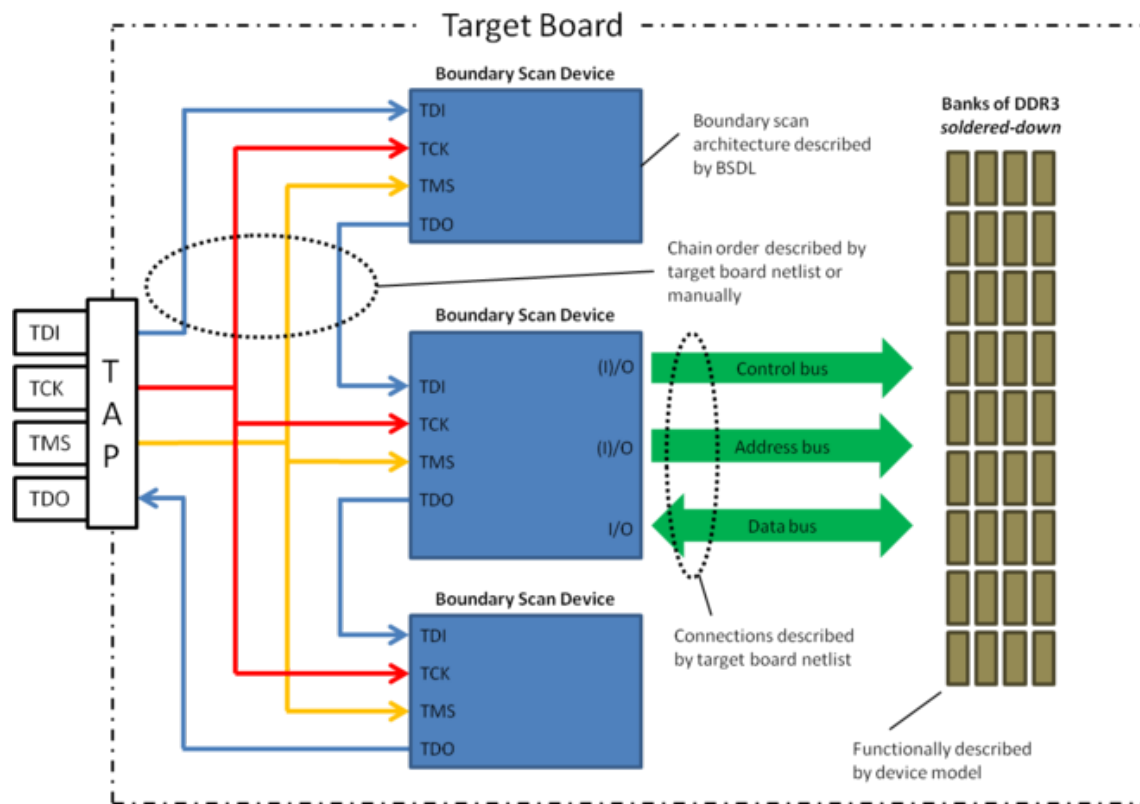


TESTING DDR3 MEMORY WITH BOUNDARY SCAN/JTAG



EBOOK

BY KENT ZETTERBERG

By Kent Zetterberg – Product Manager



Kent Zetterberg started his career in the automation industry, working with systems from ABB, Siemens and others. Following graduation from the University of Gävle with a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Computer Engineering, he worked 15 years in the telecom industry where he held various positions involving hardware test and debug. He joined Ericsson AB in Sweden in 1997 where he developed functional test programs for processor boards and designed interface boards and test fixtures. At Ericsson, he became an expert in boundary scan and eventually led the boundary-scan team. With ASSET, Kent has held several positions in support, serving as a customer trainer and European support team leader. Currently, he is the technical product manager for ScanWorks boundary-scan test products.

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Executive Summary

A recent survey by the International Electronics Manufacturing Initiative (iNEMI) asked test engineers in the electronics industry what were their biggest problems with testing circuit boards. Of the 11 possible problems listed, characterizing and testing memory soldered to circuit boards were among the top three. Memory test was at the top of the list of prevalent problems along with ‘loss of access to test points’ and ‘the need to perform debug/diagnostics on board failures.’ When asked which type of built-in self-test (BIST) instruments would solve the engineer’s problem, memory BIST was rated the second most needed, virtually tied with BIST instruments for validating high-speed I/O buses. Clearly, the ability to thoroughly test, characterize and diagnose problems with soldered-down memory is one of the most pressing problems in the industry. Using DDR3 memory as an example, this eBook discusses how boundary-scan test (BST) and JTAG methods based on the IEEE 1149.1 standard can be used to test and diagnose soldered-down memory devices. It is assumed that a BST tool is being used to test the DDR3 memory.

Note that circuit board test engineers participated in the iNEMI survey mentioned above. In most cases, board test engineers assume that the memory devices themselves are not causing a failure since the memory chips are tested and qualified before they are assembled on a board. As a result, a memory test failure in many cases will indicate a failure in the connectivity channel to/from the memory. For some time now, the decreasing level of test point access on circuit boards has made BST the most effective method for acquiring pin-level diagnostic on structural faults early in the production flow. BST is able to perform thorough tests on the interconnects linking memory management units (MMU), field programmable gate arrays (FPGA), processors and memory devices. Later in the test process, functional test of some sort can be employed to ensure the quality of the assembly. The remainder of this eBook is limited to explaining the advantages of BST to test memory early in the production flow.

Testing memory during every step in the life cycle

In the broadest sense, memory testing takes place over the entire life cycle of a system, beginning with board design/development, moving into production and culminating in post-production stages such as field service. Eventually, the cycle begins again when memory test is performed during design/development for the next generation of the board design. During each phase in the life cycle, the objectives and goals of memory test differ and the memory test process itself is typically referred to differently, according to the objectives of that particular phase.

During system design and new product introduction (NPI), testing memory in a timely fashion is particularly critical if the new system is to be delivered promptly to the marketplace. One of the critical points in the NPI process is the production of prototypes of the circuit board design. These prototypes must be evaluated for structural faults quickly so that board bring-up and development feedback can be completed effectively. Structural memory tests will be performed during the initial phase of board bring-up to identify the root cause(s) of faults, failures or errors in the design as well as identifying problems in the early production equipment. The intent of these tests is to correct the problems prior to the design's release to high-volume production. When memory structures on early prototypes are found to be functioning properly, functional software can be executed more easily and the functional system can be debugged sooner. The best way to quickly transition into functional test is to first identify any structural defects early in the process. This is where boundary scan excels. Products can then flow through design faster and move into full production, shortening the product's time-to-market. Various delays and a longer-than-expected board bring-up phase could jeopardize revenues.

Once the NPI/board bring-up phase has been completed, the design is ready to transition into manufacturing. At this point, the nature of memory tests is the same, but the faults found may differ considerably. By the time design and board bring-up testing have achieved a 'known good board,' manufacturing test engineers assume that any errors in the design's memory architecture have already been corrected because the design has been released to production. Consequently, the memory tests performed during production are intended to determine whether individual circuit boards are ready to be released to users, not to identify any underlying errors in the memory architecture itself. Instead, production testing involves determining whether the

manufacturing and assembly processes have added any defects to the circuit boards. These types of memory tests with shorter test application times will be essentially go/no-go tests that can be applied quickly in order to keep pace with a predetermined beat rate on the production line.

When the rate of production has achieved its predetermined beat rate, boards that fail due to systemic defects must be debugged and diagnosed so that the root cause or source issue in the manufacturing process can be understood and corrected. This will improve manufacturing yields and increase the volume of product available to the market. In most cases, a test that uncovered a fault that affected manufacturing yields is retained as part of the manufacturing test suite so that this condition can be quickly identified should it occur again.

During post-production phases of the life cycle – that is, when systems have been sold and are installed in the field – memory tests are performed by repair personnel to troubleshoot malfunctioning systems and maintain user satisfaction. The two main goals during this phase are: 1) identify any reliability concerns such as memory chips or board structures that are failing sooner than expected; and 2) identify changes in the board design or component selection that may make the system better suited for deployment to the market.

Structural test techniques like boundary scan can be quite effective during every phase in a product's life cycle for capturing faults as early and as quickly as possible.

What is a boundary-scan memory test?

All memory tests are based on reading from and writing to memory. Boundary-scan-based tests are structural and algorithmic pseudo-functional tests. In fact, these same types of tests are used by many memory device suppliers to test their memory chips and/or logic chips that contain embedded memory. It must be noted that board test requirements for memory testing are less rigorous than chip test requirements. As a result, board memory test algorithms are generally simpler and require fewer operations.

For example, a simple board-level interconnect test may be accomplished by writing and reading the physical equivalent of 5s and then As on the data bus, simultaneous with applying these same values to select locations representing 5 and A on the physical address lines (true board routes may not be in “logical” order, but may be physically scrambled). This ensures that all routes are

stressed with a checkerboard pattern consisting of 1s surrounded by 0s and 0s surrounded by 1s. Other more advanced memory interconnect tests may use an algorithm like Wagner, which will achieve high fault coverage while reducing test execution time and the number of test vectors applied. (For more information on the Wagner algorithm, click here for a whitepaper on [“Fault Coverage Reporting”](#) and see page 4 therein.)

Boundary-scan testing of DDR3 Memories

Although memory chips typically do not conform to the boundary-scan standard (IEEE 1149.1 JTAG) – meaning they do not have their own IEEE 1149.1 Test Access Port (TAP) or dedicated boundary-scan registers on chip – they can be tested from the boundary-scan facilities of a connected device, such as a MMU, microprocessor or an FPGA, as long as power and a clock are present on the interconnects and access to the board’s IEEE 1149.1 TAP is provided. The boundary-scan registers on a MMU can be appropriated and directed to test the shorts and opens on the interconnect routes to and from memories. In some cases, BST will be the only alternative to test these interconnects. For example, bed-of-nails fixtures that are essential to in-circuit test (ICT) systems frequently do not have access to the memories because there are no test pads or just a few on the board. Moreover, functional tests for the board are typically not yet available when board bring-up is being performed on prototypes. When the boundary-scan registers on a device that is connected to the memory device are used to test memory interconnects, algorithmic writes and reads are executed on memory locations in particular sequences. The more complex the test algorithms, the longer the testing will take because a boundary-scan ‘scan operation’ (ScanDR) must be conducted for each read or write. In many cases, when multiple Read, Write, Stall, Output_Enable and other control signals must be operated at different times during a test, then multiple ScanDRs must be executed to operate those signals in the proper sequence for each read or write action. Fortunately, applying a Wagner pattern significantly reduces the number of patterns BST requires to test the memory, reducing to a matter of seconds the test execution time on interconnects to memories of any size.

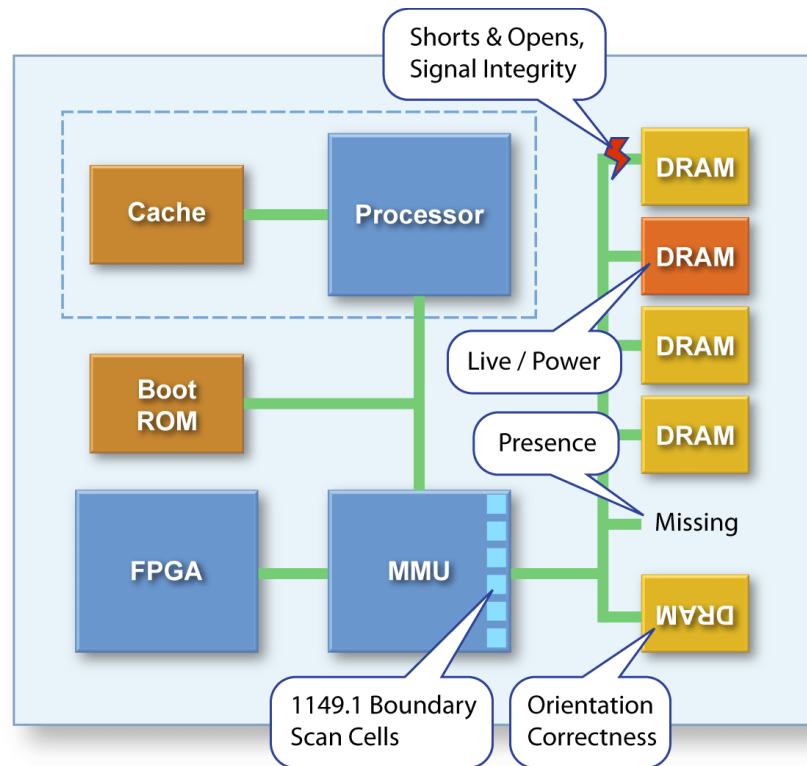


Figure 1: Example board with memory architecture

Figure 1 shows that a MMU with a boundary-scan Test Access Port (TAP) can test connected memory devices for specific faults, such as those defined by the PCOL/SO board test fault spectrum. (PCOLA/SOQ is a fault spectrum originally defined by Agilent Technologies and now adopted and supported by iNEMI. For a description, see ASSET Test Data Out blog post, [“Ever heard of PCOLA/SOQ/FAM?”](#)) Figure 1 illustrates a case where shorts or opens have corrupted the interconnect to the first DRAM device, the next DRAM does not have power, another DRAM is missing and the last memory device is the wrong type of memory and its orientation is incorrect (upside down). All of these fault types are included in PCOLA/SOQ fault spectrum definition. (Note that the “A” and “Q” are inspection items and not covered by boundary-scan electrical tests.)

The rate and efficiency at which boundary-scan tests can be applied to memory buses are limited by the clock speed of the boundary-scan resources in the chips on the board and the length of a particular device’s boundary-scan register. For example, 50 MHz may be the maximum boundary-scan clock speed of the slowest device on the JTAG scan chain. This limits the speed of the entire chain to 50 MHz. In Figure 1 above, the capabilities of the MMU would dictate

these factors. Moreover, multiple scans typically comprise a memory test. When each scan can only be applied at a slow speed, the time needed to apply an entire memory test made up of multiple scans is affected. Fortunately, the auto-refresh functions of DDR3 memories, together with smart test patterns like the Wagner algorithm, effectively address these issues so that reasonable test times are achieved by applying boundary-scan tests to memory interconnects.

Testing DDR3 with a boundary-scan tool

Every BST tool is different. The functionality and requirements described below may or may not apply to a particular BST tool. In fact, certain less powerful tools may not be capable of some of the functionality explained here.

For a BST tool to test DDR3 memory, it must be provided certain information, including the following:

- Structure and composition of the boundary-scan chain
- The order of the boundary-scan devices on the scan chain. This can be entered manually by the engineer or some tools are able to automatically extract this information from the board design's netlist.
- The Boundary-Scan Description Language (BSDL) file for each device on the chain. BSDL files are usually provided by the chip supplier and can be downloaded from the supplier's web site.
- How the DDR3 memory is connected to the boundary-scan device from which boundary-scan tests will be launched. Some tools are able to extract this information from the board's netlist, which often can be imported by the boundary-scan tool from a computer-aided design (CAD) tool.
- Model(s) of the DDR3 device(s) to be tested with boundary scan

Figure 2 below shows the general architecture of a circuit board with a bank of DDR3 memory and the buses that connect it to a boundary-scan device.

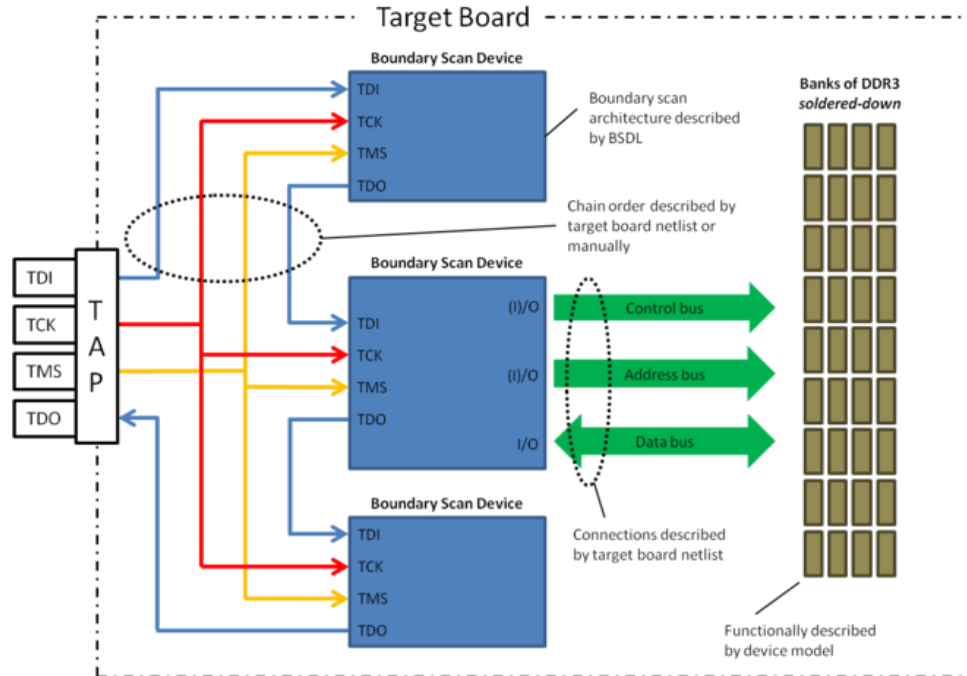


Figure 2: General architecture of a circuit board with memory

On many board designs the connection between a boundary-scan device and the DDR3 memory array will also contain non-boundary-scan devices such as series resistors, buffers and other types of devices. When this is the case, information on these so-called ‘cluster’ devices must be provided to the boundary-scan test tool. Model-based boundary-scan test tools capture the needed information on these cluster devices in device models. The more accomplished suppliers of boundary-scan test tools provide these models to users in a cluster device library. Advanced tools can then automatically generate memory test sequences and patterns using boundary-scan actions.

Summary and Conclusions

Modern circuit boards have complex memory architectures that are harder to test because of their high speeds, the increasing frequency of data transfers over memory buses, the escalating complexity of communications protocols across these buses, the disappearance of test points on circuit boards and the fact that test probes may cause unwanted signal integrity issues when they are placed on an interconnect. Memory test and validation coverage from intrusive probe-based methods such as oscilloscopes, flying probe testers and ICT systems is rapidly eroding. Frankly, these legacy test methods are quite challenged by today’s aggressive test goals.

Non-intrusive memory test methodologies such as BST can effectively replace most of these legacy intrusive methods. In addition, BST can function as an effective bridge into the non-intrusive world of test, validation and debug technologies. Today's highly automated boundary-scan tools can be applied through cost-effective, compact and standalone or integrated testers that provide comprehensive fault coverage, including production-related memory diagnostics that isolate faults to pin or net levels in a matter of seconds.

In addition to the memory test coverage from BST, other non-intrusive memory test methodologies can complement this coverage, including processor-controlled test (PCT), microprocessor-based memory BIST technologies like Intel's Interconnect Built-In Self Test (IBIST) and FPGA-controlled test (FCT). Separately or together these methodologies have reached the point where they can exceed the memory test coverage provided by legacy intrusive methods. These non-intrusive technologies are available as automated software tools that can be applied through cost-effective, compact and standalone testers. When these non-intrusive memory test technologies are deployed together, the coverage derived from each complements the others and, taken together, they can comprise a memory test toolkit capable of meeting the requirements of any test strategy. Because these non-intrusive test technologies are software-based, they are extremely flexible and, as a result, can be targeted to the specific characteristics and restrictions of a particular board design. Combining the strengths of all of these non-intrusive test methods creates a powerful and versatile memory test platform that solves the test problems created by today's high-speed memory and memory architectures.

Learn More

Learn about memory test methods and their tradeoffs. In particular some of the complexities in testing high-speed DDR memory buses.

Register for eBook: [“Testing High-Speed Memory with Embedded Instruments”](#)

