The Bridge problem

Multithreading synchronised programming visualisation in Java and React

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# Project assumptions

*On a two-way north-south road, there is a narrow bridge that allows cars to pass in only one direction at a time. Synchronize the passage of cars from the south and north to avoid collisions and ensure that a car from each direction can eventually cross the bridge.*

# Implementation agenda

Solution comes as web application that can be opened in a web browser. It uses both server- and user-side code, but multithreading is implemented on the backend server.

User can spawn a new car on the road and select whether it’s coming from north or south. Time needed for passing the bridge is different for every car. Car then places itself at the end of selected queue and waits for the bridge to be empty, because bridge can only have one car at time. Once the bridge is empty, car from side selected by server’s thread planner passes the bridge and drives further down the road. User can also select how many cars will be let into the bridge from one side until the green light appears on the other one.

# Technologies

## Front-end (client side):

* React 18
* Next.js 14.0.4
* TypeScript 5
* Tailwind CSS 3.3.0

## Back-end (server side):

* Java 17.09
* Spring Boot 3.2
* Maven

# Front-end implementation details

# Back-end implementation details

## Overview

The web layer of backend application is provided by modern Java web framework: Spring Boot in latest stable version 3.2. REST controller is pretty simple and consists of 6 endpoints, which deliver following features: adding a car, getting all cars in list, getting current direction with green light, getting current amount of cars being let from each side, changing mentioned amount and the last one, which is being called every 100 milliseconds, looks for the cars that have been crossed the bridge for at least 5 seconds and removes them from the list.

The service layer provides whole workflow for processing cars in the queues. Car added by user is being put into desired queue, ‘SOUTH’ or ‘NORTH’, which means the direction the car is coming from. After adding a new car the program starts or restarts proceeding of the threads, each for one direction. Simulation of time needed for crossing the bridge is done by sleeping the thread for desired amount of milliseconds. During the car begins to cross the bridge, its status is changed from ‘WAITING’ to ‘PROCESSING’. After successful passing the river, status is updated to ‘PROCESSED’.

To make sure that only one car is currently crossing the bridge, the method for that uses *synchronized* keyword. Moreover, to avoid *races* between threads, program uses concurrent-safe data structures.

## Endpoints (web layer)

As mentioned before, the backend web layer of the application consists of 6 endpoints:

* *GET(‘/api/cars’):* returns the list of all cars added to the program in JSON format;
* *POST(‘/api/add-car’):* allows to add a new car into the program; JSON body is required (CarAddRequest class) and should contain following fields:
  + *String name (text),*
  + *Source source (enum; NORTH, SOUTH),*
  + *Int processingTime (number);*
* *GET(‘/api/direction):* returns the direction from which cars are currently passing the bridge;
* *GET(‘/api/max-cars):* returns the current amount of cars that will be let to pass from one side;
* *POST(‘/api/max-cars):* allows to set new max-cars. Requires a number in body;
* *SCHEDULED:* deletes all cars that have been passed the bridge for at least 5 seconds;

All endpoints doesn’t require any authentication or headers to be accessed and are also doesn’t have any specified allowed domains, which mean they can work with any front-end code from all domains.

## Service (server layer)

The most important class of the program is *BridgeService*. It has 6 private fields:

* *Queue<Car> cars*: queue of all cars added to the program,
* *Queue<Car> northQueue*: queue of cars coming to the bridge from the north,
* *Queue<Car> southQueue*: queue of cars coming to the bridge from the south,
* *int maxCarsAmount*: stores the amount of cars that can pass from one side – default value is 2,
* *Source currentDrivingSource*: stores the direction which currently has green light,
* *ExecutorService executorService;* instance of class that allows to create a thread pool to increase efficiency;

It has also two public methods: *addToQueue(Car car)* which allows to add a new car to queue and *deleteProcessed* which is called to remove all processed cars from list.

Private method *processQueue(Queue<Car> queue)* mentioned before is method that comes through the queue passed as an argument and if they are present, allows them to pass the bridge.

Private method *CrossBridge(Car currentCar)* is method that simulates the passing the bridge by the car.

# Summary

The implemented multithreading solution in Java addresses the bridge problem in a two-way road scenario. The web application, using React on the front-end and Spring Boot on the back-end, allows users to spawn cars from the north or south, each with a customizable crossing time. The backend employs a simple REST controller with endpoints for adding cars to queues and retrieving their states. Program manages the workflow, employing synchronized threading to ensure only one car crosses the bridge at a time. Overall, the system provides a visual representation of the classic synchronization problem in a web-based environment, enhancing understanding of multithreading concepts.