

DRAFT

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J. H. Saltzer

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Information Processing Center, in conjunction with M.I.T. Project MAC, invites specific proposals for engineering, manufacture, installation and maintenance of a large primary memory system for the Honeywell 6180 computer system operated by the M.I.T. Information Processing Center. This system is run as a computer utility using the Multics operating system.

The current system consists of 2 Honeywell 6180 processors, 384k 36-bit words of 0.5 microsecond core memory, a 2048k word bulk core memory (1.5 μ sec) and associated I/O and disk storage equipment, supplied by Honeywell. This request envisions replacing the 384k word primary memory and the 2048k word bulk store with a one-level primary memory of 8 million 36-bit words.

The remainder of this document provides details which should be considered by a proposal.

Size

The complete system is to consist of 8 million 36-bit words of directly addressable, random access, primary memory. Provision should be made for possible later expansion to 16 million 36-bit words.

Performance

Access and cycle times on the order of 500 nanoseconds at the system controller interfaces are usable by the Honeywell 6180 processors. There is, however, a potential tradeoff between memory price and access time which may be exploited by prospective vendors. For example, a 750 nanosecond memory system with three processors might achieve the same effective performance as a 500 nanosecond memory system with two processors, but with lower total cost.

Technology

It is presumed that to meet the requirements of this request, an electronic memory system based on an integration level of 2048 or more bits per chip will be required. Since the schedule calls for phased delivery over a period of four years, it is acceptable for later delivered modules to use a higher integration level.

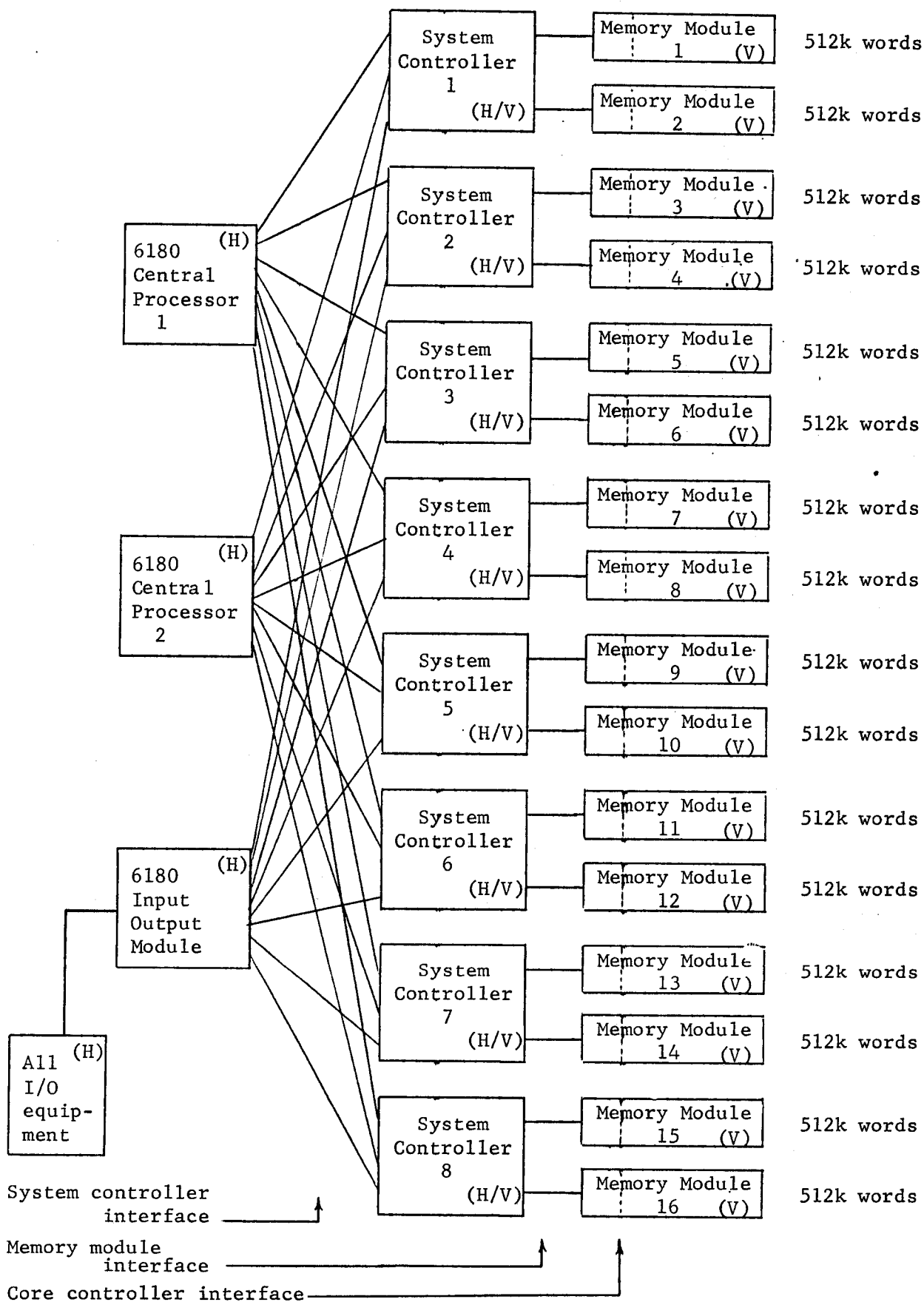
Configuration

The planned configuration is based on the standard Honeywell 6000 system organization. Figure one illustrates. The planned configuration may be operated with two, three, or four central processors. The designation (H) in figure one indicates that the module will be supplied by Honeywell (or some other previously arranged supplier) and the designation (V) indicates that the module is to be supplied by the vendor responding to this request. The designation (H/V) on the System Controller modules means that the vendor may propose to supply this module, or plan to use the standard Honeywell System Controller. The remainder of this document will assume the latter choice.

Modularity

It is important that the complete 8-million word system consist of at least eight (and possibly 16) completely independent units, in order that any individual module may be shut down and disconnected from the remainder of the system while the remainder continue in active operation. This requirement suggests that independent power supplies and attention to switching transients which could affect modules still in use will be required.

Figure One



Schedule

Delivery would be in uniform increments over a four-year period, perhaps with a 1-million word increment each 6 months. The first 1-million word increment would be scheduled for installation sometime in 3rd quarter, 1973.

Completed proposals should be in the hands of Mr. Robert Scott, Director of Information Processing Services, by May 1, 1973.

Interface

There are at least three interface levels to which attachment to the Honeywell 6180 system may be made: the "core controller" interface, the "memory module" interface, and the "system controller" interface. The "core controller" interface is the most primitive, and closest to the memory devices, but attachment to that interface would require use of the Honeywell core controller logic, which currently is not obtainable as a separate product. The specification of the "memory module" interface may be easier to obtain, but attachment to that interface would require that the vendor supply the equivalent of the Honeywell core controller logic. Attachment to the "system controller" interface requires that the vendor supply the equivalent of the Honeywell System Controller, a substantial piece of logic, including multiple ports for attachment to processors and I/O controllers. Of the three interface possibilities, it is suggested that "memory module" interface be considered first.

Details of the interface specification will have to be obtained by direct negotiation between the vendor and Honeywell. This negotiation may be aided by Honeywell's recent agreement with the General Services Administration to supply technical information required for attachment of memory to the Honeywell 6000-line, which uses the same interfaces as the 6180. In addition,

Project MAC's position as a defense contractor may permit it to take advantage of this agreement directly.

6180 System modifications

Some minor modifications to the Honeywell 6180 Processors, IOM, and System Controllers may be required to provide high-order address lines for which architectural provisions have been made. A completed proposal should include a plan for installation of these modifications, either by Honeywell or by the vendor.

Reliability

The overall reliability of the 8-million word memory system must be at least equivalent to that of common 256k word systems today. An MTBF of 168 hours (1 week of continuous operation) is suggested. This requirement would appear to force an increase in reliability level by a factor of 32. However, certain special properties of the system may be used to make this reliability specification easier to meet: the rate of accesses to the memory system by two parallel processors will be about the same as to a 256k word system, so the average density of access to any one module will be reduced by a factor of 32. Thus, although reliability expressed in mean time between failures is much higher than usual, when expressed in mean number of references between failures, it may actually be quite ordinary. Note however, that we are discussing only averages; any one module must also be prepared for a continuous stream of successive accesses for an indefinite time.

It would appear that error correction techniques will probably be required. It is essential that some method be devised for keeping count of the number of errors successfully corrected, so that the operating system may have an early warning of possible trouble. For example, the highest-order word

in each 0.5M word memory module might maintain a count of the number of errors successfully corrected in that module since module initialization.

In addition to error correction, uncorrectable errors must be detected with high probability, and reported to the operating system via the standard H-6000 "parity failure" interface.

The lifetime of the equipment should be at least 5 years (45,000 hours) when operated continuously, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

Maintenance

The proposal should include a maintenance plan for the memory system, including any equipment needed, such as a memory load simulator, and whether or not a spare memory module is planned as part of the system. Maintenance costs and availability of experienced maintenance personnel should be addressed.

The proposal should also address itself to the maintenance of the Honeywell 6180 processors and I/O system, presumably to be carried out by Honeywell on terms acceptable to its Field Engineering Department.

Acceptance Test

Each module will be subject to a separate acceptance test. One week of continuous operation in production service on the 6180 without a hardware failure will be considered as initially passing the reliability specification. In addition, if later experience indicates that a previously accepted module is actually below specified reliability, acceptance of later modules will be delayed until the specification is met.

Tests confirming that access and cycle time are within specification will also be performed.

Engineering Contact

This request for proposals provides only sketchy technical details. It is anticipated that any complete proposal will require considerable ironing out of technical details, and will therefore require direct contact between the responsible engineering personnel of the proposer, and those of M.I.T.

Bidder's Technical Conference

To maximize the rate of information transfer to prospective bidders under this request, M.I.T. will hold a technical conference for bidders on March 1, 1973. At this conference, a brief review of salient features of this RFP will be given, together with any additional considerations which seem significant. Prospective bidders will then have an opportunity to inquire about requirements not described here, and to discuss negotiability and tradeoffs among the explicitly stated requirements.