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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A novel Medium Access Control (MAC) architecture for IEEE 802.11 wireless local area networks is disclosed. The illustrative embodiment partitions the medium access control into an Upper Medium Access Control for providing medium-access-control services that are independent of a Physical Control, and a Lower Medium Access Control for providing medium-access-control services that are dependent on the Physical Control. By partitioning the Medium Access Control in this manner, a single Upper Medium Access Control can be employed for any existing or future Physical Control while maintaining full compatibility with the huge installed base of existing IEEE 802.11 equipment. It will be clear to those skilled in the art how to make and use alternative embodiments of the present invention for networks that employ protocols other than IEEE 802. 11.

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