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Balachandran

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(54) **METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR PROCESSING
VEHICULAR VIOLATIONS**

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See application file for complete search history.

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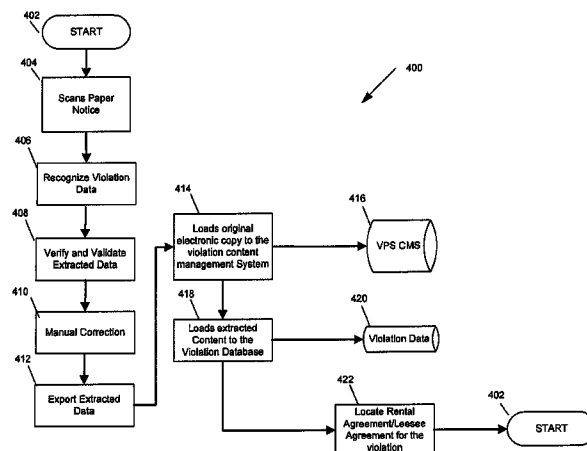
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method includes receiving paper comprising information regarding a vehicular violation, the information comprising a unique vehicle identifier and a violation classification, extracting from the paper the unique vehicle identifier and the violation classification via automated pattern recognition, uploading the extracted unique vehicle identifier and the violation classification to a database, determining whether the extracted unique vehicle identifier is associated with a predefined plurality of vehicles, responsive to a determination that the unique vehicle identifier is associated with a vehicle of the predefined plurality of vehicles, charging a violation fee for the vehicular violation to a party that was responsible for the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation, responsive to a determination that the unique vehicle identifier is not associated with the predefined plurality of vehicles, disputing responsibility for the vehicular violation.

27 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



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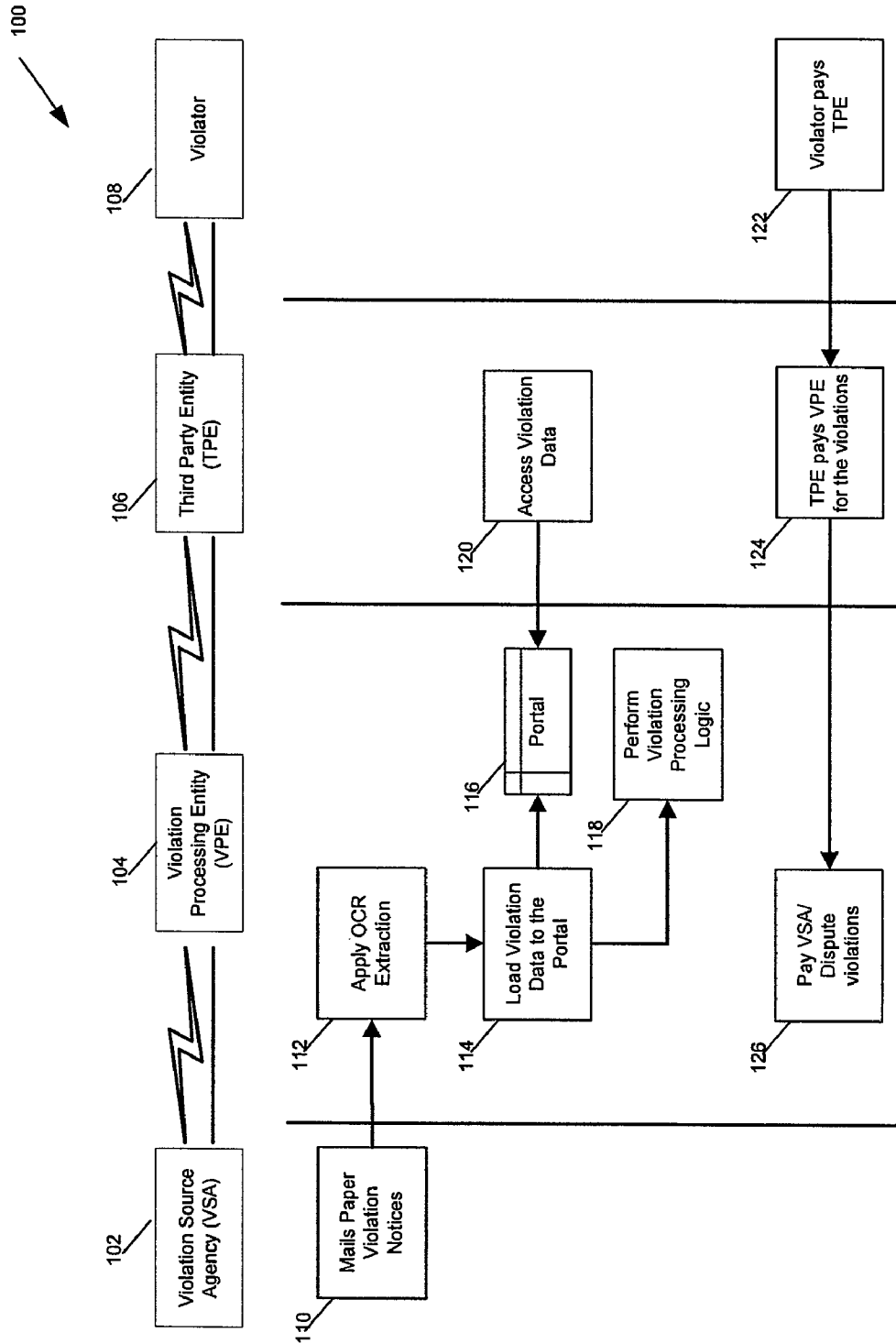


Figure 1

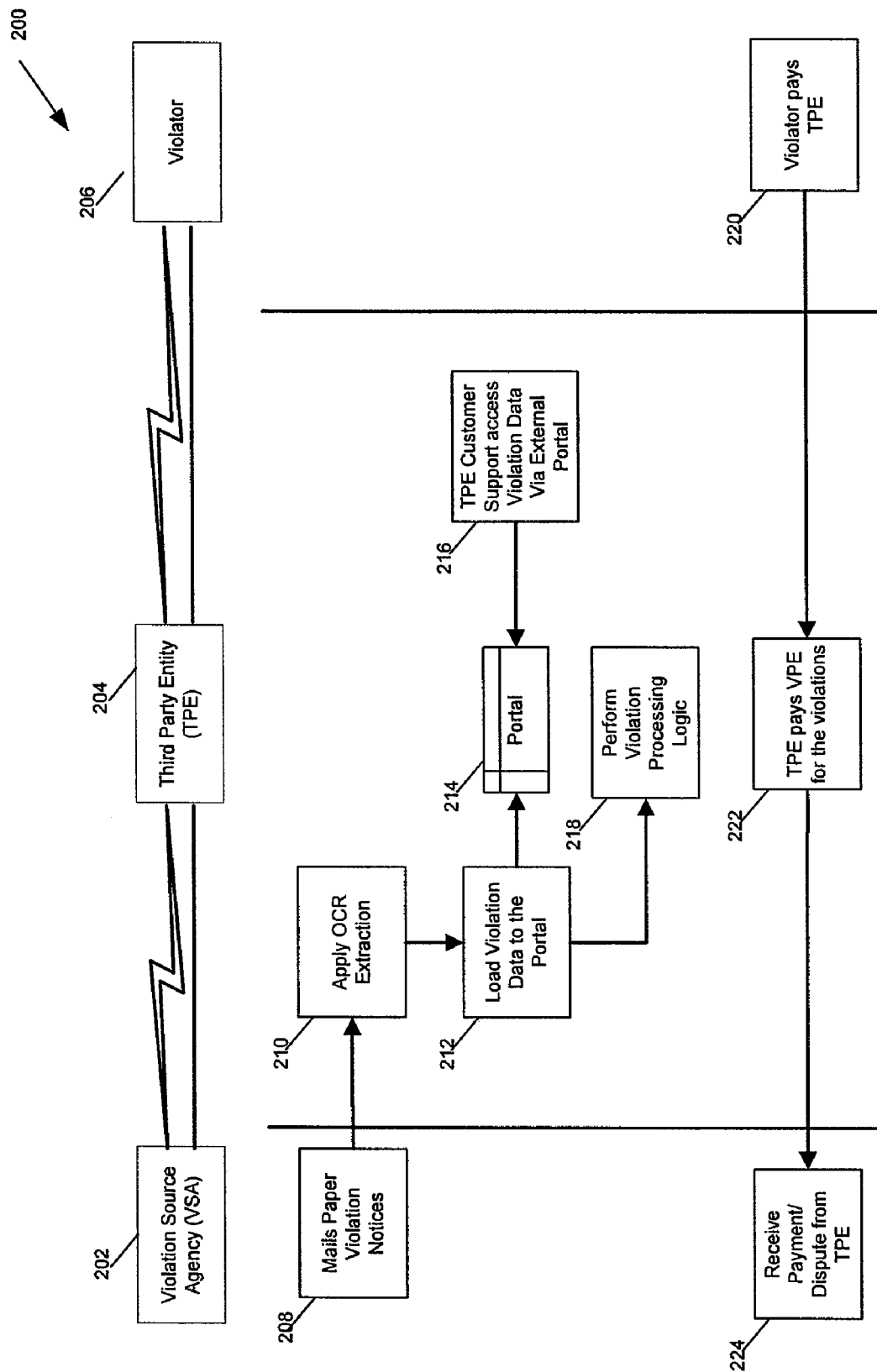


Figure 2

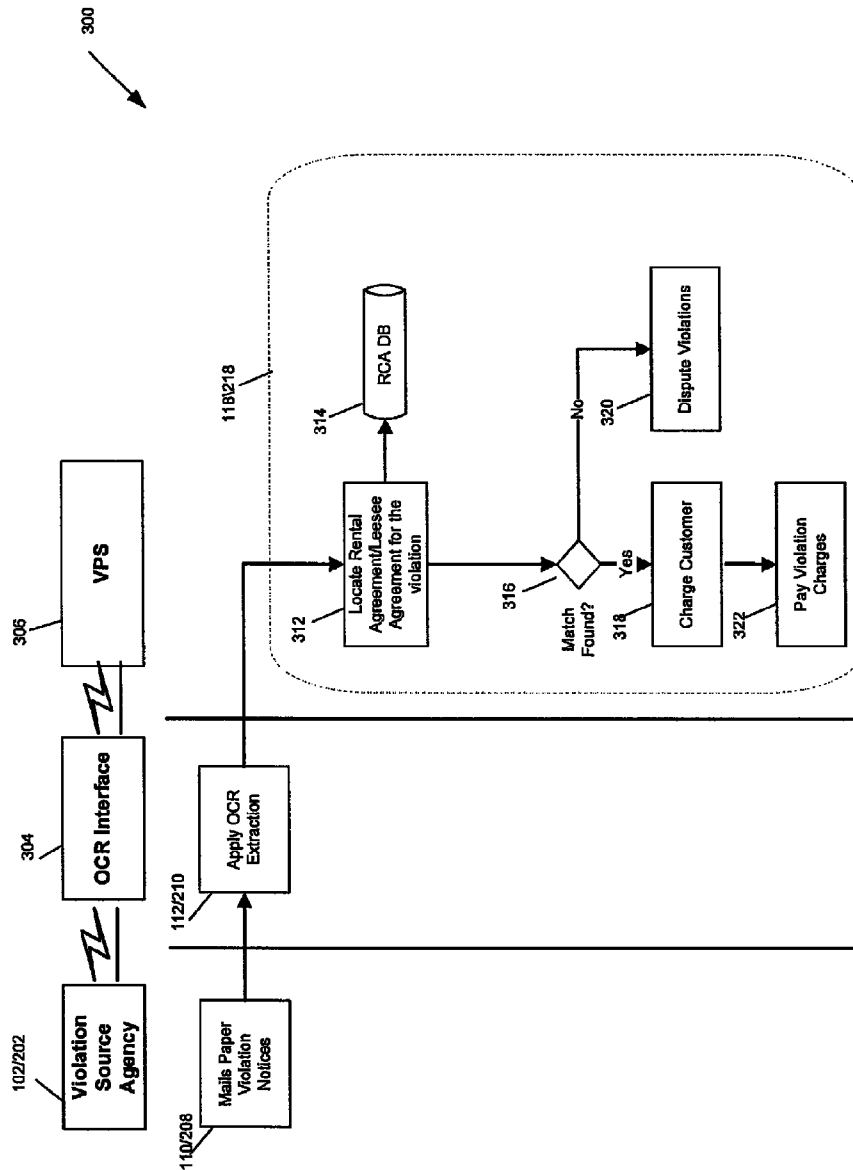


Figure 3

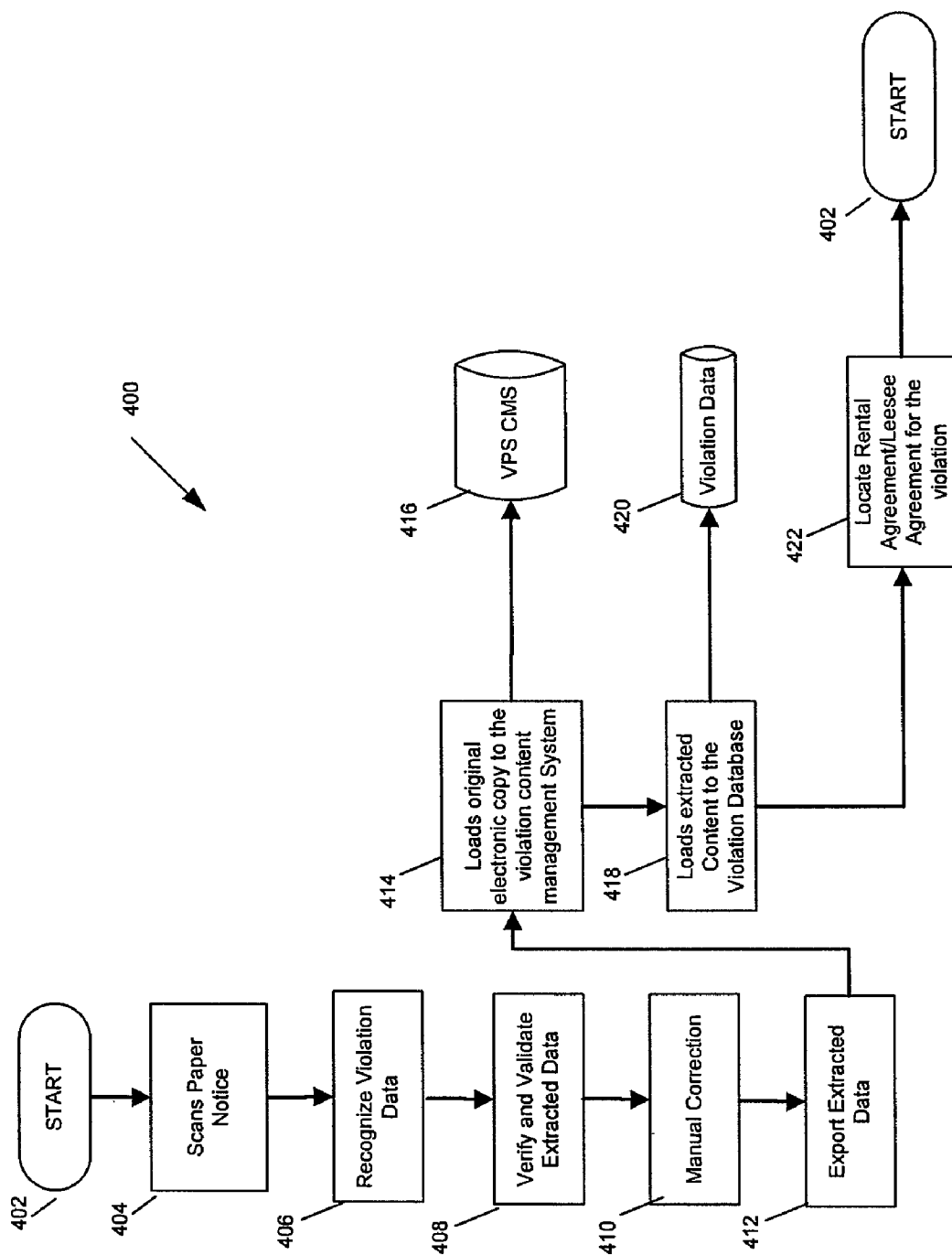


Figure 4

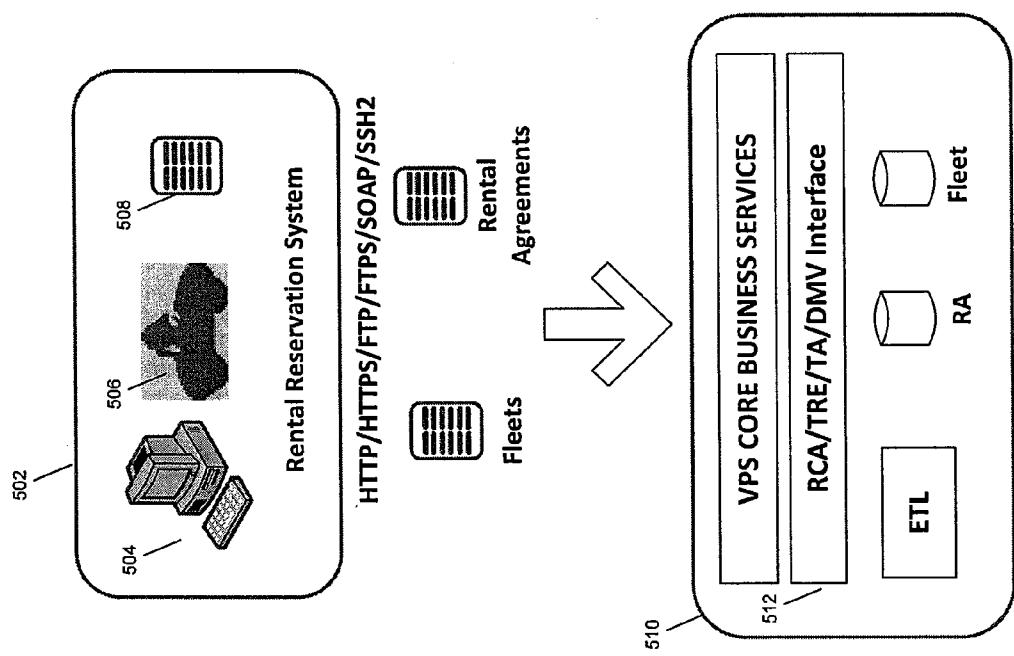


Figure 5

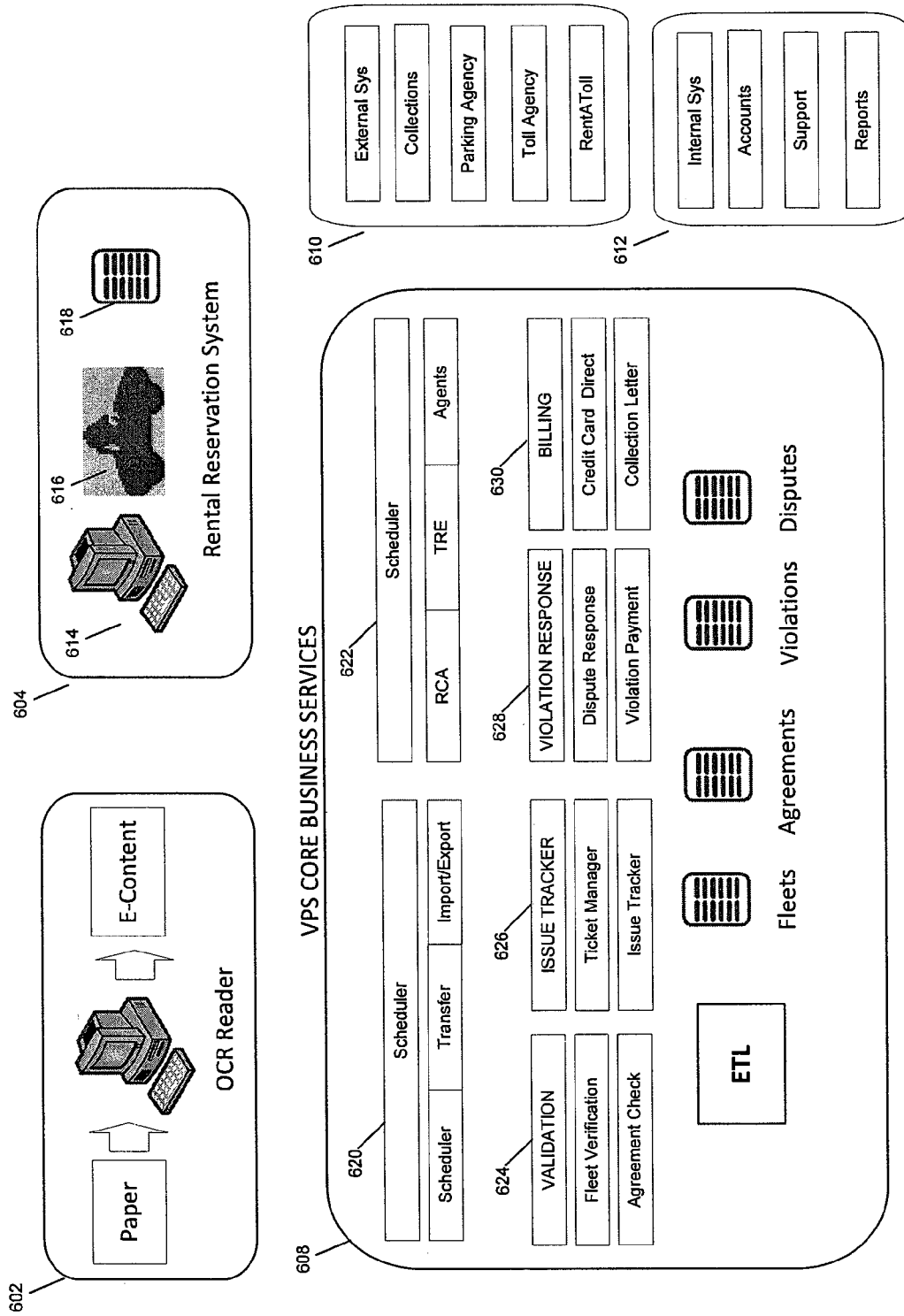


Figure 6

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METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR PROCESSING VEHICULAR VIOLATIONS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This patent application claims priority from, and incorporates by reference, U.S. Patent Application No. 61/104,471, filed on Oct. 10, 2008.

BACKGROUND

1. Technical Field

The invention relates generally to automation of processing of vehicular violations and, more particularly, but not by way of limitation, to automation of processing of vehicular violations involving vehicles operated, for example, by a fleet operator or a rental-car agency.

2. History Of Related Art

Third-party entities such as, for example, rental agencies, typically receive notices via standard mail from agencies such as, for example, governmental authorities, toll authorities, or the like regarding vehicular violations incurred by customers. The vehicular violations may include, but are not necessarily limited to, toll violations, parking violations, speeding violations, and the like.

After the notices of the vehicular violations are received, third-party-entity personnel often must manually search rental agreements or other records in order to determine an identity of a customer who was responsible for the violating vehicle at the time the violation occurred. In this way, the customer can be charged for the violation. In other circumstances, the third-party entity may send customer information to the entity from which the vehicular violation notice was received. Processes such as those described above are cumbersome, time-consuming, and expensive.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A method includes receiving paper comprising information regarding a vehicular violation, the information comprising a unique vehicle identifier and a violation classification, extracting from the paper the unique vehicle identifier and the violation classification via automated pattern recognition, uploading the extracted unique vehicle identifier and violation classification to a database, determining whether the extracted unique vehicle identifier is associated with a predefined plurality of vehicles, responsive to a determination that the unique vehicle identifier is associated with a vehicle of the predefined plurality of vehicles, charging a violation fee for the vehicular violation to a party that was responsible for the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation, responsive to a determination that the unique vehicle identifier is not associated with the predefined plurality of vehicles, disputing responsibility for the vehicular violation. The above summary of the invention is not intended to represent each embodiment or every aspect of the present invention.

A computer-program product includes a computer-usable medium having computer-readable program code embodied therein. The computer-readable program code adapted to be executed to implement a method that includes receiving paper comprising information regarding a vehicular violation, the information comprising a unique vehicle identifier and a violation classification, extracting from the paper the unique vehicle identifier and the violation classification via automated pattern recognition, uploading the extracted unique vehicle identifier and the violation classification to a data-

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base, determining whether the extracted unique vehicle identifier is associated with a predefined plurality of vehicles, responsive to a determination that the unique vehicle identifier is associated with a vehicle of the predefined plurality of vehicles, charging a violation fee for the vehicular violation to a party that was responsible for the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation, and responsive to a determination that the unique vehicle identifier is not associated with the predefined plurality of vehicles, disputing responsibility for the vehicular violation.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A more complete understanding of the method and system of the present invention may be obtained by reference to the following Detailed Description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying Drawings wherein:

FIG. 1 is a messaging diagram for a vehicular-violation processing system;

FIG. 2 illustrates a vehicular-violation processing system;

FIG. 3 illustrates in more detail violation processing logic;

FIG. 4 illustrates in more detail an OCR extraction process;

FIG. 5 illustrates communication between a third-party entity and a violation processing entity; and

FIG. 6 is a diagram of a violation management system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

Embodiment(s) of the invention will now be described more fully with reference to the accompanying Drawings. The invention may, however, be embodied in many different forms and should not be construed as limited to the embodiment(s) set forth herein. The invention should only be considered limited by the claims as they now exist and the equivalents thereof.

FIG. 1 is a messaging diagram for a vehicular-violation processing system. In FIG. 1, a vehicular-violation processing system 100 includes a violation source agency (VSA) 102, a violation processing entity (VPE) 104, a third-party entity 106 (TPE) and a violator 108. As illustrated in FIG. 1, the VPE 104 is interoperably coupled to both the VSA 102 and the TPE 106 and may communicate with each of the VSA 102 and the TPE 106. The TPE 106 and the violator 108 are interoperably coupled to one another and may communicate with each other. In a typical embodiment, the communication between the VSA 102, VPE 104, TPE 106, and the violator 108 may take place using connection oriented or communication less communication protocols such as, for example, HDTP, HDTPS, FTP, FTTS, SOAP, or SSH2.

In a typical embodiment, the VSA 102 may be, for example, an agency issuing vehicular violations. For example, the VSA 102 may be, for example, Dallas Parking Agency, DART, Dallas Police Department, collection agencies, and the like. In a typical embodiment, the VPE 104 may be, for example, an entity for receiving violation data from the VSA 102, performing violation processing logic, and forwarding data to the TPE 106. For example, the VPE 104 acts as a communication channel between the VSA 102 and the TPE 106 for forwarding data from the VSA 102 to the TPE 106 in, for example, real-time, near real-time, or periodic manner. In a typical embodiment, the TPE 106 may be, for example, a vehicle fleet operator such as, for example, a rental car agency, a vehicle lease agency, and the like. In a typical embodiment, the violator 108 may be, for example, a vehicle operator, a rental vehicle operator, an operator of a leased vehicle at a time when vehicle violation occurred.

Operation of the vehicular-violation processing system 100 will now be described in further detail beginning at step 110. At step 110, the VSA 102 mails paper vehicular violation notices to the VPE 104. The paper vehicular violation notices may be divided into a plurality of classifications. As an example, the paper vehicular violation notices could each be grouped into one of the following categories: first notice; second notice; collection letter; and court notice. At step 112, the VPE 104 applies optical character recognition (OCR) extraction techniques to identify and capture information contained in the paper vehicular violation notices. From step 112, execution proceeds to step 114. At step 114, the VPE 104 loads vehicular violation data obtained via step 112 to a portal 116. The portal 116 typically includes a searchable database and other functionality that permits the vehicular violation data from the paper vehicular violation notices to be processed, matched with violator data and otherwise handled in an automated fashion as will be described in further detail hereinbelow. From step 114, execution proceeds to step 118. At step 118, violation processing logic is performed on the vehicular violation data as well as, for example, rental agreement data also contained on the portal 116.

In addition, the TPE 106 at step 120 accesses the vehicular violation data contained on the portal 116. Moreover, at step 122, the violator pays the TPE 106 for the vehicular violation. In a typical embodiment, the vehicular violation may be, for example, a toll violation, a parking violation, a traffic violation, and the like. In step 124, in response to step 122, the TPE 106 pays the VPE 104 for the vehicular violation. In response to step 124, the VSA 102 is paid by the VPE 104.

In another option, as described in more detail below, the VPE 104 may dispute one or more of the vehicular violations contained in the paper vehicular violation notices 110. In a typical embodiment, upon disputing one or more of the vehicular violations, the VPE 104 is required to provide evidence of non-responsibility for the vehicle at a time of vehicular violation. For example, the evidence of non-responsibility may include, for example, vehicle sale documents, vehicle lease-return documents, and the like. In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 1, the VPE 104 is a stand-alone unit acting as a communication channel between the VSA 102 and the TPE 106 for performing violation processing logic on data received from the VSA 102 and forwarding to the TPE 106.

FIG. 2 illustrates a vehicular-violation processing system. In FIG. 2, a vehicular-violation processing system 200 includes a VSA 202, a TPE 204, and a violator 206. The TPE 204 is interoperably coupled to and is in communication with both the VSA 202 and the violator 206. At step 208, the VSA 202 mails paper vehicular violation notices to the TPE 204. The TPE 204 applies OCR extraction techniques at step 210 to the paper vehicular violation notices obtained via step 208. From step 210, execution proceeds to step 212, at which step vehicular violation data obtained via step 210 is loaded to a portal 214.

In a typical embodiment, the portal 214 includes a database onto which the vehicular violation data obtained in step 210 is loaded. The portal 214 may also include rental agreement and other data maintained by the TPE 204. At step 216, the TPE may permit customer support access to the vehicular violation data via the portal 214. At step 218, violation processing logic is performed on the vehicular violation data and possibly on other data on the portal 214. At step 220, the violator 206 pays the TPE 204 for the vehicular violation. In a typical embodiment, the vehicular violation may be, for example, a toll violation, a parking violation, a traffic violation, and the like. Responsive to step 220, the TPE 204 pays the VSA 202 for the vehicular violation. Responsive to step 222, at step

224, the VSA 202 receives payment or a dispute of one or more of the vehicular violations from the TPE 204. In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 2, the functionality for performing violation processing logic is integrated into an existing operating system of the TPE 204.

FIG. 3 illustrates in more detail violation processing logic. In FIG. 3, a processing system 300 is illustrated. The processing system 300 includes a VSA 102/202 that is interoperably coupled to and is in communication with an OCR interface 304. The OCR interface 304 is interoperably coupled to and in communication with a violation processing system 306. Those having skill in the art will appreciate that the OCR interface may be resident on either the VPE 104 or the TPE 204. In addition, in similar fashion, the VPS 306 is present on either the VPE 104 or the TPE 204. At step 110/208, paper vehicular violation notices are mailed. From step 110/208, execution proceeds to step 112/210, at which step OCR extraction is performed as described relative to FIG. 1 and FIG. 2 above. From step 112/210, execution proceeds to step 118/218.

Further detail relative to an exemplary method for performing the violation processing logic of step 118 or step 218 will now be provided. From step 112/210, execution proceeds to step 312. At step 312, a rental or lessee agreement is located on a rental car agreement (RCA) database 314 using, for example, a unique vehicle identifier. In a typical embodiment, the unique vehicle identifier may be, for example, a license plate number found via OCR extraction of a vehicular violation notice. In a typical embodiment, the RCA database 314 may be, for example, an Oracle™ database, a MS Access™ database, MS SQL, IBM DB2, and the like. From step 312, execution proceeds to step 316. At step 316, if a match is found, execution proceeds to step 318. If a match is not found, execution proceeds to step 320. At step 318, the customer who was responsible for the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation is charged and, at step 322, the vehicular violation charges are paid via the VPS 306. At step 320, if no match is found, the vehicular violations for which no match was found may be disputed via the VPS 306.

FIG. 4 illustrates in more detail an OCR extraction process. In FIG. 4, an OCR extraction process 400 is illustrated that could be used, for example, as step 112 or step 210. The OCR extraction process 400 begins at step 402 and proceeds to step 404, at which step a paper vehicular violation notice is scanned. At step 406, vehicular violation data on the paper vehicular violation notice is recognized. At step 408, data extracted at step 406 is verified and validated. At step 410, a manual correction process of extracted data from step 408 is performed. In some embodiments, step 410 might not be performed.

At step 412, the extracted and manually corrected data is exported. At step 414, an original electronic copy of the paper notice of step 404 is loaded to a violation content management system 416. In some embodiments, step 416 might not be performed. At step 418, the extracted content is loaded to a violation database 420. In a typical embodiment, the violation database 420 may be, for example, an Oracle™ database, a MS Access™ database, MS SQL, IBM DB2, and the like. At step 422, a rental or lessee agreement for the violation is located for the violation. At step 424, execution ends.

FIG. 5 illustrates communication between a third-party entity (TPE) 502 and a violation processing entity (VPE) 510. The TPE 502 includes information-technology infrastructure 504, vehicles for rent or lease 506, and rental agreements 508. Information regarding a fleet or rental agreement may be communicated to the VPE 510. The VPE 510 includes an interface to one or more of a rental car agreement, toll rental

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entity, toll authority, or department of motor vehicles **512**. Communication between the VPE **510** and the TPE **502** may take place using connection oriented or communication less communication protocols such as, for example, HDTP, HDTPS, FTP, FTTS, SOAP, or SSH2.

FIG. 6 is a diagram of a violation management system **600**. The violation management system **600** includes an OCR module **602**, a third-party entity (TPE) **604**, violation processing entity (VPE) **608**, violation source agencies (VSA) **610**, and an internal system module **612**. In a typical embodiment, the OCR module **602** is operable to use extraction techniques to identify and capture information contained in the paper vehicular violation notices. The extracted information is then communicated to functionality within the VPE **608**.

In a typical embodiment, the VPE **608** includes an extract-transform-load (ETL) module **620**, a system integrator module **622**, a validation module **624**, an issue tracker module **626**, a violation response module **628**, and a billing module **630**. In a typical embodiment, the ETL module **620** is operable to create a schedule for the extracted data to be imported from the OCR module **602**. Once the data is imported from the OCR module **602** by the ETL module **620**, the validation module **624** performs a series of verifications such as, for example, fleet verifications, agreement verifications for the vehicular violation.

The issue tracker module **626** is operable to store each vehicular violation. For example, for every vehicular violation, the issue tracker module **626** generates a separate ticket. In a typical embodiment, the issue tracker module **626** is operable to track and prioritize each vehicular violation.

The violation response module **628** is operable to provide responses to various violation agencies. The violation agencies may be, for example, Dallas Parking Agency, DART, Dallas Police Department, collection agencies, and the like. The violation response module **628** is also operable to set up an automated response to the violation agencies related to the status of vehicular violations issued by the violation agencies. The billing module **630** is operable to receive payment from the violators.

In a typical embodiment, the system integrator module **622** is operable to interact with the TPE **604** and the VSA **610**. In a typical embodiment, the VSA **610** may be, for example, an agency issuing vehicular violations. For example, the VSA **610** may be, for example, Dallas Parking Agency, DART, Dallas Police Department, collection agencies, and the like. In a typical embodiment, the TPE **604** includes customer support infrastructure **614**, a rental reservation system **616**, and a billing system **618**. In a typical embodiment, the billing system may further include, for example, a rental point-of-sale (POS) system, a customer invoice unit, and the like.

Although various embodiments of the method and apparatus of the present invention have been illustrated in the accompanying Drawings and described in the foregoing Detailed Description, it will be understood that the invention is not limited to the embodiments disclosed, but is capable of numerous rearrangements, modifications and substitutions without departing from the spirit of the invention as set forth herein.

What is claimed is:

1. A method comprising:

receiving paper comprising information regarding a vehicular violation, the information comprising a unique vehicle identifier and a violation classification; extracting from the paper the unique vehicle identifier and the violation classification via automated pattern recognition;

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uploading the extracted unique vehicle identifier and the violation classification to a database;

determining whether the extracted unique vehicle identifier is associated with a predefined plurality of vehicles;

responsive to a determination that the unique vehicle identifier is associated with a vehicle of the predefined plurality of vehicles, charging a violation fee for the vehicular violation to a party that was responsible for the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation;

responsive to a determination that the unique vehicle identifier is not associated with the predefined plurality of vehicles, disputing responsibility for the vehicular violation; and

wherein the predefined plurality of vehicles is a plurality of vehicles available for rent by a rental-car agency.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the disputing step comprises providing evidence of non-responsibility for the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the evidence of non-responsibility comprises sale documents.

4. The method of claim 2, wherein the evidence of non-responsibility comprises lease-return documents.

5. The method of claim 1, comprising, responsive to a determination that the unique vehicle identifier is associated with the vehicle of the predefined plurality of vehicles:

determining whether the vehicle was rented at the time of the vehicular violation;

responsive to a determination that the vehicle was rented at the time of the vehicular violation, identifying a renter of the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation as the party responsible for the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation; and

responsive to a determination that the vehicle was not rented at the time of the vehicular violation, identifying the rental-car agency as the party responsible for the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation.

6. The method of claim 5, comprising:

identifying an employee of the rental-car agency who was responsible for the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation; and

charging the employee the violation fee.

7. The method of claim 1, comprising paying the violation fee.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the unique vehicle identifier is a license-plate number.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the determining step comprises comparing the unique vehicle identifier to a plurality of unique vehicle identifiers in a database.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein the database comprises rental-car-agreement data of a rental-car agency.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the vehicular violation is selected from the group consisting of a toll violation, a parking violation, and a traffic violation.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein the violation classification is selected from the group consisting of a first notice, a second notice, a collection letter, and a court notice.

13. The method of claim 1, comprising sorting the vehicular violation among a plurality of vehicular violations by the violation classification.

14. A computer-program product comprising a non-transitory computer-readable medium encoded with a computer-readable program code embodied therein, the computer-readable program code adapted to be executed to implement a method comprising:

receiving paper comprising information regarding a vehicular violation, the information comprising a unique vehicle identifier and a violation classification;

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extracting from the paper the unique vehicle identifier and the violation classification via automated pattern recognition;

uploading the extracted unique vehicle identifier and the violation classification to a database;

determining whether the extracted unique vehicle identifier is associated with a predefined plurality of vehicles; responsive to a determination that the unique vehicle identifier is associated with a vehicle of the predefined plurality of vehicles, charging a violation fee for the vehicular violation to a party that was responsible for the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation;

responsive to a determination that the unique vehicle identifier is not associated with the predefined plurality of vehicles, disputing responsibility for the vehicular violation; and

wherein the predefined plurality of vehicles is a plurality of vehicles available for rent by a rental-car agency.

15. The computer-program product of claim 14, wherein the disputing step comprises providing evidence of non-responsibility for the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation.

16. The computer-program product of claim 15, wherein the evidence of non-responsibility comprises sale documents.

17. The computer-program product of claim 15, wherein the evidence of non-responsibility comprises lease-return documents.

18. The computer-program product of claim 14, the method comprising, responsive to a determination that the unique vehicle identifier is associated with the vehicle of the predefined plurality of vehicles:

determining whether the vehicle was rented at the time of the vehicular violation;

responsive to a determination that the vehicle was rented at the time of the vehicular violation, identifying a renter of the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation as the party responsible for the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation; and

responsive to a determination that the vehicle was not rented at the time of the vehicular violation, identifying the rental-car agency as the party responsible for the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation.

19. The computer-program product of claim 18, the method comprising:

identifying an employee of the rental-car agency who was responsible for the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation; and

charging the employee the violation fee.

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20. The computer-program product of claim 14, the method comprising paying the violation fee.

21. The computer-program product of claim 14, wherein the unique vehicle identifier is a license-plate number.

22. The computer-program product of claim 14, wherein the determining step comprises comparing the unique vehicle identifier to a plurality of unique vehicle identifiers in a database.

23. The computer-program product of claim 22, wherein the database comprises rental-car-agreement data of a rental-car agency.

24. The computer-program product of claim 14, wherein the vehicular violation is selected from the group consisting of a toll violation, a parking violation, and a traffic violation.

25. The computer-program product of claim 14, wherein the violation classification is selected from the group consisting of a first notice, a second notice, a collection letter, and a court notice.

26. The computer-program product of claim 14, comprising sorting the vehicular violation among a plurality of vehicular violations by the violation classification.

27. A method comprising:

receiving paper comprising information regarding a vehicular violation, the information comprising a unique vehicle identifier and a violation classification; extracting from the paper the unique vehicle identifier and the violation classification via automated pattern recognition;

uploading the extracted unique vehicle identifier and the violation classification to a database;

determining whether the extracted unique vehicle identifier is associated with a predefined plurality of vehicles; responsive to a determination that the unique vehicle identifier is associated with a vehicle of the predefined plurality of vehicles, charging a violation fee for the vehicular violation to a party that was responsible for the vehicle at the time of the vehicular violation;

responsive to a determination that the unique vehicle identifier is not associated with the predefined plurality of vehicles, disputing responsibility for the vehicular violation;

wherein the determining step comprises comparing the unique vehicle identifier to a plurality of unique vehicle identifiers in a database; and

wherein the database comprises rental-car-agreement data of a rental-car agency.

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