass over a neighbouring grid cell **122**. In particular, the recessed section **29** has a shape which is complementary to the shape of the protruding battery cover **27** and extends across the whole width of the container handling vehicle **3** in the Y direction, thus allowing vehicles **3** to pass each other over adjacent grid cells **122**.

[0177] This is most clearly illustrated in FIGS. **7-9**, which show a first vehicle **3a** moving in to operate over a grid cell **122**, while a second vehicle **3b** is positioned over a neighbouring grid cell **122**. When the vehicles **3a,3b** are oriented in the same direction, the protruding battery cover **27a** of the first vehicle **3a** is accommodated in the recessed section **29** of the second vehicle **3b**, thereby allowing the vehicles **3a,3b** to pass unhindered.

[0178] In the disclosed embodiment, the protruding battery cover **27** of each container handling vehicle **3** extends in the X direction and the recessed section **29** extends across the whole width of the vehicle **3** in the Y direction. However, it is understood that the protruding section may alternatively extend in the Y direction and the recessed section may extend across the whole width of the vehicle **3** in the X direction.

[0179] In yet another alternative configuration, the vehicle may comprise a protruding battery cover **27** as disclosed above, but where the complementary recessed section **29** is absent.

[0180] In the track system **108** shown in FIGS. **5** and **8**, each horizontal member making up the track system comprises two tracks. Consequently, each horizontal member is capable of accommodating two or more wheels in parallel. In such a track system **108**, the borders between neighbouring grid cells **122** run along the centre-line of the horizontal members, as is indicated in FIG. **5**.

[0181] The charging and/or battery exchange station **40** mentioned above will now be described in further details, and with particular reference to FIG. **13A-16**.

[0182] An example of a charging and/or battery exchange station **40**, hereinafter referred to as a charging station, is shown in FIG. **13A-13C**, both in a perspective view (FIG. **13A**) and in side views along X direction (FIG. **13B**) and along Y direction (FIG. **13C**).

[0183] In the particular embodiment illustrated in FIG. **13A-14F**, the charging station **40** is mounted on a charging station base plate **41**, which again is fixed (directly or indirectly) to neighbouring rails **110a, 110b, 111a, 111b** of the track system **108** above a grid column **112** (see FIG. **8**) at or near the perimeter of the framework structure **100**. The particular grid column **112** containing the charging station **40** will hereinafter be referred to as a charging station cell.

[0184] The charging station **40** shown in FIG. **13A-16** includes a vertical charging station column **42** fixed at a lower end **42a** to the based plate **41**. A charging socket **45** is arranged at or near an upper end **42b** of the column **42**, i.e. opposite to the lower end **42a**, and electrically connected to a power supply **44**, possibly via a power transformer transforming the charging power to the desired power level.

[0185] The charging socket **45** is further configured to receive a charging plug **46** on the battery **28** installed on each vehicle **3** (see FIG. **17**), thereby allowing flow of electric power when the charging plug **46** is electrically coupled to the charging socket **45**.

[0186] The charging socket **45** is resiliently attached to the charging station **42**, such that the position of the charging socket **45** is fixed in an upper (unloaded) position when no external force act on the charging socket **45** and in a lower (loaded) position when the charging socket is exposed to the weight of the electrically connected battery **28**. This feature ensures that the charging socket **45** and the charging plug **46** is at the same level relative to each other during connection and

disconnection. Having the charging socket biased towards the upper position and able to move into a lower position due to the weight of the battery is a highly advantageous feature since it allows for the use of standard plug/socket charging connectors. Without the feature of having a biased charging socket, a plug and socket would have to be able to move vertically relative to each other while being fully connected (i.e. move relative to each other in a direction being perpendicular to the direction in which they move during connection). Although such plug/socket connectors may be envisioned, they would likely be unable to provide a secure connection having a required charging capacity and reliability.

[0187] The charging socket **45** and the charging plug **46** may of course be interchanged.

[0188] In general, any kind of disconnectable electrical connections between the charging station **40** and the battery **28** is possible.

[0189] An automated storage and retrieval system **1** as described herein may comprise a plurality of such charging stations **40**, typically arranged along the perimeter of the track system **108**. However, one or more charging stations **40** may alternatively or additionally be placed further into the track system **108** and/or fully outside. In the latter configuration, the charging station(s) **40** should be connected to the track system **108** by additional rails in order to allow the vehicles **3** to travel to their respective charging station **40**.

[0190] One possible battery exchange process will now be described with particular reference to FIG. **14A-14F**, FIG. **15A-15D** and FIG. **16**.

[0191] A vehicle **3**, having transferred its discharged, or partly discharged, main battery **28** from its battery compartment **27a** to a first charging station for charge, approaches a second charging station **40** containing a charged, or partly charged, main battery **28** (see FIG. **14A** and FIG. **15C**).

[0192] To allow the vehicle to enter the charging station storage cell, the first set of wheels **19a-d** should contact the underlying track system **108** (see FIG. **15A-15D**) and the second set of wheels **20a-d** closest to the charging station **30** should be sufficiently high above the track system **108** in order not to interfere with the tracks **111** along the Y direction.

[0193] When the two wheels **20a,b** of the second set of wheels **20a-d** have entered the charging station storage cell, and prior to reaching the horizontal position where the charging station **40** is contacting the approaching vehicle **3**, the vehicle **3** is again lowered towards the track system **108**. The re-lowering is performed to allow correct alignments with the main battery **28** during the battery exchange process since weight of the battery **28** forces the charging socket **45** down to its lower (loaded) position as explained above. A lowering of the vehicle **3** also increases the overall stability of the exchange procedure. Typical vertical displacement of the vehicle **3** is 5-15 mm, for example 10 mm.

[0194] The charging station **40** should thus be configured such that the height of the main battery **28** under charge, relative to the track system **108**, is approximately equal to the corresponding height of the battery compartment **27a** on the vehicle **3** when the vehicle **3** is in a lowered position.

[0195] To allow movements of the vehicle **3** being void of a main battery **28**, an auxiliary battery may be installed, for example in the same or similar way as disclosed in the patent publication WO 2015/104263 A1, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference. Other solutions may also be envisaged, for example use of external power sources such as live rails, manual interference, etc.

[0196] Alternative embodiments in which either the charging station **40** or the vehicle **3** or a combination of both contain a plurality of batteries **28**, thereby avoiding the need of vehicle movements between charging stations **40** during battery exchange. A multi-battery charging station applicable for the above-mentioned storage system **1** is disclosed in WO 2017/220627 A1, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0197] The available charged battery **28** on the second charging station **40** is mounted onto a battery support **43**, which in the example shown in FIG. **13A-15D** is in form of two guiding pins **43a,43b** (i.e. guiding arms) extending laterally into the track system **108** from each side of the

charging station column's **42** upper end **42b**.

[0198] When the vehicle **3** is contacting the charging station **40** (see FIG. **14A** and FIG. **15D**), a release mechanism **50** (i.e. a releasable locking mechanism) is activated, allowing the battery cover **27** to be tilted around a rotational Y axis.

[0199] In the example shown in FIG. **14A-16**, the release mechanism **50** comprises a pivot arm **51** arranged at each side of the opening of the battery compartment **27a** into which the battery **28** should enter.

[0200] Further, each of the protruding ends of the guiding pins **43a,43b** (constituting the battery support **43**) displays a tapered section **52** (see FIGS. **13A** and **13C**). Upon contact between the pivot arm **51** and the guiding pins **43**, a pivot arm contact element **51a** of each pivot arm **51** is pushed towards the tapered section **52**, thereby enforcing an upward directed pivoting movement of the pivot arm **51** (see FIG. **14A**, FIG. **15D** and FIG. **16**). This pivot movements releases a security lock **51b** (see FIGS. **14A-14F** and **18**) allowing the above-mentioned tilt of the battery cover **27**.

[0201] The operation of the release mechanism **50** is illustrated in each of the sequence drawings in FIG. **14A-14F** and in FIG. **16**. To increase clarity, enlarged area drawings of the release mechanism **50** is added in FIG. **14A-14C** and FIG. **14F**. The enlarged area drawings clearly show the activation of the pivot arm movement upon contact with the tapered section **52** moving the security lock **51b** away from the battery cover **27** and the subsequent entry of the battery **28**.

[0202] When the guiding pins **43** with the attached battery **28** has entered a certain distance into the battery compartment **27a** (see FIGS. **14B** and **14C**), the guiding pins **43** releases a battery lock **27b, 27c** that allows further entry until the battery **28** is fully in its end position within the battery compartment **27a**.

[0203] In FIG. **18**, the battery lock **27b,c** (i.e. a power supply locking assembly) comprises a battery lock activator in the form of a wheel **27b** and one or more blocking teeth **27c** extending from the inner walls of the battery cover **27** (i.e. from the sidewalls **36** of the power supply locking assembly) and into the battery compartment **27a**. When the tapered ends **52** of the guiding pins **43a,b** contacts the wheel **27b**, the battery cover **27** is tilted upwards, thereby displacing the one or more teeth **27c** such that the battery **28** and the guiding pins **43a,b** may continue the movement deeper into the battery compartment **27a**. It is noted that the main function of the battery cover **27** is to act as a constructional element of the battery lock, providing rigidity to the two side walls on which the blocking teeth and the wheel is arranged. Thus, in other embodiments the battery cover may be any element able to provide adequate support/rigidity to the two side walls (or longitudinal elements) on which the blocking teeth and the wheel is arranged.

[0204] In this end position, and before retraction of the vehicle **3**, the battery **28** can be electrically connected two both the charging station **40** and i.e. the drive motors for the wheels **19a-d,20a-d**.

[0205] When the battery **28** is in its end position inside the battery cover **27** and in electrical contact with the corresponding electrical connector of the vehicle **3**, the battery cover **27** tilts back to its initial position such that the teeth **27c** physically locks or holds the battery **28** within the battery compartment **27a**. As an example, the teeth **27c** may enter dedicated recesses **49a** within support rails **49** arranged at both sides of the battery **28** (see FIG. **17**).

[0206] The battery lock **27b,c** may be any physical hindrance within the battery compartment **27a**. As an alternative to the above-mentioned teeth **27c**, the battery lock may comprise one or more protruding wedges that the battery **28** may surpass in one direction, but not in the other. In this configuration, the wedge shape would act as the battery lock activator **27b**.

[0207] When the battery **28** is in its end position and successfully locked into the battery compartment **27a** by the battery lock **27b,c**, the second set of wheels **20a-d** of the vehicle **3** is lifted from the track system **108** (typically between 5-15 mm), thereby lifting the overall height of the vehicle **3**. This operation causes the battery **28** to be released from the battery support **43**, for example from dedicated pockets or tracks within the first and second guiding pins **43a,b** (see FIG. **13A**).

[0208] Since now the battery lock **27b,c** is locking the battery **28** into the battery compartment **27a**, and the battery **28** has been lifted free from the battery support **43**, a retraction of the vehicle **3** out of the charging station storage cell leaves the battery **28** electrically connected to the vehicle **3**.

[0209] In addition to allowing successful exchange of battery, the blocking of the battery **28** into the battery compartment **27a** has the advantage that the battery **28** cannot be unintentionally displaced within the battery cover **27** during operation.

[0210] When the control system has sent an instruction to the vehicle **3** to place its battery **28** into a charging station **40** for charge, the steps for transferring the battery **28** from the vehicle **3** to the charging station **40** are essentially equal or similar to the opposite sequence and direction of the above-mentioned steps of transferring the battery **28** from the charging station **40** to the vehicle **3**.

[0211] Hence, the vehicle **3** is first raised to both allow the vehicle to enter the charging station storage cell without interference of the second set of wheels **20** with the tracks **111** in the second direction (Y) and to align the operative battery **28** with the charging socket **45** of the charging station **40**. As mentioned above, the charging socket **45** is in the exemplary configuration of FIG. **13A-16** in an upper, unloaded position.

[0212] During the approach of the vehicle **3** towards the charging station **40**, the wedged ends **52** of the first and second guiding pins **43a,b** first activate the tilt of the battery house **27** via the release mechanism **51**, then active the battery lock **27b,c** causing the battery cover **27** to tilt upwards, thereby removing the blocking teeth **27c** from the corresponding recesses **49a** in the support rail **49**.

[0213] By lowering the vehicle **3** towards the track system **108**, the support rails **49** of the battery **28** mesh with the battery support **43**. A subsequent retraction of the vehicle **3** would thus leave the battery **28** in the desired charging position on the charging station **40**.

[0214] To allow larger batteries within the vehicle **3**, both the battery cover **27** and the optional release mechanism **50** may be arranged so that they protrude horizontally in the X direction beyond the otherwise generally vertical side walls **26c** and **26d**. In this way, the overall capacity of each vehicle **3** in the system **1** may be increased significantly without necessitating making the tracks **110,111** wider.

[0215] In case there is a need of manual interference for removing the battery **28** from the battery compartment **27a**, for example due to general maintenance or accidental battery jamming, a configuration with a protruding release mechanism **50** has an additional advantage in that it allows easy manual unlocking of the battery **28**. That is, the protruding arrangement allows for exertion of sufficient manual force on the release mechanism **50**, an operation that would be difficult if for example the release mechanism **50** was arranged deep within the battery cover **27**.

[0216] The protruding configuration described above is also beneficial for ensuring early engagement in the charging station **40**.

[0217] An example of a battery **28** is shown in perspective in FIG. **17**. One of two support rails **49** is shown protruding from a side wall of the battery **28**. And identical support rail is protruding from the opposite side wall. The purpose of the support rails **49** is to both ensure a stable support of the battery **28** on the battery support/guiding pins **43** and to ensure an accurate guiding of the battery **28** into and out of the battery compartment **27a** during exchange. FIG. **18** shows the battery **28** with support rails **49** being inserted fully within the battery compartment **27a**. In the particular configuration shown in FIG. **18**, the battery **28** is approximately half the maximum allowable volume of a battery.

[0218] FIGS. **19** and **20** show perspective views of a vehicle **4,5** on a framework structure **100** according a second and third embodiment, respectively. As for the vehicle **3** according to the first embodiment, the battery supply cover(s) **27** enclosing the battery compartment(s) **27a** is for the second and third embodiments arranged above the bin storage space **24**.

[0219] FIGS. **20A** and **20B** shows an example of a vehicle **5** comprising two battery covers **27** arranged adjacent to another. In FIG. **20B** the outer walls and lid of the vehicle **5** have been

removed. Any exchange of batteries **28** may for this exemplary vehicle **5** use two charging station **40**, either one at the time, or simultaneously. In order to inter alia improve weight distribution during lifting and transport, the vehicle **5** comprises six wheels for each wheel set.

[0220] FIGS. **21** and **22** show a second embodiment of a charging station for use with the automated storage and retrieval system. In this embodiment, the protrusion **32** on the guiding pins **43a, 43b** are more extended in the lateral direction. As discussed above, the charging socket **45** is displaceable in a vertical direction, relative the guiding pins **43a, 43b** (or alternatively relative the charging station column **42**), between an upper position and a lower position. In FIGS. **21** and **22**, the charging socket is shown in the upper position. The charging socket **45** is biased towards the upper position by a spring **33**. In this particular embodiment, the biasing is obtained by having the charging socket **45** slidably connected via a bracket **34a** to a column connecting element **34b**, and by having the spring arranged between the bracket **34a** and the column connecting element **34b**, such that the bracket **34a** is biased into the upper position.

[0221] In the preceding description, various aspects of a charging station and an automated storage and retrieval system according to the invention have been described with reference to the illustrative embodiment. However, this description is not intended to be construed in a limiting sense. Various modifications and variations of the illustrative embodiment, as well as other embodiments of the system, which are apparent to persons skilled in the art, are deemed to lie within the scope of the present invention as defined by the following claims.

[0222] The following paragraphs are intended to demonstrate that certain features may be included together with other features in one or more embodiments of the disclosed invention. These are merely meant to be explicit examples of combinations of features and not an exhaustive list.

[0223] In one or more embodiments, an automated storage and retrieval system (**1**) comprises a track system (**108**) comprising a first set of parallel tracks (**110**) arranged in a horizontal plane (P) and extending in a first direction (X), and a second set of parallel tracks (**111**) arranged in the horizontal plane (P) and extending in a second direction (Y) which is orthogonal to the first direction (X), said first and second sets of tracks (**110, 110**) forming a grid pattern in the horizontal plane (P) comprising a plurality of adjacent grid cells (**122**), each grid cell comprising a grid opening (**115**) defined by a pair of adjacent tracks (**110a, 110b**) of the first set of tracks (**110**) and a pair of adjacent tracks (**111a, 111b**) of the second set of tracks (**111**); a plurality of storage columns (**105**) located beneath the track system (**108**), wherein each storage column (**105**) is located vertically below a grid opening (**115**) and arranged to store a stack (**107**) of storage containers (**106**); a container handling vehicle (**3-5**) for lifting at least one storage container (**106**) stacked in the stacks (**107**), the container handling vehicle (**3-5**) being configured to move laterally on the track system (**108**) above the storage columns (**105**) to access the storage containers (**106**) via the grid openings (**115**), wherein the container handling vehicle (**3-5**) comprises a lower part (**17a**) comprising at least one storage compartment (**24**) for storing a storage container (**106**), an upper part (**17b**) arranged vertically above the lower part (**17a**), a wheel assembly (**18**) for guiding the container handling vehicle (**3-5**) along the track system (**108**) and a power supply compartment (**27a**) for accommodating a replaceable power supply (**28**); a replaceable power supply (**28**) for accommodation in the power supply compartment, having a power supply charging connection (**46**); and a charging station (**40**) for charging of the replaceable power supply (**28**), the charging station (**40**) comprising a charging connection (**45**) configured to create an electrical connection with the power supply charging connection (**46**) and a power supply support (**43**) for releasably supporting the power supply (**28**) during charging; wherein the power supply compartment (**27a**) is arranged in the upper part (**17b**) of the container handling vehicle (**3-5**) and is configured to receive the replaceable power supply (**28**) via an opening facing towards the first direction (X) or the second direction (Y).

[0224] In the system according to any embodiment, the power supply support (**43**) may be arranged to extend into the power supply compartment (**27a**) to retrieve a discharged power supply (**28**) or

insert a charged power supply (28). In the system according to any embodiment, the power supply compartment (27a) may comprise a power supply locking assembly (27, 27b, 27c) arranged to hold the power supply (28) in place within the power supply compartment (27a). In the system according to any embodiment, the power supply locking assembly (27, 27b, 27c) may be moveable between a first position, in which the power supply locking assembly may hold the power supply in place, and a second position, wherein the power supply may be moved. In the system according to any embodiment, the power supply locking assembly (27, 27b, 27c) may be locked in the first position by a releasable locking mechanism (50). In the system according to any embodiment, the power supply support (43) may be arranged to interact with the releasable locking mechanism (50) and/or the power supply locking assembly (27, 27b, 27c), such that the power supply locking assembly may move into the second position when the power supply support (43) is extended into the power supply compartment (27a) to retrieve a discharged power supply or insert a charged power supply. In the system according to any embodiment, the power supply locking assembly may be pivotably connected to the upper part (17b) of the container handling vehicle (3-5), such that the power supply locking assembly may pivot between the first and second position.

[0225] In the system according to any embodiment, the power supply support (43) may comprise two laterally extending guide arms (43a, 43b) between which the replaceable power supply (28) may be supported. In the system according to any embodiment, at least one of the guide arms (43a, 43b) may comprise an end (52) for interaction with the releasable locking mechanism (50) and/or the power supply locking assembly. In the system according to any embodiment, the replaceable power supply (28) may comprise a support rib (49) arranged on each of two opposite sides of the power supply, each support rib (49) arranged to interact with a corresponding guide arm (43a, 43b) of the power supply support. In the system according to any embodiment, each support rib (49) may comprise a recess (49a) or protrusion for interaction with a corresponding protrusion (32) or recess, respectively, arranged on the guide arms (43a, 43b). In the system according to any embodiment, the interacting recesses (49a) and protrusions (32) may be arranged such that the power supply (28) is prevented from lateral movement when supported by the power supply support. In the system according to any embodiment, the power supply locking assembly (27, 27b, 27c) may comprise locking elements (27c), the locking elements arranged to interact with the power supply (28), optionally via support ribs (49) arranged on each of two opposite sides of the power supply, when the power supply is arranged in the power supply compartment and the power supply locking assembly (27, 27b, 27c) is in the first position, such that the power supply is prevented from moving in at least a lateral direction.

[0226] In the system according to any embodiment, the wheel assembly (18) may comprise a first set of wheels (19), arranged to engage with the first set of tracks (110), and a second set of wheels (20), arranged to engage with the second set of tracks (111), the first set of wheels (19) is moveable between an upper and a lower wheel position, such that the first set of wheels (19) engage with the first set of tracks (110) in the lower wheel position and the second set of wheels (20) engage with the second set of tracks (111) in the upper wheel position. In the system according to any embodiment, the power supply locking assembly (27, 27b, 27c) may be arranged to be in the first position when the power supply support (43) extends into the power supply compartment and the first set of wheels (19) is in the lower wheel position. In the system according to any embodiment, the power supply locking assembly (27, 27b, 27c) may be arranged to be in the second position when the power supply support (43) extends into the power supply compartment and the first set of wheels (19) is in the upper wheel position. In the system according to any embodiment, the power supply (28) may be arranged to be supported by the power supply support (43), when the power supply support (43) extends into the power supply compartment (27a) and the first set of wheels (19) is in the upper wheel position. In the system according to any embodiment, the power supply (28) may be arranged to be separate from the power supply support (43) and supported by at least one support surface (31) arranged inside the power supply compartment, when the power supply

support (43) extends into the power supply compartment and the first set of wheels (19) is in the lower wheel position. In the system according to any embodiment, the power supply support (43) may be arranged at a fixed level relative the track system (108), and the charging connection (45) is movable between a lower connection position and an upper connection position relative the track system (108); in the lower connection position, the charging connection (45) is arranged at a level corresponding to the level of the power supply charging connection (46) when the power supply (28) is supported by the power supply support (43); and in the upper connection position, the charging connection (45) is arranged at a level corresponding to the level of the power supply charging connection (46) when the power supply (28) is accommodated in the power supply compartment and the first set of wheels (19) is in the lower wheel position. In the system according to any embodiment, the charging connection (45) may be biased towards the upper connection position.

[0227] In one or more embodiments, a charging station (40) for a replaceable power supply (28) comprises a power supply charging connection (46), wherein the charging station (40) comprises a charging connection (45) configured to create an electrical connection with the power supply charging connection (46) and a power supply support (43) for releasably supporting the power supply (28) during charging, wherein the charging connection (45) may move between a lower connection position and an upper connection position relative the power supply support (43); and in the lower connection position, the charging connection (45) is arranged at a level corresponding to the level of the power supply charging connection (46) when the power supply (28) is supported by the power supply support (43); and the charging connection (45) is biased towards the upper connection position, such that the charging connection is in the upper connection position when the power supply support is not supporting a power supply.

[0228] In the charging station according to any embodiment, the power supply support (43) may comprise two laterally extending guide arms (43a,43b) by which the replaceable power supply (28) may be supported, at least one guide arm comprises a wedge-shaped end (52) extending beyond a section of the guide arms by which the power supply may be supported. In the charging station according to any embodiment, the section of each guide arm may comprise at least one recess or protrusion (32) for interaction with the power supply, such that lateral movement of a supported power supply is prevented.

[0229] In one or more embodiments, a container handling vehicle for an automated storage system according to any above-described embodiment may feature a lower part (17a) comprising at least one storage compartment (24) for storing a storage container (106), an upper part (17b) arranged vertically above the lower part (17a), a wheel assembly (18) for guiding the container handling vehicle (3-5) along a track system (108) and a power supply compartment (27a) for accommodating a replaceable power supply (28), wherein the wheel assembly (18) comprises a first set of wheels (19), arranged to engage with a first set of tracks (110) of the track system (108), and a second set of wheels (20), arranged to engage with a second set of tracks (111) of the wheel system (108), the first set of wheels (19) can be moved between an upper and a lower position, such that the first set of wheels (19) engage with the first set of tracks (110) in the lower position and the second set of wheels (20) engage with the second set of tracks (111) in the upper position, wherein the power supply compartment is arranged to receive the replaceable power supply (28) via an opening facing in the direction in which the vehicle may move when the first set of wheels (19) are in the lower position.

[0230] In the container handling vehicle according to any embodiment, the power supply compartment (27a) may comprise a power supply locking assembly (27, 27b, 27c) arranged to hold the power supply (28) in place within the power supply compartment (27a), the power supply locking assembly (27,27b,27c) is pivotably connected to the upper part (17b) of the container handling vehicle (3-5), such that the power supply locking assembly may pivot between a first position, in which the power supply locking assembly may hold the power supply in place, and a

second position, wherein the power supply may be moved. In the container handling vehicle according to any embodiment, the power supply locking assembly (27, 27b, 27c) may be locked in the first position by a releasable locking mechanism (50).

[0231] In one or more embodiments, a method of charging a power supply (28) accommodated within a power supply compartment (27a) of a container handling vehicle (3-5) using a charging station (40) comprising a power supply support (43), the container handling vehicle (3-5) being configured to move on a track system (108) comprising a first set of parallel tracks (110) arranged in a horizontal plane (P) and extending in a first direction (X), and a second set of parallel tracks (111) arranged in the horizontal plane (P) and extending in a second direction (Y) which is orthogonal to the first direction (X), said first and second sets of tracks (110, 110) forming a grid pattern in the horizontal plane (P) comprising a plurality of adjacent grid cells (122), each grid cell comprising a grid opening (115) defined by a pair of adjacent tracks (110a, 110b) of the first set of tracks (110) and a pair of adjacent tracks (111a, 111b) of the second set of tracks (111); the method comprises the following steps: moving the container handling vehicle (3-5) to a position where the power supply support (43) of the charging station (40) is at least partly entering the power supply compartment (27a) containing the power supply (28) and where at least one charging connection (45) of the charging station (40) is set in electrical contact with at least one power supply charging connection (46) of the power supply (28), transferring the power supply (28) from the power supply compartment (27a) of the container handling vehicle (3-5) to the power supply support (43) and reversing the container handling vehicle (3-5), leaving the power supply (28) at charge on the charging station (40).

[0232] In the method according to any embodiment, the transfer of the power supply (28) from the power supply compartment (27a) of the container handling vehicle (3-5) to the power supply support (43) may be achieved by adjusting the height of the power supply compartment (27a) relative to the underlying track system (108). In the method according to any embodiment, during step a), the power supply compartment (27a) may be in an upper position relative to the track system (108). In the method according to any embodiment, the container handling vehicle (3-5) may comprise a lower part (17a) displaying at least one storage compartment (24) for storing a storage container (106) and an upper part (17b) arranged vertically above the lower part (17a), wherein the power supply compartment (27a) is located in the upper part (17b) of the container handling vehicle (3-5). In the method according to any embodiment, the automated storage and retrieval system (1) may be according to any of the above-described embodiments.

REFERENCE NUMERALS

[0233] **1** Automated storage and retrieval system [0234] **3** Vehicle, first embodiment [0235] **3a** First vehicle, first embodiment [0236] **3b** Second vehicle, first embodiment [0237] **4** Vehicle, second embodiment [0238] **5** Vehicle, third embodiment [0239] **17** Vehicle body [0240] **17a** Lower section of vehicle body **17** [0241] **17b** Upper section of vehicle body **17** [0242] **18** Wheel assembly/rolling means/rolling device [0243] **19** First set of wheels [0244] **19a** First wheel of the first set [0245] **19b** Second wheel of the first set [0246] **19c** Third wheel of the first set [0247] **19d** Fourth wheel of the first set [0248] **20** Second set of wheels [0249] **20a** First wheel of the second set [0250] **20b** Second wheel of the second set [0251] **20c** Third wheel of the second set [0252] **20d** Fourth wheel of the second set [0253] **21** Lifting device [0254] **22** Gripping device [0255] **23** Lifting motor [0256] **24** Storage compartment, bin storage space [0257] **25** Side plate (attached to first or second set of wheels) [0258] **26** Side walls of vehicle [0259] **26a** First side wall oriented in second direction (Y) [0260] **26t** Second side wall oriented in second direction (Y) [0261] **26c** Third side wall oriented in first direction (X) [0262] **260** Fourth side wall oriented in first direction (X) [0263] **27** Power supply cover/battery cover/battery house [0264] **27a** Power supply compartment/battery compartment [0265] **27b** Battery lock activator [0266] **27c** Blocking teeth [0267] **28** Power supply/main power supply; battery/main battery [0268] **29** Recessed section [0269] **30** Opening of power supply compartment [0270] **31** Support surface within the power

supply compartment [0271] **32** Protrusion on guiding pin [0272] **33** Spring [0273] **34a** Bracket [0274] **34b** Column connecting element [0275] **35** Onboard control and communication system [0276] **36** Sidewall/longitudinal element [0277] **40** Charging and/or battery exchange station/charging station [0278] **41** Charging station base plate/base plate [0279] **42** Charging station column/column [0280] **42a** Lower end of charging station [0281] **42b** Upper end of charging station [0282] **43** Power supply support/battery support/guiding means/guide/guiding pins [0283] **43a** First guiding pin [0284] **43b** Second guiding pin [0285] **44** Power supply/power transformer [0286] **45** Charging connection/charging plug [0287] **46** Power supply charging connection/charging socket [0288] **49** Support rail [0289] **49a** Recess (in support rail **49**) [0290] **50** Release mechanism [0291] **51** Pivot arm [0292] **51a** Pivot arm contact element [0293] **52b** Security lock (to hinder tilt of power supply cover **27**) [0294] **52** Tapered section (of guiding pins) [0295] **100** Framework structure [0296] **102** Upright members of framework structure [0297] **103** Horizontal members of framework structure [0298] **104** Storage grid [0299] **105** Storage column [0300] **106** Storage container [0301] **106'** Particular position of storage container [0302] **107** Stack [0303] **108** Rail system/track system [0304] **110** Parallel tracks in first direction (X) [0305] **110a** First track of neighboring tracks **110** [0306] **110b** Second track of neighboring tracks **110** [0307] **111** Parallel tracks in second direction (Y) [0308] **111a** First track of neighboring tracks **111** [0309] **111b** Second track of neighboring tracks **111** [0310] **112** Grid column [0311] **115** Grid opening [0312] **119** First port column/first port [0313] **120** Second port column/second port [0314] **122** Grid cell/storage cell [0315] **201** Prior art single cell storage container vehicle [0316] **201a** Vehicle body of the storage container vehicle **101** [0317] **201b** Drive means/wheel arrangement, first direction (X) [0318] **201c** Drive means/wheel arrangement, second direction (Y) [0319] **301** Prior art cantilever storage container vehicle [0320] **301a** Vehicle body of the storage container vehicle **101** [0321] **301b** Drive means in first direction (X) [0322] **301c** Drive means in second direction (Y) [0323] X First direction [0324] Y Second direction [0325] Z Third direction [0326] P Horizontal plane [0327] D Distance from termination of charging station column's lower end to the lowermost part of the power supply support [0328] L Distance from the outer perimeter of the charging station column to a geometrical size of the power supply and/or the horizontal center point of the vehicle under charge.

Claims

1. An automated storage and retrieval system comprising: a track system comprising a first set of parallel tracks arranged in a horizontal plane and extending in a first direction, and a second set of parallel tracks arranged in the horizontal plane and extending in a second direction which is orthogonal to the first direction, said first set of parallel tracks and said second set of parallel tracks forming a grid pattern in the horizontal plane comprising a plurality of adjacent grid cells, each grid cell comprising a grid opening defined by a pair of adjacent tracks of the first set of parallel tracks and a pair of adjacent tracks of the second set of parallel tracks; a plurality of storage columns located beneath the track system, wherein each storage column is located vertically below a grid opening and arranged to store a stack of storage containers; a container handling vehicle for lifting at least one storage container stacked in the stack of the storage containers, the container handling vehicle being configured to move laterally on the track system above the plurality of storage columns to access the storage containers via the grid openings, wherein the container handling vehicle comprises a lower part comprising at least one storage compartment for storing a storage container, an upper part arranged vertically above the lower part, rolling means for guiding the container handling vehicle along the track system and a power supply compartment for accommodating a replaceable power supply, wherein the power supply compartment is arranged in the upper part of the container handling vehicle and is configured to receive the replaceable power supply via an opening facing towards the first direction or the second direction; a replaceable

power supply for accommodation in the power supply compartment, having a power supply charging connection; and a charging station for charging of the replaceable power supply, the charging station comprising a charging connection configured to create an electrical connection with the power supply charging connection and a power supply support for releasably supporting the replaceable power supply during charging; wherein the power supply compartment comprises a power supply locking assembly arranged to hold the power supply in place within the power supply compartment, wherein the power supply locking assembly is moveable between a first position, in which the power supply locking assembly may hold the power supply in place, and a second position wherein the power supply may be moved, and the power supply locking assembly is locked in the first position by a releasable locking mechanism, wherein the power supply support is arranged to interact with the releasable locking mechanism and/or the power supply locking assembly, such that the power supply locking assembly may move into the second position when the power supply support is extended into the power supply compartment to retrieve a discharged power supply or insert a charged power supply.

2. The automated storage and retrieval system according to claim 1, wherein the power supply support is arranged to extend into the power supply compartment to retrieve a discharged power supply or insert a charged power supply.

3. The automated storage and retrieval system according to claim 1, wherein the power supply support is arranged to interact with the releasable locking mechanism and/or the power supply locking assembly, such that the power supply locking assembly may move into the second position when the power supply support is extended into the power supply compartment to retrieve a discharged power supply or insert a charged power supply.

4. The automated storage and retrieval system according to claim 1, wherein the power supply locking assembly is pivotably connected to the upper part of the container handling vehicle, such that the power supply locking assembly may pivot between the first position and the second position.

5. The automated storage and retrieval system according to claim 1, wherein the power supply support comprises two laterally extending guide arms between which the replaceable power supply may be supported.

6. The automated storage and retrieval system according to claim 5, wherein at least one of the guide arms comprises an end for interaction with the releasable locking mechanism and/or the power supply locking assembly.

7. The automated storage and retrieval system according to claim 5, wherein the replaceable power supply comprises a support rib arranged on each of two opposite sides of the power supply, each support rib arranged to interact with a corresponding guide arm of the power supply support.

8. The automated storage and retrieval system according to claim 7, wherein each support rib comprises a recess or protrusion for interaction with a corresponding protrusion or recess, respectively, arranged on the guide arms.

9. The automated storage and retrieval system according to claim 8, wherein the recesses and protrusions are arranged such that the power supply is prevented from lateral movement when supported by the power supply support.

10. The automated storage and retrieval system according to claim 1, wherein the power supply locking assembly comprises locking elements, the locking elements arranged to interact with the power supply, optionally via support ribs arranged on each of two opposite sides of the power supply, when the power supply is arranged in the power supply compartment and the power supply locking assembly is in the first position, such that the power supply is prevented from moving in at least a lateral direction.

11. The automated storage and retrieval system according to claim 1, wherein the rolling means comprises a first set of wheels, arranged to engage with the first set of tracks, and a second set of wheels, arranged to engage with the second set of tracks, the first set of wheels is moveable

between an upper and a lower wheel position, such that the first set of wheels engage with the first set of tracks in the lower wheel position and the second set of wheels engage with the second set of tracks in the upper wheel position.

12. The automated storage and retrieval system according to claim 11, wherein the power supply locking assembly is arranged to be in the first position when the power supply support extends into the power supply compartment and the first set of wheels is in the lower wheel position.

13. The automated storage and retrieval system according to claim 11, wherein the power supply locking assembly is arranged to be in the second position when the power supply support extends into the power supply compartment and the first set of wheels is in the upper wheel position.

14. The automated storage and retrieval system according to claim 11, wherein the power supply is arranged to be supported by the power supply support, when the power supply support extends into the power supply compartment and the first set of wheels is in the upper wheel position.

15. The automated storage and retrieval system according to claim 11, wherein the power supply is arranged to be separate from the power supply support and supported by at least one support surface arranged inside the power supply compartment, when the power supply support extends into the power supply compartment and the first set of wheels is in the lower wheel position.

16. The automated storage and retrieval system according to claim 11, wherein the power supply support is arranged at a fixed level relative the track system, and the charging connection is movable between a lower connection position and an upper connection position relative the track system; in the lower connection position, the charging connection is arranged at a level corresponding to the level of the power supply charging connection when the power supply is supported by the power supply support; and in the upper connection position, the charging connection is arranged at a level corresponding to the level of the power supply charging connection when the power supply is accommodated in the power supply compartment and the first set of wheels is in the lower wheel position, wherein the charging connection is biased towards the upper connection position.

17. A container handling vehicle comprising: the container handling vehicle for use in an automated storage and retrieval system as recited in claim 1; the container handling vehicle featuring a lower part comprising at least one storage compartment for storing a storage container, an upper part arranged vertically above the lower part, rolling means for guiding the container handling vehicle along a track system and a power supply compartment for accommodating a replaceable power supply, wherein the rolling means comprises a first set of wheels, arranged to engage with a first set of tracks of the track system, and a second set of wheels, arranged to engage with a second set of tracks of the wheel system, the first set of wheels can be moved between an upper and a lower position, such that the first set of wheels engage with the first set of tracks in the lower position and the second set of wheels engage with the second set of tracks in the upper position, wherein the power supply compartment is arranged to receive the replaceable power supply via an opening facing in the direction in which the vehicle may move when the first set of wheels are in the lower position; and wherein the power supply compartment comprises a power supply locking assembly arranged to hold the power supply in place within the power supply compartment, wherein the power supply locking assembly is moveable between a first position, in which the power supply locking assembly may hold the power supply in place, and a second position wherein the power supply may be moved, and the power supply locking assembly is locked in the first position by a releasable locking mechanism, wherein the releasable locking mechanism and/or the power supply locking assembly are arranged to interact with a power supply support of a charging station of the automated storage system, such that the power supply locking assembly may move into the second position when the power supply support is extended into the power supply compartment to retrieve a discharged power supply or insert a charged power supply.

18. The container handling vehicle according to claim 17, wherein the power supply locking assembly is pivotably connected to the upper part of the container handling vehicle, such that the

power supply locking assembly may pivot between the first position and the second position.

19. A method of charging a power supply accommodated within a power supply compartment of a container handling vehicle as recited in claim 17, using a charging station comprising a power supply support, the container handling vehicle being configured to move on a track system comprising a first set of parallel tracks arranged in a horizontal plane and extending in a first direction, and a second set of parallel tracks arranged in the horizontal plane and extending in a second direction which is orthogonal to the first direction, said first and second sets of tracks forming a grid pattern in the horizontal plane comprising a plurality of adjacent grid cells, each grid cell comprising a grid opening defined by a pair of adjacent tracks of the first set of tracks and a pair of adjacent tracks of the second set of tracks; the method comprising: moving the container handling vehicle to a position where the power supply support of the charging station is at least partly entering the power supply compartment containing the power supply and where at least one charging connection of the charging station is set in electrical contact with at least one power supply charging connection of the power supply; transferring the power supply from the power supply compartment of the container handling vehicle to the power supply support; and reversing the container handling vehicle, leaving the power supply at charge on the charging station.

20. The method according to claim 19, wherein the transferring the power supply from the power supply compartment of the container handling vehicle to the power supply support is achieved by adjusting a height of the power supply compartment relative to the track system.
