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Fan

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(54) **METHOD FOR DISTRIBUTING LOCATION-RELEVANT INFORMATION USING A NETWORK**

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Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation-in-part of application No. 09/365,671, filed on Aug. 2, 1999, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 08/924,042, filed on Aug. 28, 1997, now Pat. No. 5,959,577.

(51) **Int. Cl.**⁷ **G01S 5/02; H04B 7/185**

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **342/357.09; 701/213**

(58) **Field of Search** **342/357.09, 357.1; 701/213**

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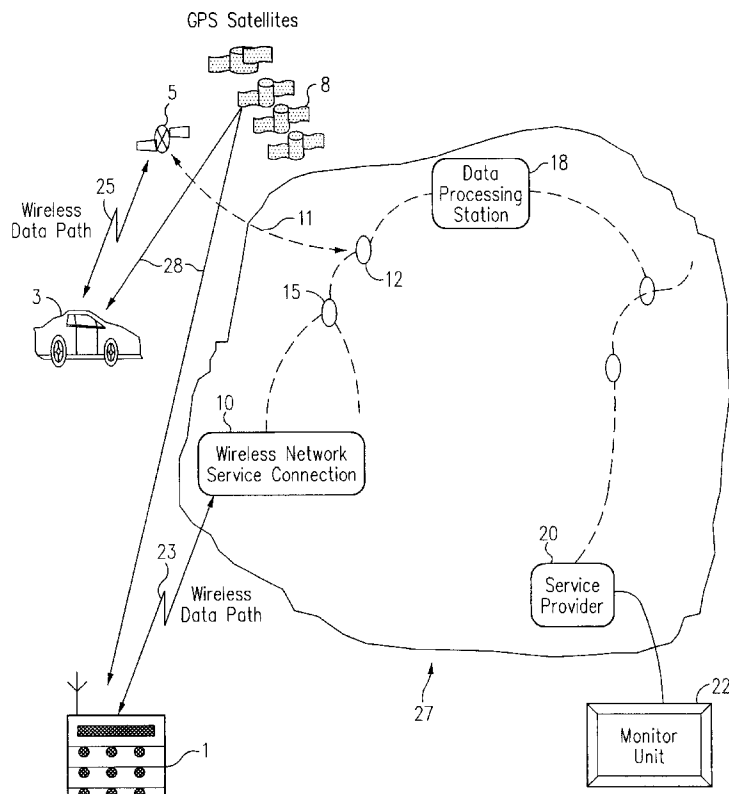
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method for distributing locating-relevant information includes providing a GPS position of a client to a server on a data network, and returning location-relevant information by the server based on the specified GPS position. Such location-relevant information include travel or tourist information (e.g., locations of tourist attractions, hotels, or restaurants). Commercial information such as discount coupons or advertising selected based on the Client's GPS position can also be provided. Financial or business transactions can be conducted using the GPS position for authentication or identification.

48 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



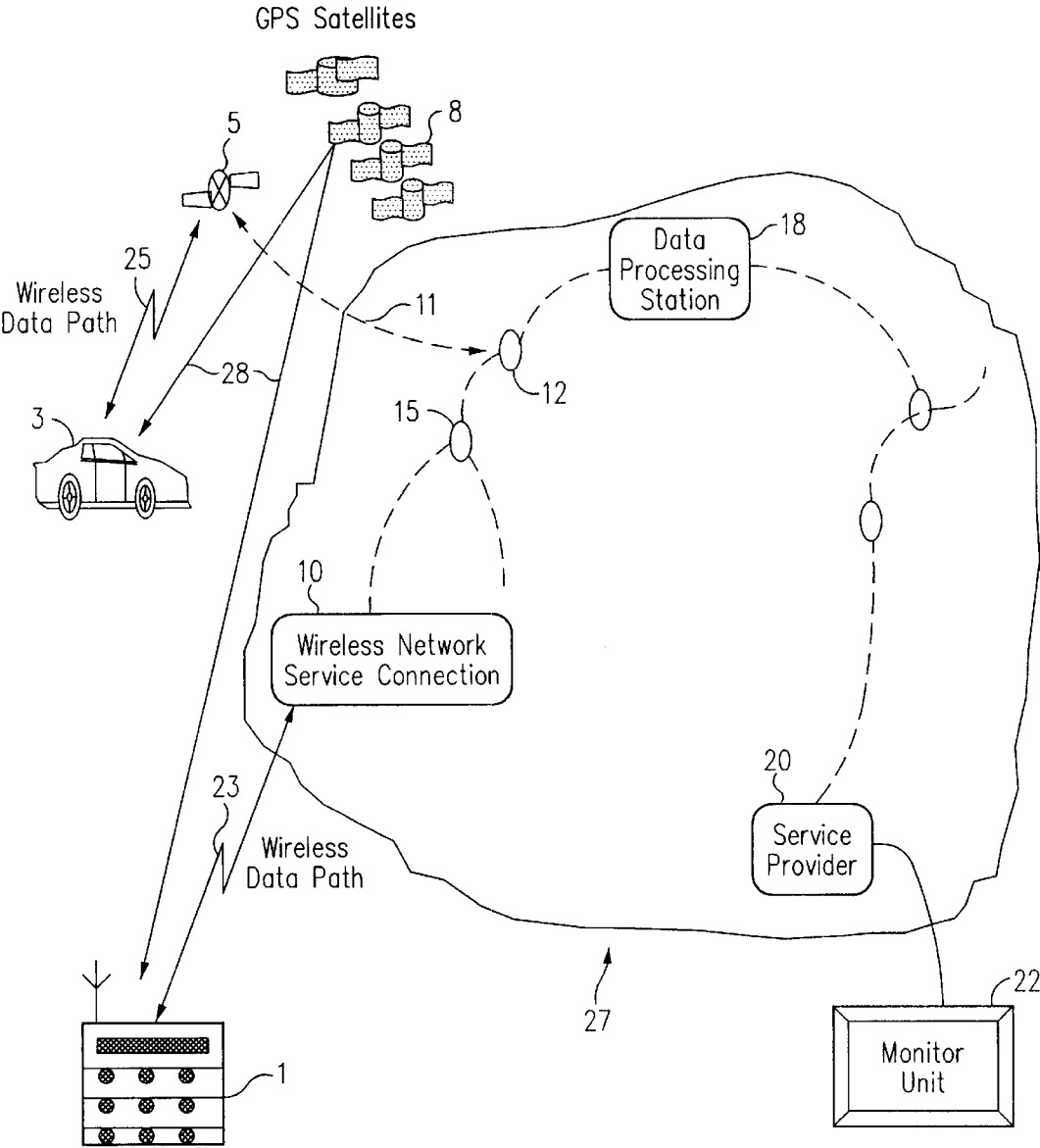


FIG. 1

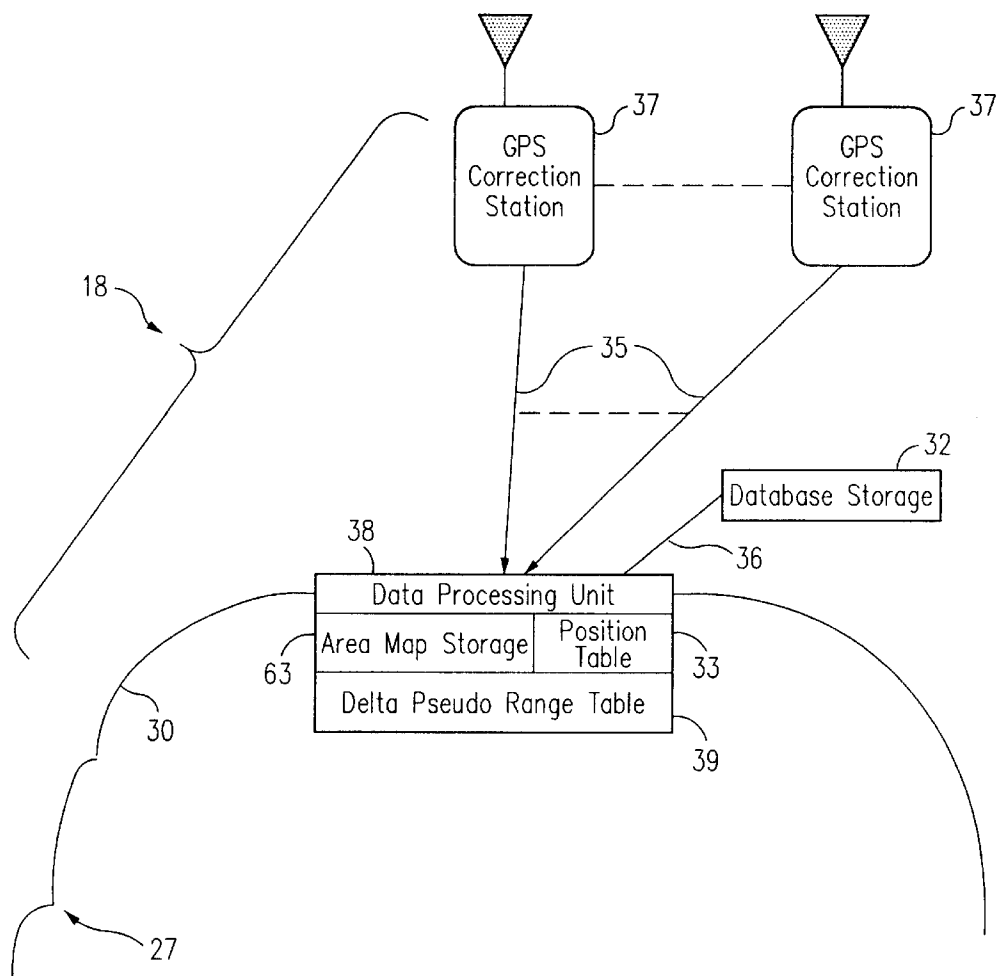


FIG. 2

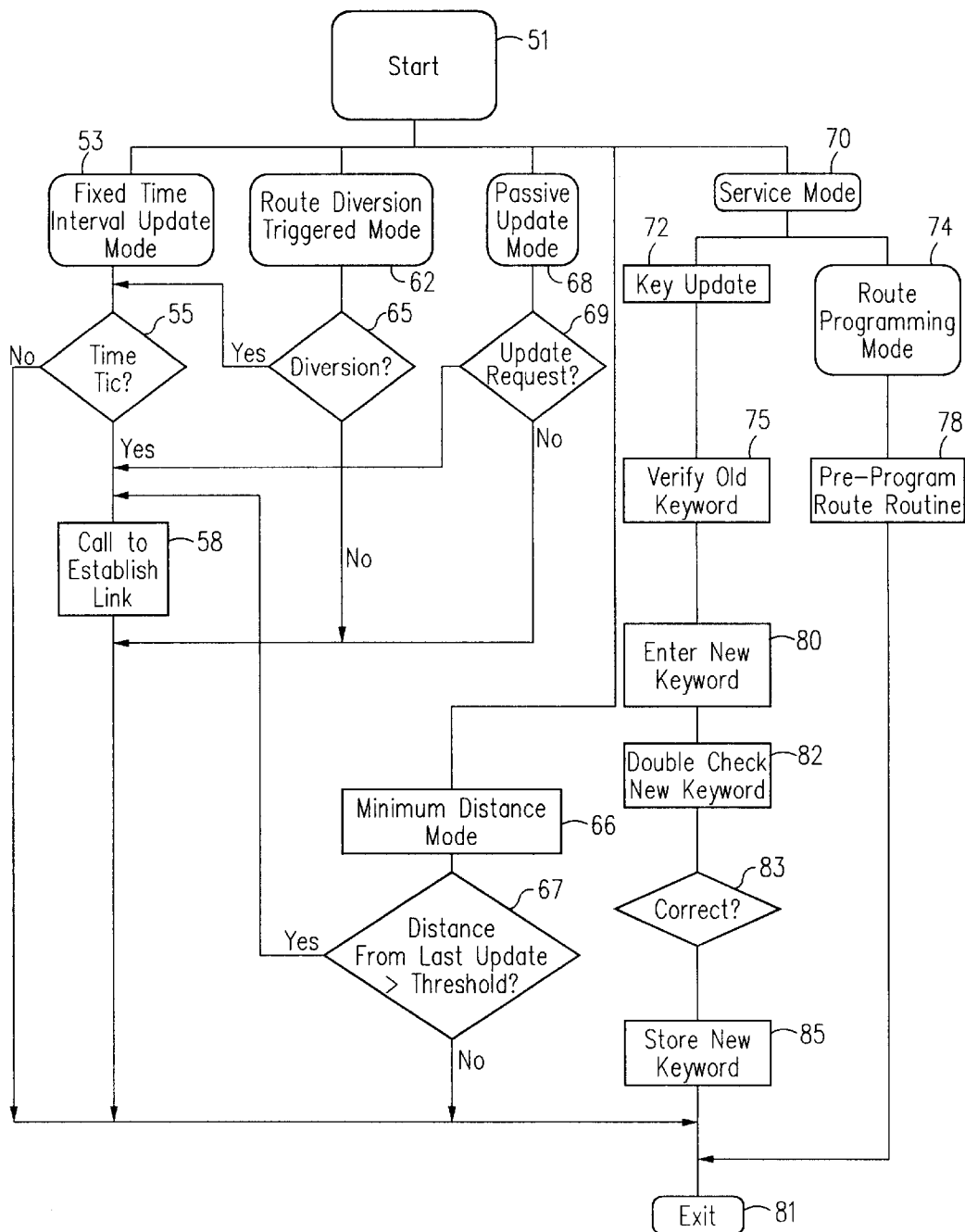


FIG. 3

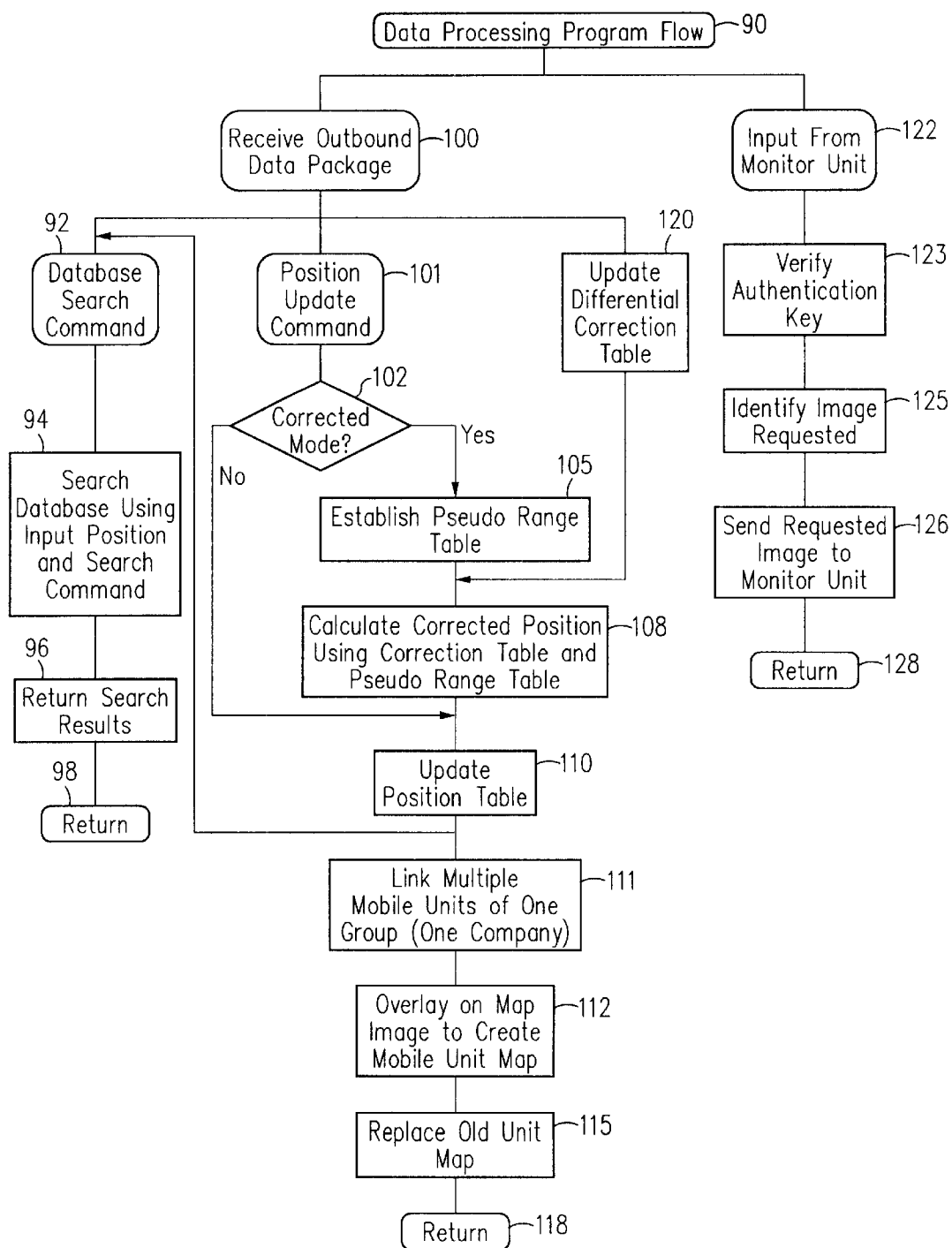


FIG. 4

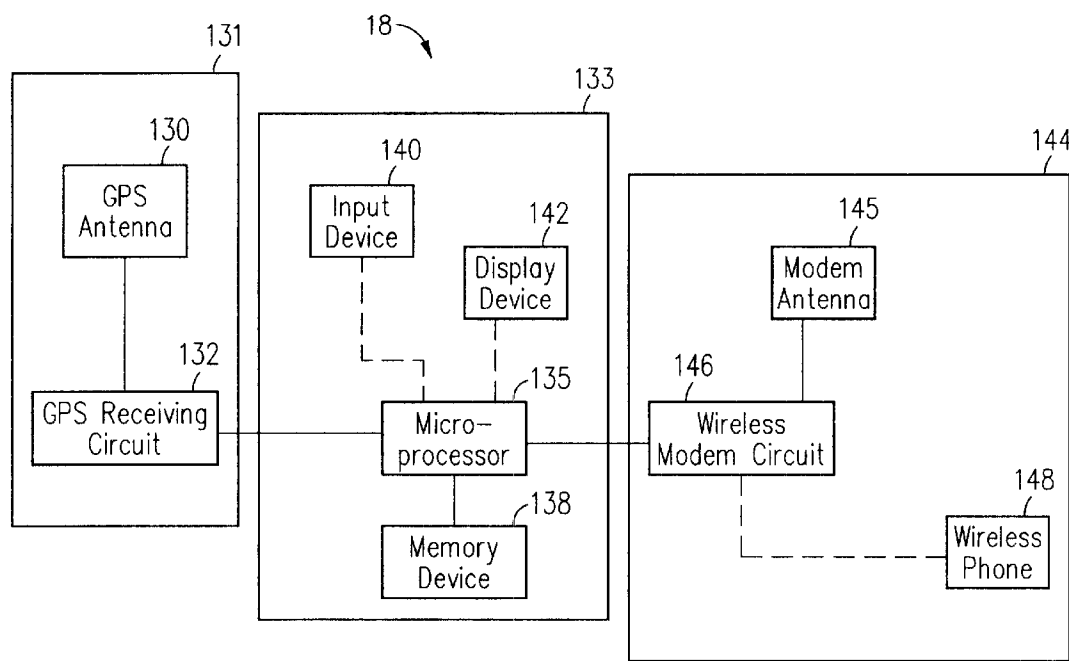


FIG. 5

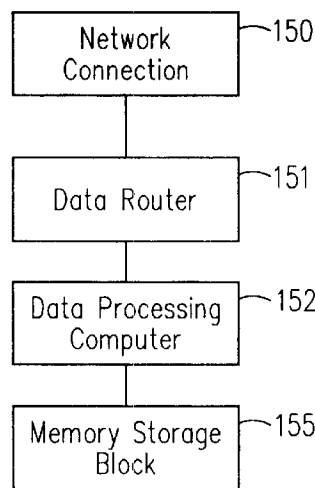


FIG. 6

160	162	165	168	170	
ID	Time	Latitude	Longitude	Velocity	
XX	XXX	XXXX	XXXX	XXX	33
*	*	**	**	*	
**	*	**	**	*	

FIG. 7

172	175							178		
ID	PR1, PR2, PR3, PR4, PR5, PR6, PR7, PR8								Time	40
MU1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1:00.00	
MU1	-	X	X	X	X	-	X	X	1:00.10	

FIG. 8

180	186							188	39
Area	DPR1, DPR2, DPR3, DPR4, DPR5, DPR6, DPR7, DPR8,	Time							
A	X X X X X X X X	1:00.00							
A	X X - X X - - X	1:00.10							
A	X - X X X - - -	1:00.50							

FIG. 9

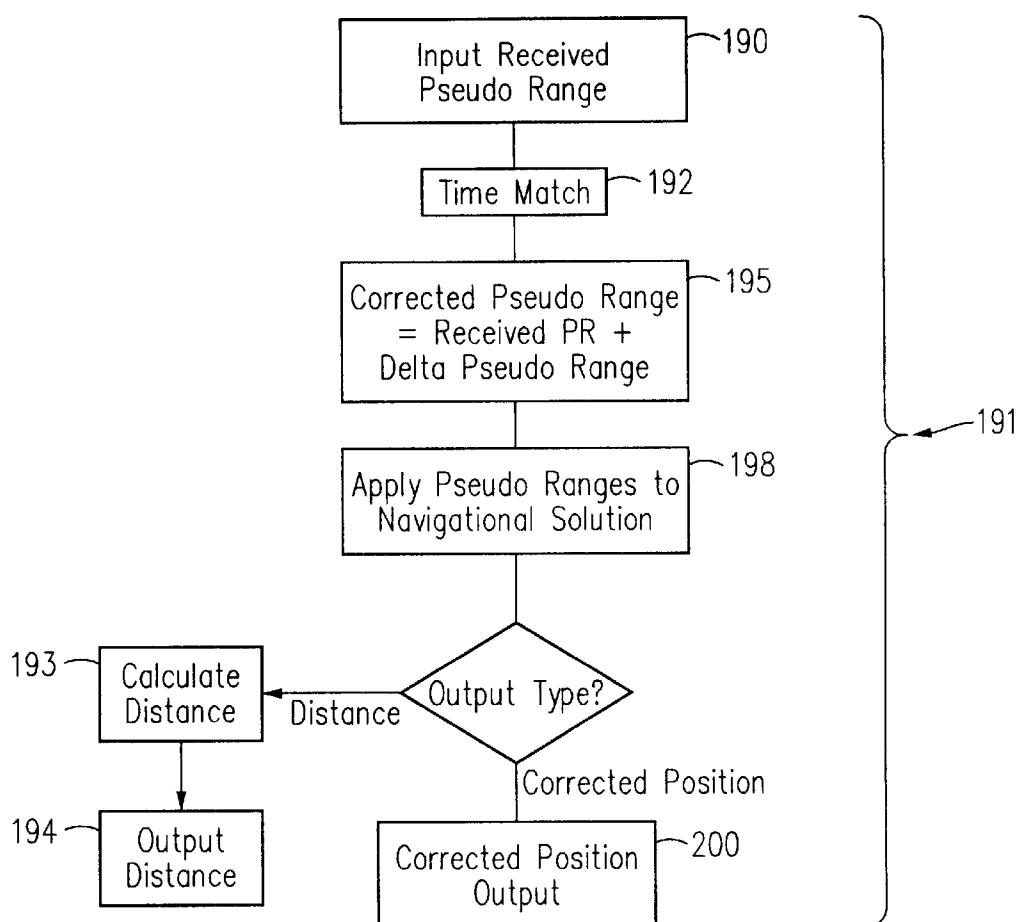


FIG. 10

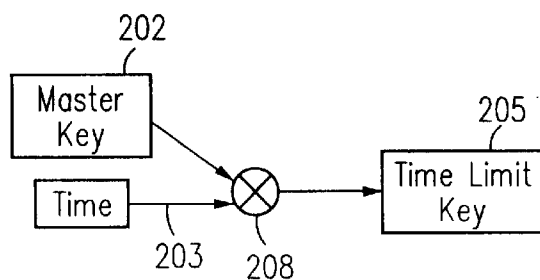


FIG. 11

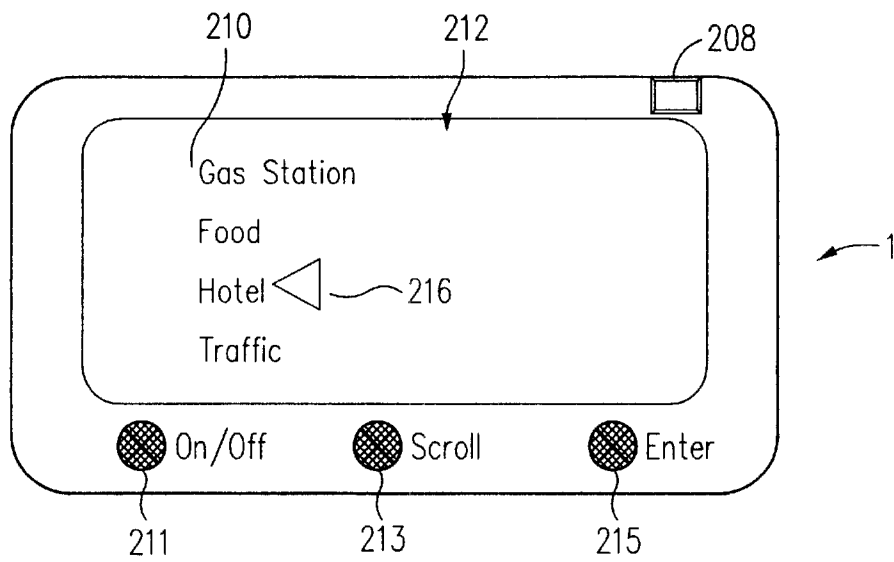


FIG. 12

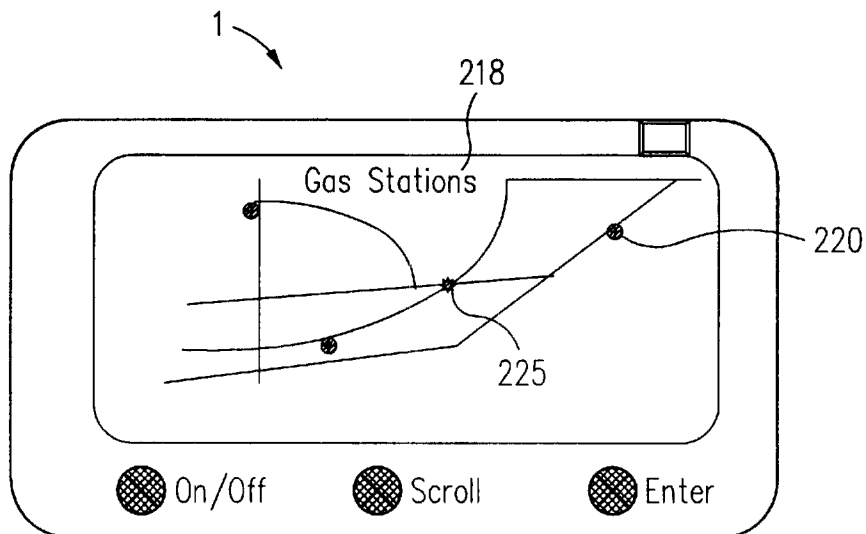


FIG. 13

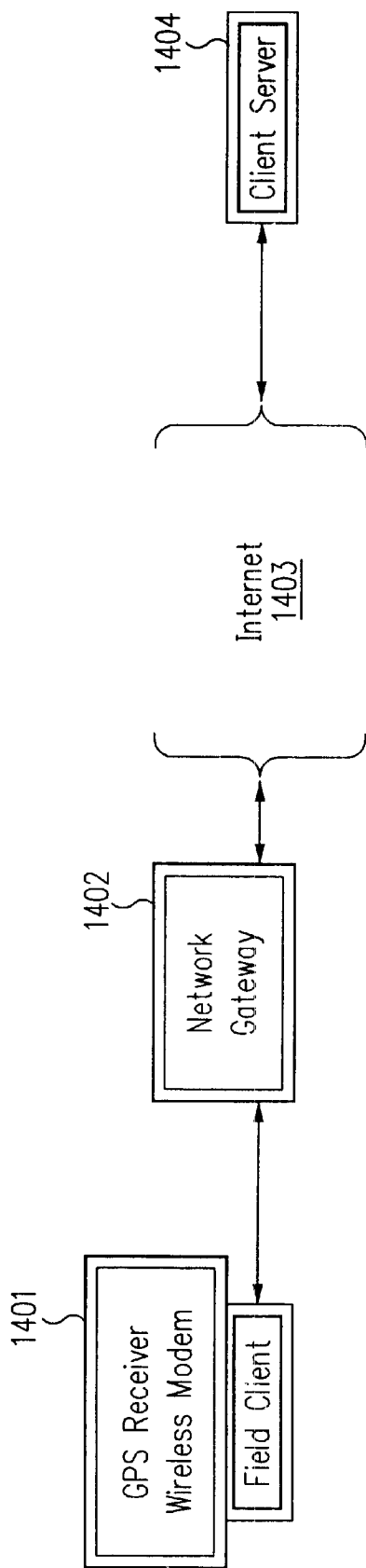


FIG. 14

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METHOD FOR DISTRIBUTING LOCATION-RELEVANT INFORMATION USING A NETWORK

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This Application is a continuation-in-part application of U.S. patent application (the "First Continuation-in-part Application", Ser. No. 09/365,671, filed Aug. 2, 1999, entitled "Method for Distributing Location-Relevant Information Using A Network," assigned to @Road Inc., which is a continuation-in-part application of copending U.S. patent application (the "Parent Application", Ser. No. 08/924,042, filed Aug. 28, 1997, entitled "Method and Structure for Distribution of Travel Information Using Network," now U.S. Pat. No. 5,959,577, which is assigned to @Road Inc., which is also the Assignee of the present application.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of Invention

This invention relates to a method for distributing location-relevant information to a mobile client based upon the position of the client.

2. Description of the Related Art

The global position system ("GPS") is used for obtaining position information. A GPS receiver receives ranging signals from several GPS satellites, and triangulates these received ranging signals to obtain the measured position of the receiver. A more detailed discussion of a GPS receiver is found in U.S. patent application ("Copending Application"), Ser. No. 08/779,698, entitled "Structure of An Efficient Global Positioning System Receiver," assigned to the present assignee. The Copending Application is hereby incorporated by reference.

One application of GPS is vehicle location. The Parent Application provides a method for vehicle location using both the GPS system and a data network, such as the Internet. Commercial activities have become an important part of the Internet. Users of the Internet can access information anywhere in the world with equal ease. However, because of the global nature of the Internet, the user of information obtained from the Internet filters out a large amount of that information to get to relevant information of local interest.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides methods applicable to commercial activities between a mobile unit with a wireless link with a server on a data network, such as the Internet. According to one aspect of the present invention, a method is provided for distributing location-relevant information over a data network to a client includes: (a) providing a GPS position of the client to a server over the data network; (b) obtaining at the server the location-relevant information using the GPS position provided by the server; and (c) returning to the client the location-relevant information. In one embodiment, the client communicates over a wireless link with a gateway of the data network, which then acts as a proxy client for accessing the server. Under this method, the GPS position can be provided to the server by the client in conjunction with a query for information. Based on the supplied GPS position, the server can then select to return only that information relevant to the client from the non-location specific information responsive to the query,

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thereby relieving the client of the task of filtering for relevant information. In one implementation, the client uses an Internet browser application program. Location-relevant information includes advertising of local interest to said client, discount coupons accepted by businesses in the local vicinity of said client, and addresses of local points of interest.

According to another aspect of the present invention, a method is provided for conducting a business or financial transaction over a data network. The method includes (a) by a first party, attaching a GPS position of the first party to a digital instrument transmitted over the data network; and (b) by a second party, accepting the digital instrument to complete the transaction. The GPS position can be attached as a code word formed using the GPS position or embedding the GPS position. To ensure security, such a code word can be formed using an encryption process. Under such a method, the second party can use the GPS position received from the first party to authenticate the digital instrument, or to identify the first party first party, or to establish the location at which said transaction is deemed to have taken place, for legal and other purposes. Thus, the present invention allows a simple and efficient authentication, identification or signature scheme for business to be conducted on the Internet.

The present invention is better understood upon consideration of the detailed description below and the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates a vehicle locating system which includes a data network 27.

FIG. 2 illustrates a data processing station 18 in a vehicle location system.

FIG. 3 illustrates a program flow in a mobile unit.

FIG. 4 illustrates a program flow in a data processing unit.

FIG. 5 is a block diagram of a mobile unit.

FIG. 6 is a block diagram of a data processing unit.

FIG. 7 represents one implementation of position table 33.

FIG. 8 illustrates a pseudo-range table 40 for indicating the pseudo-ranges of a mobile unit over a period of time.

FIG. 9 represents one implementation of delta-pseudo-range table 39, containing delta-pseudo-ranges obtained from various service areas.

FIG. 10 illustrates the logic flow of a differential correction process.

FIG. 11 illustrates a process for generating a time-limited key from a master key and a specified duration.

FIG. 12 illustrates one display in a mobile unit.

FIG. 13 illustrates one display in a mobile unit, specifically displaying a map with travel information overlaid thereon.

FIG. 14 shows a model of distributing location-relevant information to a mobile unit according to one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

FIG. 1 illustrates a system of the present invention which includes a data network. As shown in FIG. 1, a vehicle locating system according to the present invention includes: GPS satellite constellation 8, data network 27 with nodes 5, 10, 12 and 15, data processing station 18, monitor unit 22, and mobile units 1 and 3. Mobile unit 1 is a portable (e.g.,

handheld) device while mobile unit 3 is installed in a vehicle. Mobile units 1 and 3 each include a GPS receiver, a transmitter for transmitting messages to data network 27, and a microprocessor. Each mobile unit can also be provided a data receiver for receiving messages from the data network. Mobile units may fall into different groups, which requires different handling procedures. For example, moving companies can be group separately from taxi companies for management convenience. Monitor units perform system-wide or regional control and data-gathering functions. The following description uses mobile unit 1 as an example of the mobile units of the present invention.

The mobile unit of the present invention allows a user to report its position and to obtain travel-related information over a data network. Travel-related information includes such information as directions to reach a destination (e.g., a gas station, a hotel, or a restaurant), or traffic conditions in the immediate vicinities of concern. For example, using a GPS receiver, mobile unit 1 receives a positioning signal that contains code sequences from GPS satellite constellation 8 and converts the code sequences into pseudo-range information. When the operator of the mobile unit wishes to request travel-related information, a query is sent in an outbound data package, which includes the operator's query, the pseudo-ranges and a time-stamp indicating the time the pseudo-ranges were obtained. (In this detailed description, an outbound data package refers to a data package transmitted from a mobile unit.) A history showing the most recent positions of mobile unit 1 may also be included in the outbound data package. In this embodiment, data processing station 18 keeps track of the time since the last update. The outbound data package is then transmitted by mobile unit 1's transmitter over wireless link 23 to a service connection 10 on data network 27, which relays the outbound data package to data processing station 18. Alternatively, instead of sending pseudo-ranges as described above, mobile unit 1 obtains a "measured" position by applying a triangulation technique on the pseudo-ranges. This measured position of mobile unit 1 is then included in an outbound data package. The outbound data package also includes a position update request or query, together with the pseudo-ranges or the measured position. Mobile unit 1 reports its position either automatically, according to a predetermined schedule, or upon a command manually entered by an operator into the mobile unit. Wireless communication between mobile unit 1 and data network 27 can be accomplished, for example, using a cellular digital packet data (CDPD) modem or via satellite.

FIG. 2 illustrates data processing station 18 of the present invention, including data process unit 38 which handles computation at data processing station 18. If data processing station 18 receives an outbound data package that includes a measured position of the mobile unit (presumably the position of the vehicle), the measured position is entered into a position table 33 (FIG. 2). If the outbound data package includes pseudo-ranges, however, data processing station 18 obtains the measured position of the mobile unit for position table 33 by applying a triangulation technique on the pseudo-ranges.

Alternatively, data processing station 18 can also use pseudo-ranges in conjunction with differential correction information, or delta-pseudo-ranges. The delta-pseudo-ranges, which are obtained by data processing unit 38 from correction stations (e.g., correction stations 37) and stored in a delta-pseudo-range table (e.g., delta-pseudo-range table 39 of FIG. 2), are correction factors for the geographical area in which the mobile unit is currently located. Data processing

unit 38 can connect to correction stations 37 via wired or wireless communication links, or via a data network, such as data network 27. The position of a differential correction station is precisely known. Typically, a differential correction station serves an area 200 miles in diameter. In the present embodiment, a differential correction station in each of the vehicle locating service's service areas is desired. The delta-pseudo-ranges are used in conjunction with the pseudo-ranges received from satellite constellation 8 to provide a corrected measured position of the mobile unit. The corrected measured position is then stored in position table 33 (FIG. 2).

A differential correction station receives code sequences from GPS satellite constellation 8 (FIG. 1) to obtain a first set of pseudo-ranges based on the received code sequences. The differential correction station then calculates a second set of pseudo-ranges based on its known position and the relative positions of the satellites in satellite constellation 8. Delta-pseudo-ranges are then computed using the two sets of pseudo-ranges. These delta-pseudo-ranges are provided to data processing unit 38, and stored in delta-pseudo-range table 39 for computing corrected measured positions of the mobile units. Alternatively, correction to the measured position can also be achieved using positional corrections, rather than delta-pseudo-ranges. To obtain a positional correction, a differential correction station receives GPS positioning code sequences, and obtains, based on the received code sequences, a measured position of its own position expressed in terms of the longitude and latitude. This measured position (called a "fix") is compared to the precisely known position of the differential correction station to obtain the positional correction expressed in a delta-longitude quantity and a delta-latitude quantity. To use these delta-longitude and delta-latitude quantities to find a corrected measured position of mobile unit 1, the pseudo-range obtained by mobile unit 1 is first used to triangulate a measured position to obtain a raw position expressed in a raw longitude and a raw latitude. The corrected longitude for the mobile unit is this raw longitude plus the applicable delta-longitude obtained by the differential correction station in the vicinity. Likewise, the corrected latitude is the raw latitude of the mobile unit plus the delta-latitude computed by the differential correction station in the vicinity.

In addition to computing the corrected measured position, data processing station 18 searches a database 32 and associated area map storage 63 to process the operator's query received in the outbound data package. Database 32 maintains such travel-related information as maps, traffic situation in a particular area, positions of service stations and destinations of interest. Storage for database 32 can be implemented using any mass storage media, such as hard disks, RAMs, ROMs, CD-ROMs and magnetic tapes. For example, infrequently updated information (e.g., maps or destinations of interest) can be stored on CD-ROMs, while frequently updated information (e.g., current traffic conditions) can be stored on RAM. Data processing unit 38 accesses database 32.

Position table 33 stores the last known measured positions of the mobile units in the system. The measured position stored in position table 33 can be used for compiling vehicle position maps by monitor unit 22 (FIG. 1). FIG. 7 represents one implementation of position table 33. Position table 33 contains the measured position of several mobile units, identified respectively by an identification number 160, at particular times 162. The measured position of each mobile unit is represented by time-stamp 162, a measured latitude value 165, a measured longitude value 168, and a velocity 170.

Delta-pseudo-range table **39** stores the delta-pseudo-ranges of each service area. FIG. **9** represents one implementation of delta-pseudo-range table **39** used by data processing station **18** (FIG. **1**). As shown in FIG. **9**, delta-pseudo-range table **39** maintains the delta-pseudo-ranges **186** of each service area (indicated by identification **180**) from each of a group of satellites at each of specified times **188**. Each value of the delta-pseudo-range data **186** indicate the delta-pseudo-range to a particular satellite. Area map storage **63** stores area maps with position markers indicating the mobile units and landmarks. The response to the query can be in text, graphical or audio form. If the query is for directions, for example, a map including the measured position or corrected measured position and the position of the destination is retrieved. Typically, a position marker is provided to identify the position of the requested destination. The map and a result of the database search (i.e., a response to the operator's query), are then packaged into an inbound data package, which is transmitted to mobile unit **1** through data network **27** via network connection **10** and wireless link **23**. (In this detailed description, an inbound data package refers to a data package received by a mobile unit or a monitor unit.)

Instead of computing the corrected measured position at data processing station **18**, a microprocessor in mobile unit **1** can also be used to compute a corrected measured position from pseudo-range information the mobile unit received from satellite constellation **8** and delta-pseudo-range information received from data processing station **18**. Under this arrangement, instead of the measured corrected position, data processing station **18** includes in the inbound data package the delta-pseudo-ranges for the current position of mobile unit **1**. In any event, upon receiving the inbound data package, mobile unit **1** displays on its screen the corrected measured position and the position of the destination, typically by overlaying the positions on the map received, along with the response to the query. For example, if the operator requests directions to a nearby gas station, a position marker identifying the gas station and a position marker identifying the mobile unit's current position are displayed on the map, together with the response to query (i.e., directions as to how to get to the gas station.) The response to the query can be a text description or a graphical representation of the directions placed next to or overlaying the map. Alternatively, instead of sending the map, the positions and the response to query in the inbound data package, data processing station **18** can provide in the inbound data package a picture file of the map, with the markers and the response to the query already embedded. Special markers can be used for indicating conditions of interest. For example, a mobile unit that has been stationary for a predetermined period of time can be marked by a special marker to signal monitor units of an exceptional condition. The picture file is then simply displayed by mobile unit **1**.

Data network **27** can be a wide area data network, such as the Internet, or a telephone network, including wired or wireless communications, or both. Data network **27** can also be accessed via a satellite link. For example, in FIG. **1**, satellite **5** provides access to data network **27**, communicating with mobile unit **3** through a wireless communication channel **25**. Satellite **5** allows the present invention to be used in a remote area where other forms of telecommunication, such as a cellular phone system, are expensive to implement. In one embodiment, the inbound and outbound data packages are encrypted for security. One method of image encryption and decryption that can be used for this application is described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,541,993

by Eric Fan and Carey B. Fan, July 1996. This disclosure of U.S. Pat. No. 5,541,993 is hereby incorporated herein by reference. Service connection **10** can be a commercial transceiver station such as a cellular phone transceiver station. In another embodiment, service connection **10** is a dedicated transceiver station for handling communication related to the present invention.

In the embodiment shown in FIG. **1**, another set of terminals (e.g., monitor unit **22**) are provided in some applications to monitor the activities of the mobile units. For example, a monitor unit may send a request to data processing station **18** to obtain the measured position and speed of a specified mobile unit. This capability can be used, for example, by a trucking company to track the positions of its fleet of trucks for scheduling and maintenance purposes. Monitor unit **22** can be a fixed unit or a portable unit. A portable monitor unit **22** is equipped with a wireless transceiver for accessing data network **27** via service provider **20** or wireless network service connection **10**. Monitor unit **22** may also communicate with mobile unit **1** through data network **27** using a message exchange protocol. For example, monitor unit **22** may send a special command to mobile unit **1**, and mobile unit **1** may send a message addressed to monitor unit **22**. In one example the message communicated between mobile unit **1** and monitor unit **22** is in the form of an electronic mail message. Of course, communication between monitor unit **22** and mobile unit **1** can be encrypted for security purpose or to prevent unauthorized use. Monitor unit **22** also displays the elapsed time since last position update graphically (data collected by data processing unit). The elapsed time can be represented graphically as a color code, grades of shade, a flashing interval, or any suitable symbolic representation.

When the Internet is used as data network **27**, data processing station **18** is a node on the Internet and is assigned an Internet address. Monitor unit **22** can include a computer installed with a conventional web browser. The Internet address of data processing station **18** is used by the monitor unit for communicating with data processing unit **18**.

A land-based vehicle normally travels only a relatively limited distance during a short time period. On the other hand, an area map showing the location of the vehicle is only useful when the vicinity of the vehicle is also shown. Consequently, a vehicle is often located in the area covered by the same map over a time period of several position updates. This principle can be utilized to reduce the amount of data transmitted and thus improve the efficiency of the system. For example, a plugin program for a web browser can be installed in monitor unit **22**. During each location update, the plugin program downloads the new location of the vehicle and compares the new location with an area map stored in monitor unit **22**. If the new location of the vehicle is within the boundary of the area map, a new location marker representing the vehicle is overlaid on the area map. If the location of the vehicle is outside the boundary of the area map, a new area map is downloaded and the location of the vehicle is marked on the new area map. The plugin program can be downloaded over the Internet from the vehicle location service provider, or can be loaded directly from software storage media.

FIGS. **12** and **13** shows one implementation of mobile unit **1** adapted for allowing an operator to send a travel-related query. As shown in FIG. **12**, mobile unit **1** includes liquid crystal display (LCD) **212**, transceiver/antenna assembly **208**, power switch **211**, a scroll key **213**, and an "enter" key **215**. Scroll key **213** and enter key **215**, in

conjunction with a software-generated command menu 210 displayed on LCD 212, allow the user to enter simple commands, such as the travel-related query described above. For example, as shown in FIG. 12, command menu 210 shows selections "gas station", "food", "hotel", and "traffic". By pressing scroll key 213, an operator of mobile unit 1 causes a cursor 216 to step through the selections. When the operator presses enter key 215, an outbound data package including the query or command is transmitted by transceiver/antenna assembly 208 to processing station 18. In this embodiment, as shown in FIG. 13, the response from data station 18 is received in mobile unit 1 through transceiver/antenna assembly 208 and displayed on LCD 212. In this instance, the query sent to data station 18 corresponds to the selection "gas station". In FIG. 13, data processing station 18 returns to mobile unit 1, in an inbound data package, a map which is displayed on LCD 212, showing the vicinity of mobile unit 1. Mobile unit 1's position is indicated on LCD 212 by a marker 225. The locations of several gas stations, indicated by markers 220 are also displayed.

FIG. 3 is a flow diagram showing the operation of mobile unit 1 (FIG. 1). At step 51, one of four modes of operation is selected: periodic update mode 53, route diversion triggered mode 62, passive update mode 68, minimum distance mode 66 and service mode 70. Under periodic update mode 53, mobile unit 1 periodically reports pseudo-ranges of its position to data processing station 18, so as to update the measured position of mobile unit 1 stored at data processing station 18. Under route diversion triggered mode 62, mobile unit 1 reports its position only upon a diversion from a pre-programmed route or a diversion from a predetermined time schedule. Under update mode 68, the position of mobile unit 1 is reported under an operator's control. Service mode 70 is not an operating mode, but is used to program mobile unit 1.

Under periodic update mode 53, at step 55, mobile unit 1 waits for the next scheduled position update. At the time of a scheduled update, i.e., at step 58, mobile unit 1 calls to establish network service connection 10 for accessing data network 27, and transmits to data processing station 18 an outbound data package. Upon receiving the outbound data package, data processing station 18 responds to the operator's query by searching database 32, updating a map retrieved from map storage 63, and transmitting the map to mobile unit 1 an inbound data package.

Under route diversion triggered mode 62, the measured position of mobile unit 1 is obtained at the mobile unit using pseudo-range data without differential correction. At step 65, this measured position is compared with a pre-programmed route and a schedule. If the current position is a substantial deviation from the pre-programmed route or from the schedule, mobile unit 1 branches to step 55 to create a service connection 10 for performing the update described above at the next scheduled reporting time.

Under passive update mode 68, a measured position update occurs when an operator issues an update request in an outbound data package. At step 69, when an operator initiates an update request, mobile unit 1 branches to step 58 to create network service connection 10. An outbound data package including the update request is transmitted via network service connection 10 to data processing station 18 over data network 27.

Under minimum distance mode 66, when the distance traveled since the last update exceeds a threshold value, a new update is issued. Step 67 compares the distance traveled since the last update with the threshold value.

Under service mode 70, an operator of mobile unit 1 can effectuate two major functions: route programming function 74 and password update function 72. In route programming function 74, the operator of mobile unit 1 enters a new route to replace a pre-programmed route in mobile unit 1. In this description, a "route" connotes not only a series of physical coordinate sets marking the path of a vehicle, but also the time at which the vehicle is scheduled to arrive at or depart from each set of physical coordinates. In this embodiment, to operate mobile unit 1, an operator is first verified by supplying a password. The password can be modified under user password update mode 72. At step 75, the operator provides the current password for identification, and to obtain authorization to modify the password. Typically, mobile unit 1 requests the operator to enter the new password twice to ensure that the new password is correctly entered. At step 85, the successfully entered new password is written into storage, thereby superseding the old password.

FIG. 4 illustrates a flow diagram of a data processing program used by data processing station 18 (FIG. 1). Beginning at step 90, data processing station 18 receives either an outbound data package (step 100) or, a command from a monitor unit (step 122), such as monitor unit 22. If the received outbound data package includes a position update request (step 101), the data processing program determines at step 102 whether a corrected measured position update is requested. If a corrected measured position update is requested (step 105), the data processing program obtains the pseudo-ranges from the outbound data package and entered into a pseudo-range table. An example of a pseudo-range table is provided in FIG. 8. As shown in FIG. 8, pseudo-range table 40 includes one entry for each mobile unit. Each entry of pseudo-range table 40 includes an identification 172, pseudo-ranges (175) of the mobile unit to 8 satellites (PR1-PR8), and a time-stamp 178, indicating the time at which the pseudo-ranges are taken.

FIG. 10 is a flow diagram of one implementation of a differential correction process 191. As shown in FIG. 10, at step 190, the pseudo-ranges of a mobile unit are either received from an outbound data package or retrieved from pseudo-range table 40 of FIG. 8. At step 192, all delta-pseudo-ranges from delta-pseudo-range table 39 are examined to find the delta-pseudo-ranges from a differential correction station in the mobile unit's service area, and which have a time-stamp closest to the time-stamp of the pseudo-ranges of the mobile unit sending the query. At step 195, the corrected pseudo-ranges for the mobile unit are obtained by adding to the pseudo-ranges of the mobile unit corresponding delta-pseudo-ranges. The corrected measured position of the mobile unit is then calculated at step 198 using the corrected pseudo-ranges. At step 199, if it is decided that a corrected position is desired, the corrected position is provided at step 200. If it is decided at step 199, on the other hand, that a distance to a known position is desired, then the distance is calculated at step 193, and is provided as output at step 194.

Returning to FIG. 4, at step 120, data processing program retrieves from delta-pseudo-range table 39 a set of delta-pseudo-ranges for the mobile unit, taken at the same time and in the same service area the pseudo-ranges of the requesting mobile unit were taken. At step 108, the data processing program computes the corrected measured position using the pseudo-range and delta-pseudo-range information obtained at steps 101 and 120. If a corrected measured position is not requested, steps 105 and 108 are skipped, and the data processing program enters the measured position of the mobile unit into position table 33.

At step 111, the data processing program links in database 32 the reporting mobile unit's updated measured position entry in position table 33 with the measured position entries of other mobile units in the reporting mobile unit's group. At step 112, in this embodiment, the measured positions of the mobile units in one linked group are associated with (or "overlaid on") a digital map, so that the positions and the identification of all vehicles of that group can be represented by position markers and text on the map. Such a map allows a manager of a group of vehicles to conveniently monitor the activities of the vehicles. At step 115, the updated position of the mobile unit and the newly created associations among the mobile units and the digital map are replaced in database 32. The data processing program then returns to step 90 to receive the next outbound data package or command.

As mentioned above, an outbound data package can contain a query for a database search, e.g. a request for directions to a nearby restaurant. When such a query is identified (step 92), database 32 is searched for formulating a response at step 94. To formulate the response, the data processing program uses the measured position of the requesting mobile unit and other relevant positional information. The response is returned in an inbound data package to the requesting mobile unit at step 96.

The data processing program can also receive a request from monitor unit 22. Typically, such a request is provided with an authentication key over data network 27 (FIG. 1). At step 123, the authentication key, hence the identity of the requesting monitor unit, is verified. The authentication key allows the requesting monitor unit access to the records of a specific mobile unit or a specific group of mobile units. To enhance security, authentication keys can be made time-limited, i.e., each authentication key is valid only for a specified duration. FIG. 11 shows a process for making a time-limited key. As shown in FIG. 11, using a mixing function represented by reference numeral 208, a master key 202 (which identifies the owner) is mixed with a value representing a time duration 203. The resulting value 205 serves as a time-limited authentication key over the specified time duration. Security is enhanced, since forging a valid time-limited authentication key requires both knowledge of the master key and the value representing the time duration for which the key is valid.

At step 125, if the verification is successful, the data processing program responds to the request. In one embodiment, a digital map (e.g., the one created above at step 112) providing the positions of a group of vehicles is returned at step 126 to the requesting monitor unit.

FIG. 5 is a block diagram of a mobile unit, such as mobile unit 1. As shown in FIG. 5, mobile unit 1 has three functional sections: GPS receiving section 131, control section 133, and communication section 144. GPS receiving section 131 includes GPS antenna 130 for receiving and providing GPS ranging signals to receiving circuit 132, which processes the received GPS ranging signals to obtain a pseudo-range to each of the GPS satellites within mobile unit 1's line of sight. Control section 133 includes a microprocessor 135, input device 140, display device 142, and memory device 138. Input device 140 is an optional feature which allows commands and requests to be entered. Input device 140 can be a keyboard, a mouse, a track ball, a pressure sensitive display panel, or any combination of these and other input devices. Display device 142 is also an optional device, which is used to provide visual responses to entered commands and requests, and to display relevant information (e.g. query response from data processing unit 18, or a command from monitor unit 22). The pseudo-ranges from

GPS receiving section 131 are provided to control section 133, where the pseudo-ranges are combined with an update request or a query in an outbound data package for data processing station 18. The outbound data packages are transmitted to data processing station 18 by wireless transceiver section 144. Wireless transceiver section 144 includes a wireless modem circuit 146 with an antenna 145 or, alternatively, a wireless telephone network interface 148. Wireless modem circuit 146 receives an outbound data package from control section 133 for transmission to data network 27 through modem antenna 145 and a wireless network service connection, such as service connection 10 (FIG. 1). Alternatively, wireless modem circuit 146 provides the outbound data package to data network 27 over wireless telephone network interface 148 via service connection 10. Depending on the application, control section 133 may or may not be programmed for receiving an inbound data package from wireless transceiver 144. For example, if mobile unit 1 is used only for reporting position, control section 133 need not be programmed to receive inbound data packages.

FIG. 6 is a block diagram of a data processing unit, e.g. data processing unit 38 of FIG. 2. Data processing unit 38 includes a network interface 150 for interfacing data processing unit 38 with data network 27, a data processing computer 152 for providing the computational power for processing operator query and performing position update requests, and a memory system 155. A data router 151 can be provided between network interface 150 for connecting data processing computer 152 to a local area network.

The present invention is applicable to a wide variety of services. For example, a courier service company may provide a mobile unit to each of its delivery persons. A delivery person may use the mobile unit to obtain directions to a destination. A time-limited key may be issued to a customer, who can then use the time-limited key to track the delivery of his/her package through data processing station 18. In this instance, the customer plays the role of monitor unit 22 described above. As described above, monitor unit 22 may access data processing station 18 through the Internet. With the time-limited key, the customer can obtain the present position of the package, monitor the performance of the courier company, and estimate the expected arrival time of the package at the destination. Further, the customer may also send additional or alternative instructions to the delivery person (e.g., he/she may instruct the delivery person to abort the delivery, or to re-route the package to a new destination). The time-limited key issued to the customer expires when the package is delivered, or when a certain amount of time has passed.

The present invention allows even small companies with limited resources to have the benefits of a vehicle locating system, even when the vehicles tracked are few and scattered over a large geographical area. Since a data network, such as the Internet, is used in the present invention, the hardware investment for such use is minimal, as compared to prior art vehicle location systems.

As another example, a vehicle rental company may install mobile units on its vehicle fleet. The speeds and measured positions of these vehicles can thus be monitored using a monitor unit. In yet another example, a metropolitan bus company may install mobile units on its buses, and set the mobile units to route diversion triggered mode 62 discussed in conjunction with FIG. 3 above. When a bus is not running according schedule, or deviates from a designated route, the mobile unit signals a dispatcher immediately. Timely remedial measures can thus be carried out.

As an example of another application of the present invention, a traveling salesperson can provide, prior to leaving on a business trip, a detailed list of the places (“itinerary”) where he or she would visit on the business trip. The itinerary can be entered, for example, at a desktop terminal (e.g., at the salesperson’s office) graphically using an user interface that displays a map, or by specifying each location’s street address. The system can easily convert the street addresses or map coordinates in the itinerary into corresponding GPS positions. The locations can also be specified by some recognized location code system, or even looked up by telephone number from a telephone-to-location directory (e.g., by a “directory assistance service” providing a GPS location in response to a query specifying name or telephone number). An example of a recognized location code system is that system provided by vicinity.com, which can be accessed over an internet connection. Alternatively, the address list can be automatically generated (e.g., by a multiple listing service, providing a list of properties to visit within a specified vicinity), or entered by another user (e.g., a sales manager). The itinerary can be created, for example, prior to or during the business trip and updated during the business trip. The salesperson can access the itinerary from a mobile unit while on the road and can query location-relevant information (e.g., detailed directions, estimated travel time, etc.) using the methods discussed above. Since the itinerary includes proprietary information (e.g., a customer list), access by an authorized user to the itinerary can be provided only after proper identification or authentication procedures are followed. In one embodiment, for example, a fingerprint is scanned and digitized at a mobile unit and forwarded to the server. Authentication may be accomplished by looking up an identification database accessible by the server or, for example, by forwarding the finger print information to an external agent specializing in providing authentication services. Such an agent can be appointed by mutual agreement between the client and the server. Other forms of authentication, such as digital signatures, may also be used.

In another application, pseudo-ranges or measured position information transmitted from mobile units are used to calculate the speeds at which the vehicles travel. This information is compiled into database 32 at data processing station 18, and made available for access through monitor units, such as monitor 22. Such information allows shipping companies to route their vehicles away from traffic congestions and diversions. Radio stations or television stations can access this database from which to report traffic conditions. The information can also be used by municipal authorities in studying traffic patterns of selected vicinities to assist in planning new infrastructures.

When the Internet is used as data network 27 (FIG. 1), the necessary hardware and software for implementing a monitor unit are readily available. Most computers having ability to access the Internet, together with a standard web browser, can be used to access data processing station 18 to perform the functions of the monitor units described above. Since a monitor unit can receive a map from data processing station 18, such as the map displayed on LCD 212 in FIG. 13, which can be displayed using conventional graphics software, the monitor unit is not required to be equipped with any special map software or a map database. Because the cost of communication on Internet is inexpensive, a vehicle monitoring system according to the present invention can be deployed on a world-wide basis at minimum cost. With increased bandwidth in data network 27, the present invention can also be used in aircrafts, ships and other vessels for navigational purposes.

Services based on the position of a mobile unit can be easily provided in the system described above. Mobile unit 1 can request for information to be supplied based on its position. Alternatively, useful information can be supplied by data processing station 18 or another server to mobile unit 1 according to mobile unit 1’s position. FIG. 14 shows a model for distributing location-relevant information to a mobile unit.

As shown in FIG. 14, a “field client” 1401, such as mobile unit 1, capable of receiving ranging signals from the GPS system, communicates with a network gateway (e.g., wireless network service connection 10) to access over the Internet (1403) to a server 1404 (e.g., data processing station 18). Using the methods discussed above, the position of field client 1401 is communicated to server 1404. Based on this position, server 1404 can provide field client 1401 with information relevant to field client 1401’s position, either upon request by field client 1401 or on server 1404’s own initiative. Such location-relevant information includes advertising of businesses local to field client 1404’s position, discount coupons to be used at local businesses, schedule of events of local interest, tourist information (e.g., locations of tourist attractions, gas stations, hotels, restaurants etc.) and other information of local interest. In addition, even on a global inquiry of a merchandise or a service, server 1404 can provide client 1401 responsive information relevant to the client 1401’s location. For example, a request for a hair dresser should return a list of hair dressers within local reach and not across the continent.

Further, the position of client 1401 can also be used as authentication or identification information of legal significance. For example, client 1401’s position—e.g., the GPS position of client 1401’s regular business office—can be attached to a digital document to authenticate client 1401 in a financial or business transaction, or to establish the location at which a financial or a business transaction is deemed to have taken place for legal or other purposes. For security purposes, client 1401’s GPS position can be encrypted or embedded in a code number to prevent counterfeits.

Although the present invention is described using the above examples, the scope of the invention is not limited by these examples. Numerous variations and modifications are possible within the scope defined by the following claims.

I claim:

1. A method for distributing location-relevant information over a data network to a mobile client, comprising:

at a server, receiving a GPS position of said client over said data network through a gateway bridging said data network and a wireless communication network; and obtaining said location-relevant information using said GPS position and positional information of selected locations stored at said server; and

returning to said client said location-relevant information over said data network and said wireless communication network through said gateway.

2. A method as in claim 1, wherein said GPS position is provided to said server by said client in conjunction with a query for information.

3. A method as in claim 1, wherein said client comprises an Internet browser application program.

4. A method as in claim 1, wherein said location-relevant information includes advertising of local interest to said client.

5. A method as in claim 1, wherein said location-relevant information includes a coupon accepted by a business in the local vicinity of said client.

6. A method as in claim 1, wherein said location-relevant information includes an address of a local point of interest.

7. A method as in claim 1, wherein said server selects location-relevant information from a non-location specific information database using said GPS position.

8. A method as in claim 1, wherein said selected locations are selected from an itinerary stored in said server.

9. A method as in claim 8, wherein said itinerary comprises a list of street addresses.

10. A method as in claim 8, wherein said itinerary is provided to said server from a terminal at a fixed location.

11. A method as in claim 1, further comprising the step of authenticating the identity of said client prior to granting access to said server by said client.

12. A method as in claim 11, wherein said authenticating step includes scanning and digitizing a fingerprint.

13. A method as in claim 1, wherein said positional information of said selected locations are provided by GPS.

14. A method as in claim 1, wherein said selected locations represent locations of real property of interest to a real estate practitioner.

15. A method as in claim 2, wherein said query comprises query of detailed direction for travel from said GPS position of client to one of said selected locations.

16. A method as in claim 1, wherein said positional information of said selected locations comprises codes from a recognized location code system.

17. A method as in claim 16, wherein said codes are provided to a second server for translating into GPS positions.

18. A method as in claim 1, wherein said positional information of said selected locations includes telephone numbers.

19. A method as in claim 18, wherein said telephone numbers are provided to a second server for translating into GPS positions.

20. A method as in claim 19, wherein said telephone numbers are provided by a telephone directory assistance service.

21. A method as in claim 1, further comprising:
scanning and digitizing a finger print of said client; and
providing said digitized finger print to said server.

22. A method as in claim 21, wherein said server authenticates said client using said digitized finger print and information stored in said server.

23. A method as in claim 21, wherein said server, upon receiving said digitized finger print of said client, provides said digitized finger print to an external agent to authenticate said client.

24. A method as in claim 23, wherein said agent is designated by agreement between said client and said server.

25. A storage medium containing a computer program for carrying out a method for distributing location-relevant information over a data network to a mobile client, said method comprising:
at a server, receiving a GPS position of said client over said data network through a gateway bridging said data network and a wireless communication network; and
obtaining said location-relevant information using said GPS position and positional information of selected locations stored at said server; and
returning to said client said location-relevant information over said data network and said wireless communication network through said gateway.

26. A storage medium as in claim 25, wherein said GPS position is provided to said server by said client in conjunction with a query for information.

27. A storage medium as in claim 25, wherein said client comprises an Internet browser application program.

28. A storage medium as in claim 25, wherein said location-relevant information includes advertising of local interest to said client.

29. A storage medium as in claim 25, wherein said location-relevant information includes a coupon accepted by a business in the local vicinity of said client.

30. A storage medium as in claim 25, wherein said location-relevant information includes an address of a local point of interest.

31. A storage medium as in claim 25, wherein said server selects location-relevant information from a non-location specific information database using said GPS position.

32. A storage medium as in claim 25, wherein said selected locations are selected from an itinerary stored in said server.

33. A storage medium as in claim 32, wherein said itinerary comprises a list of street addresses.

34. A storage medium as in claim 32, wherein said itinerary is provided to said server from a terminal at a fixed location.

35. A storage medium as in claim 25, further comprising the step of authenticating the identity of said client prior to granting access to said server by said client.

36. A storage medium as in claim 35, wherein said authenticating step includes scanning and digitizing a fingerprint.

37. A storage medium as in claim 25, wherein said positional information of said selected locations are provided by GPS.

38. A storage medium as in claim 25, wherein said selected locations represent locations of real property of interest to a real estate practitioner.

39. A storage medium as in claim 26, wherein said query comprises query of detailed direction for travel from said GPS position of client to one of said selected locations.

40. A storage medium as in claim 25, wherein said positional information of said selected locations comprises codes from a recognized location code system.

41. A storage medium as in claim 40, wherein said codes are provided to a second server for translating into GPS positions.

42. A storage medium as in claim 25, wherein said positional information of said selected locations includes telephone numbers.

43. A storage medium as in claim 42, wherein said telephone numbers are provided to a second server for translating into GPS positions.

44. A storage medium as in claim 42, wherein said telephone numbers are provided by a telephone directory assistance service.

45. A storage medium as in claim 25, said method further comprising:
scanning and digitizing a finger print of said client; and
providing said digitized finger print to said server.

46. A storage medium as in claim 45, wherein said server authenticates said client using said digitized finger print and information stored in said server.

47. A storage medium as in claim 46, wherein said server, upon receiving said digitized finger print of said client, provides said digitized finger print to an external agent to authenticate said client.

48. A storage medium as in claim 47, wherein said agent is designated by agreement between said client and said server.