

A Multi-Point Sense Amplifier for Embedded SRAM

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Abstract

This paper describes new sense amplifier with fast sensing delay time of 0.54ns and 32kb CMOS embedded SRAM with 4.67ns access time for a 3-V power supply. It was achieved using the sense amplifier with multiple point sensing scheme and high speed bit-line scheme. The sense amplifier saves 25% of the power dissipation compared with the conventional one while maintaining a very short sensing delay. The SRAM uses 0.5 μ m double-polysilicon and triple-metal CMOS process technology. A die size is 1.78mm \times 2.13mm.

I. Introduction

As hand held computers and personal digital assistants(PDA) have been developed, the demand for low power and high speed memories is increasing. An embedded memory with high performance has been reported[1]-[3]. The access time of embedded SRAM is determined by the critical path from address input to data output which consists of address buffers, decoders, memory cells, sense amplifiers, and output buffers. The address buffer and decoder circuits are composed of typical gates, which determine the delay time from the address input to the word line. Therefore, the effective method to reduce the delay time of these circuits may be to improve the switching speed of the primitive gates and to optimize the size of gates. On the other hand, in the path from the word line to the data output, various circuit technologies have been proposed to improve the speed[4]-[7]. This paper deals with circuit technologies such as the bit-line peripheral circuits and sense amplifier, especially a high speed sense amplifier was a key to achieve high speed embedded SRAM.

A novel Multi-Point Sense Amplifier is in section II and its advantages are described with applied bit-line schemes in section III. In section IV, a simulated result is presented. Finally, section V summarizes the paper.

II. Sense Amplifier Circuit and Bit-Line Scheme

As the density of CMOS SRAM increases, the fast access time is becoming an important factor. To reduce the access time during a read operation, the swing on the bit-lines should be as small as possible. The bit-line voltage swing versus local data bus delay is shown in Fig. 1.

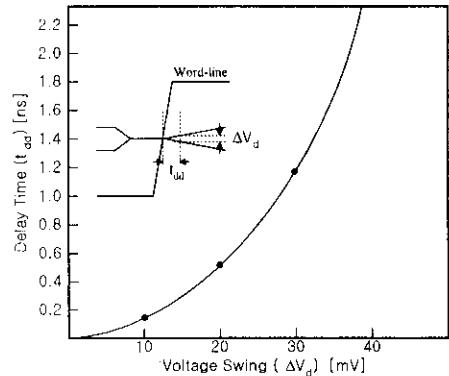
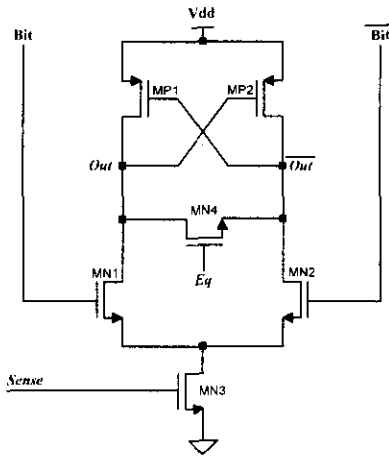
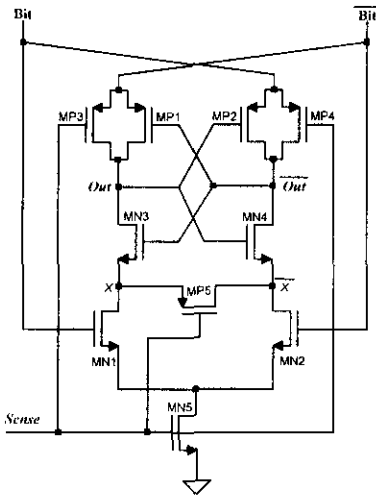


Figure 1. Bit-line Voltage Swing versus Local Data-bus Delay Time

Since this voltage swing becomes the input signal to the sense amplifier, a small bit-line voltage swing causes additional time delays. A conventional PMOS cross-coupled sense amplifier shown in Fig. 2(a) has already been reported[8][9], which achieves the power reduction without degradation of the access speed[10]. The MN1 and MN2 are used to convert the difference voltage of bit-line into current difference flowing through MN1 and MN2, resulting in the difference voltage at the \overline{Out} and Out . Both outputs \overline{Out} and Out are precharged to Vdd. Because the voltage gain of MN1 and MN2 is lower than one, the sense amplifier has less sensing performance at low slew-rate after Sense signal activates MN3.



(a) Conventional PMOS Cross-coupled Sense Amplifier



(b) Proposed Multi-Point Sense Amplifier

Figure 2. Conventional & Proposed Sense Amplifier

The proposed Multi-Point Sense Amplifier(MPSA) is shown in Fig. 2(b). The MPSA consists of CMOS-coupled pair, equalizing transistor and sensing input transistors. The source nodes of PMOS transistors, MP1-MP4, for CMOS cross-coupled pair is connected on bit-line, which has a function that transfers the voltage difference of bit-line before the Sense signal activates. The equalizing transistor MP5 is connected between X and \bar{X} . The operation of this circuit is as follow. When the Sense signal voltage is the ground level, the MP3 and MP4 transistor transport the bit-line difference from both bit lines to the nodes Out and \bar{Out} , which causes the splitting voltage level on output nodes. Therefore, the both X and \bar{X} voltage is equalized by MP5. This equalizing scheme accelerates the sensing speed. When the Sense signal

voltage rises to V_{dd} , the current that is flowing through MN5 causes the voltage lowering on the drain node of MN5. As the voltage difference between gate and source of MN1 or MN2 is large enough to turn on the transistor, the voltage difference of bit lines is amplified. Consequently, the sensing delay time is reduced because the MPSA senses the bit-line input at the multi-sensing points, which is more explained by several reasons as follow. Firstly, the output nodes are sensed through MP3 and MP4. Secondly, MN1 and MN2 amplify the input difference as amplifier when the Sense signal activates. Finally, MP1 and MP2 transports the bit-line voltage to output nodes.

Fig. 3 shows the sensing delay of conventional sense amplifier and proposed MPSA as a function of slew-rate variation of bit lines. The sensing delay is defined as the time interval from the crossing point of the input voltage to the point when the output voltage swing becomes 1V. The sensing delay of both of the sense amplifiers increase gradually as decreasing the slew-rate. The proposed MPSA shows a shorter delay time by 0.35ns at 100mV/ns and small dependence on bit-line slew-rate than the conventional one. This small dependence on the bit-line slew-rate also reduces the sensitivity of access time at low slew-rate. Fig. 4 shows the dependence of the sensing delay on the sense amplifier active current, I_{S3} which is simulated under the condition of 50mV input voltage swing and 1V output voltage swing. The conventional sense amplifier has a large dependence on the active current, especially at low current, whereas the proposed MPSA has very small dependence on the active current even at low current level. This means that proposed MPSA has low power dissipation than the conventional one. Using this proposed sense amplifier, we have obtained a sense amplifier speed of 0.48ns with 180 μ A sense amplifier current. The same delay is attained with as much as 240 μ A using the conventional sense amplifier. The MPSA saves power dissipation that is required for the conventional one to attain the same short delay time.

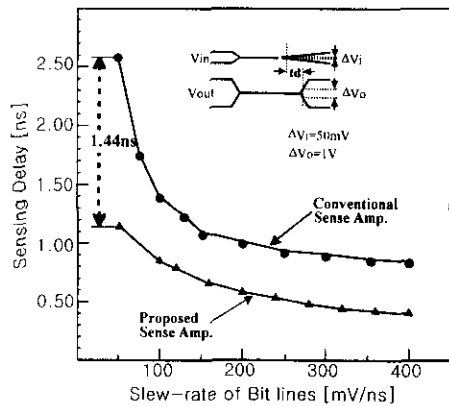


Figure 3. Sensing Delay vs. Slew-rate of Bit Lines

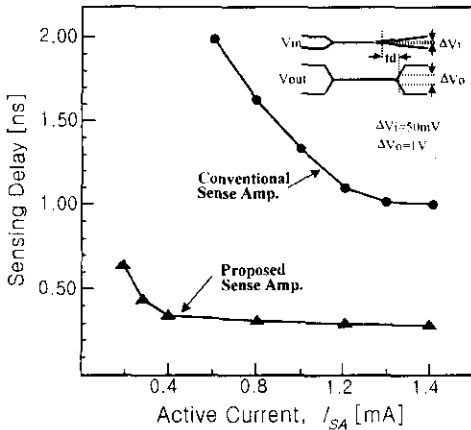


Figure 4. Sensing Delay vs. Active Current, I_{SA}

III. Bit-Line Schemes

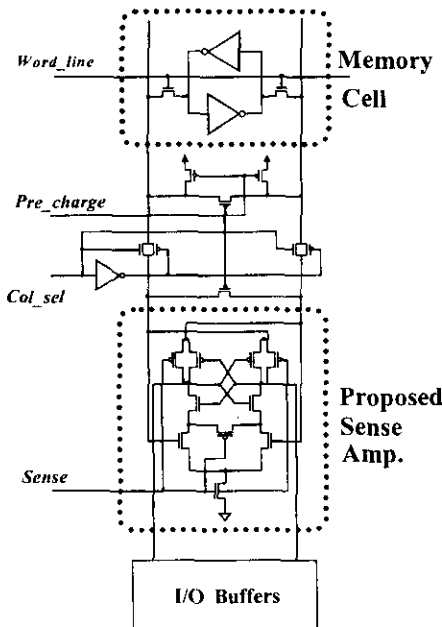


Figure 5. The Bit-line and Local-data-bus Peripheral Circuits

The bit-line and local-data-bus peripheral circuits are shown Fig. 5. Precharging and equalizing circuits are connected to the column selecting circuit. In the conventional fast SRAM design, the bit-line precharge and equalize techniques is used. However, this technique is not suitable for large SRAM because the total gate capacitance of the precharge transistors is too large for fast operation. The precharge circuit driven by *Pre_charge* is used instead of the static precharge transistors. Therefore, the precharge and equalize operation of this bit-line circuit is the same as that of the conventional circuit without sacrificing any precharge

capability. The sense amplifier is followed by column selecting circuit. The *Col_sel* signal controls the column access. If a column is not selected, the read and write access remains off while bit-line precharge devices are on, acting as bit-line clamps. As a consequence, dc power consumed in all unselected columns of the memory during a read or write cycle.

A SmartSpice of Silvaco Co. was used to simulate for a read cycle, which is resulting in Fig. 6. This figure shows two cases, that is, using conventional sense amplifier and MPSA. In the case using conventional one, the *Sense* signal rises after bit-line swing is large enough to activate the sense amplifier. Therefore, additional access delay is induced in the following bit-line voltage swing. In the case using the MPSA, the *Sense* signal quickly rises, because the output nodes of the MPSA are already precharged to bit-line voltage level. Consequently, additional delay time does not occur.

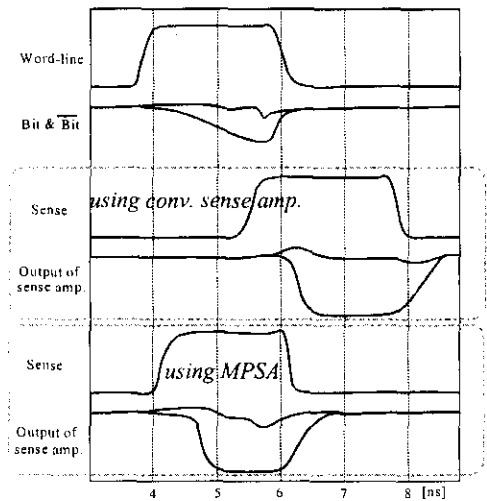


Figure 6. Comparison Waveforms using MPSA & Conventional Sense Amp.

IV. Simulation Results

To demonstrate the proposed sense amplifier, the MPSA is applied to a 32kb high speed embedded SRAM. The SRAM uses a $0.5\mu\text{m}$ CMOS process technology. The MOSFET's has a gate length of $0.5\mu\text{m}$ for 3-V power supply. The memory cells use a polysilicon word line strapped metal layer every four columns to reduce word line delay. Fig. 7 shows the SRAM layout with MPSA for testing. The typical characteristics of 32kb SRAM are shown in Table I. The die measures $1.78\text{mm} \times 2.13\text{mm}$. The cell array consists of 128 rows by 256 columns. The address buffers, pre-decoders, and ATD circuits are laid out such that signal line lengths do not exceed 1.7mm, which makes signal delay less than 0.5ns. As a result, word-line selection time of 3.29ns is achieved. The simulation waveforms for 32kb SRAM access time is shown

in Fig. 8. Fig. 9 shows the total access time of the memory core of 32kb compared with conventional one. The sensing delay is reduced from 0.91ns to 0.54ns by the reason of using multi-point sensing scheme, and the bit-line delay is reduced from 1.65ns to 0.32ns. The total access time of memory is 4.67ns in this work, which is superior to that of conventional one reducing the 34% of access time.

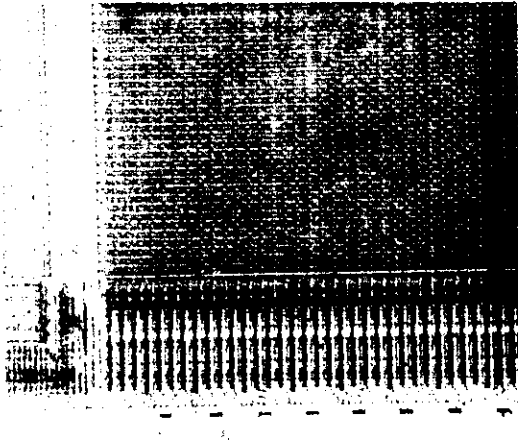


Figure 7. SRAM layout with MPSA

Table I
Typical Characteristics of 32kb SRAM

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Technology | 0.5 μ m twin-well 2-poly CMOS triple-metal |
| Configuration | 2k \times 16b |
| Power supply | 3V |
| Access time | 4.67ns |
| Chip size | 1.78mm \times 2.13mm |

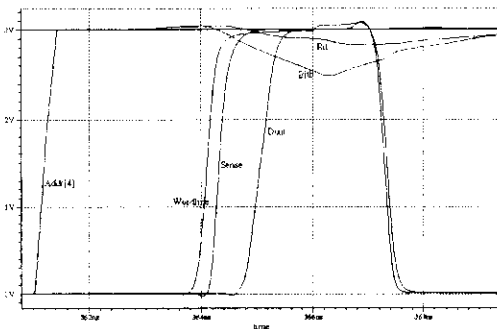


Figure 8. Simulation waveforms for 32k SRAM with the MPSA

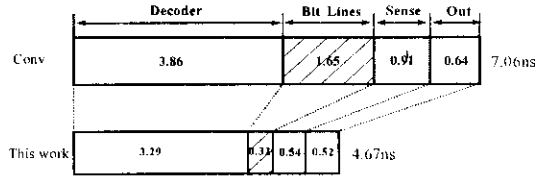


Figure 9. Comparison the access time

V. Conclusion

A new multi-point sense amplifier is proposed to correspond to the requirement of the fast embedded SRAM. It can amplify small input voltage swing with low active current. Consequently, a delay time of 0.54ns for the sense amplifier was achieved with 150 μ A sense amplifier current. The MPSA saves power dissipation in attaining a very short sensing delay. With the MPSA, the bit-line delay is reduced to 80% of that of conventional sense amplifier.

Reference

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