

An Integrated 802.11a Baseband and MAC Processor

J. Thomson, B. Baas, E. Cooper, J. Gilbert, G. Hsieh, P. Husted,
A. Lokanathan, J. Kuskin, D. McCracken, B. McFarland, T. Meng,
D. Nakahira, S. Ng, M. Rattehalli, J. Smith, R. Subramanian,
L. Thon, Y. Wang, R. Yu, X. Zhang

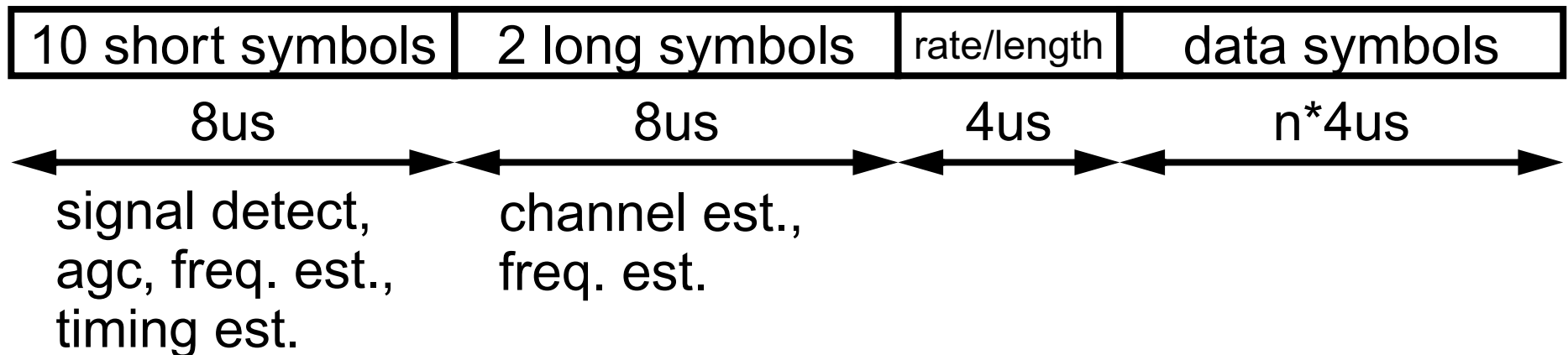
Atheros Communications, Sunnyvale, California

Outline

- 802.11a Overview
- Medium Access Control Design
- Baseband Transmitter Design
- Baseband Receiver Design
- Chip Details

What is 802.11a?

- IEEE standard approved in September, 1999
- 12 20MHz channels at 5.15 - 5.35 GHz and 5.725 - 5.825 GHz
- Coded OFDM with 48 data and 4 pilot subcarriers. Coding rate = {1/2, 2/3, 3/4}. Modulation = {bpsk, qpsk, 16qam, 64qam}
- Data rate: 6Mb/s - 54Mb/s per channel
- Symbol Format:

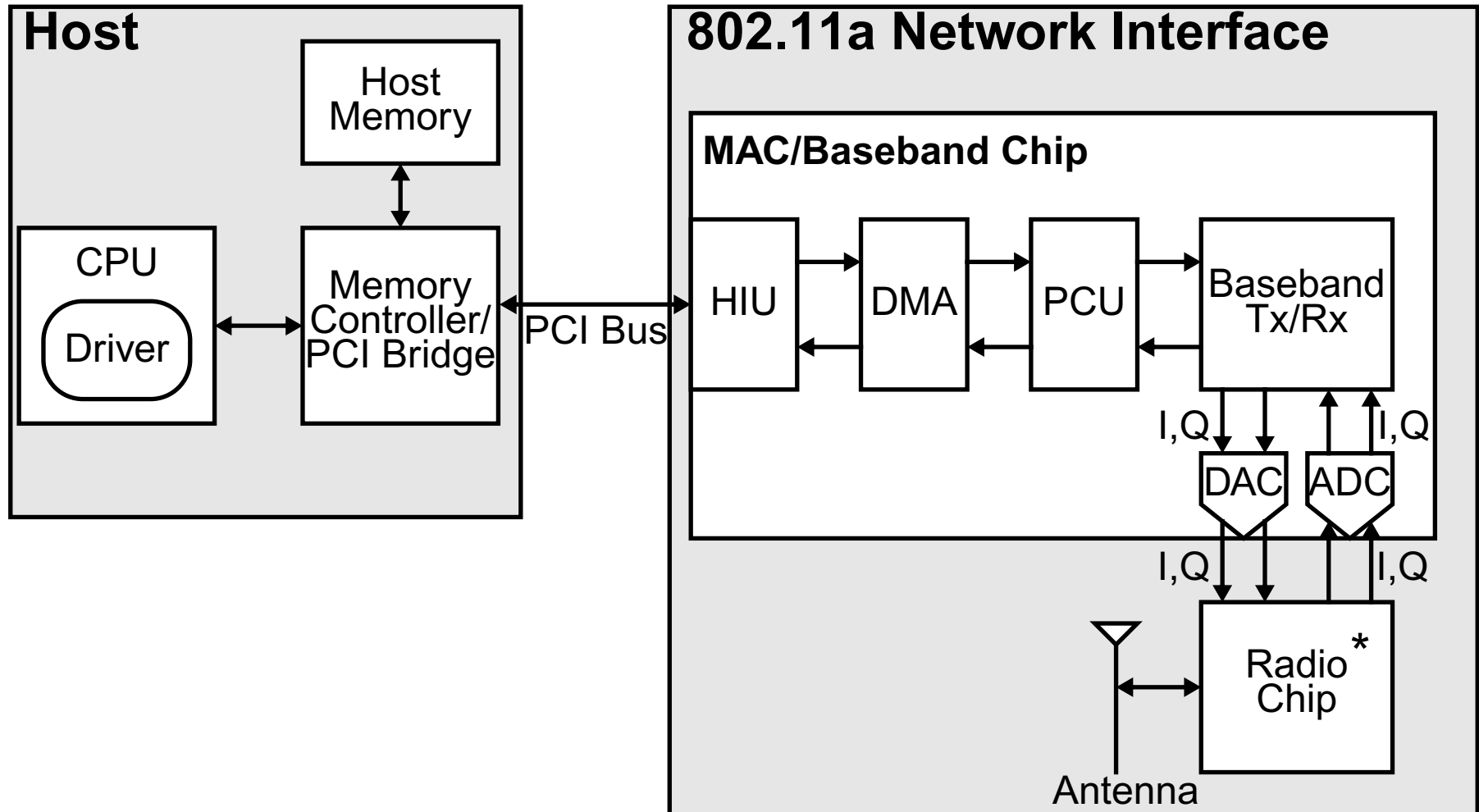


Why 802.11a?

Compared to 802.11b:

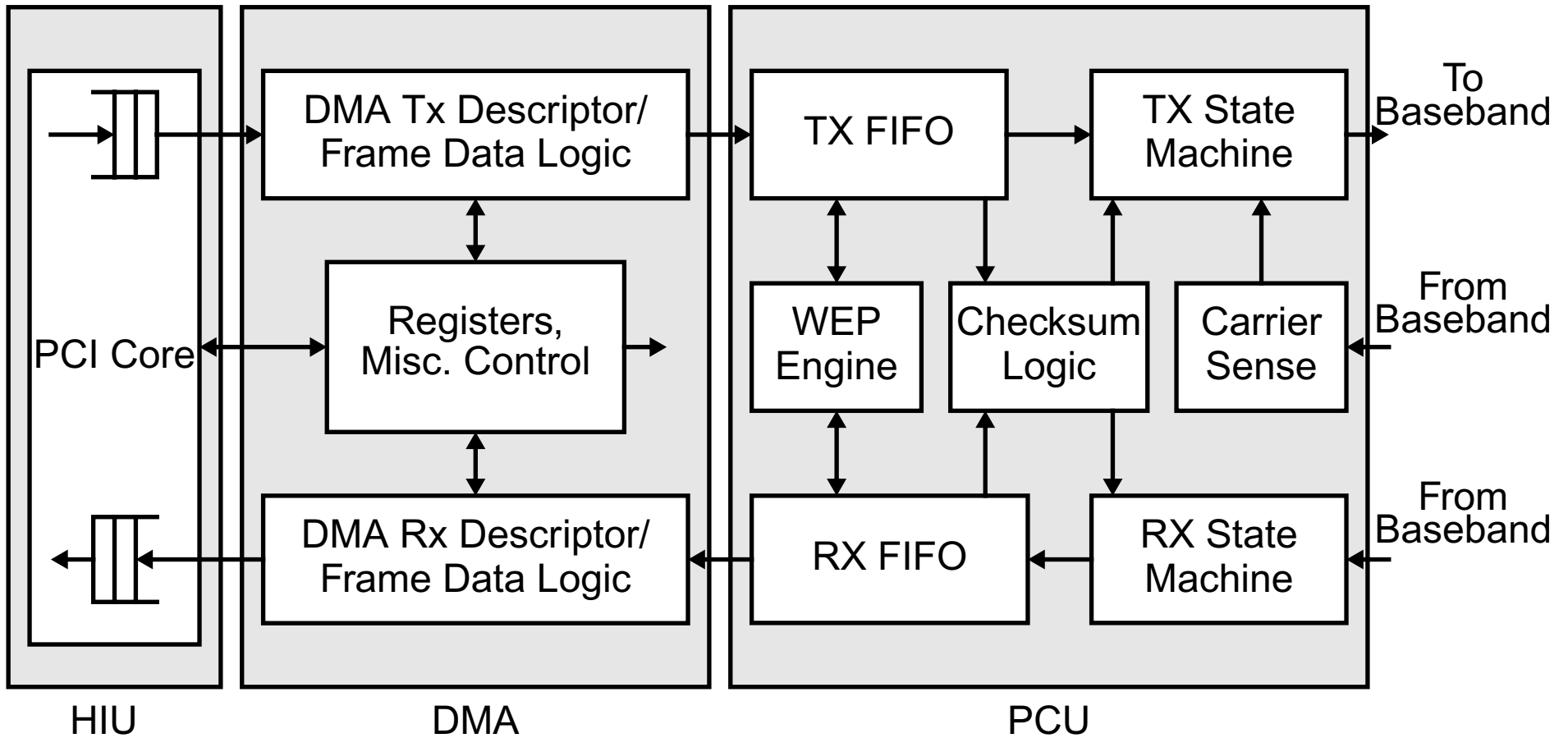
- higher data rate per channel (peak of 54Mb/s vs. 11Mb/s)
- measured throughput is 2 to 5 times higher in a typical office environment
- more non-overlapping channels (12 vs. 3) implies less co-channel interference
- the result is ~10x higher system capacity, accommodating more users or enabling lower deployment costs
- 5GHz bands have less interference (2.4GHz has 802.11b, HomeRF, Bluetooth, cordless phones, microwave ovens ...)
- less energy per bit transferred

System Overview



* D. Su, et al., ISSCC 2002, Paper 5.4

MAC Architecture



MAC Partitioning

Partitioning is based on required timing.

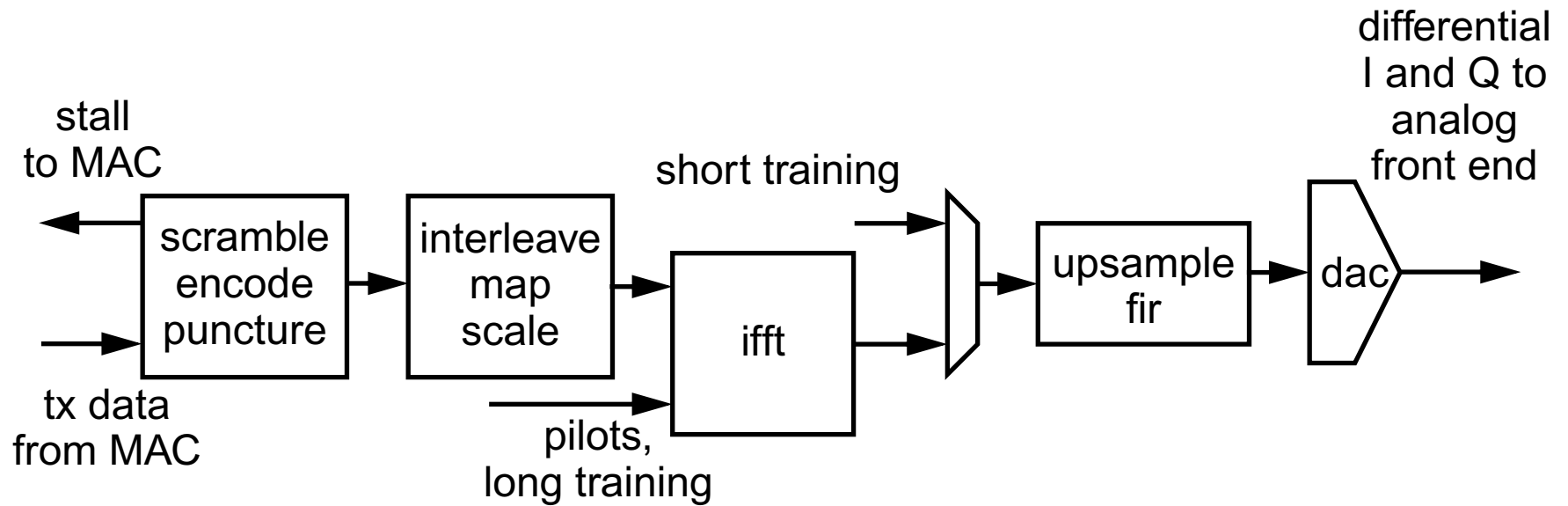
Timing-critical functions:

- demand fast response or precise timing. Managed by the PCU.
- include CRC generation and checking, hardware-level frame retry, channel access, timer updates, and generation of special frames such as beacons, ACK, CTS

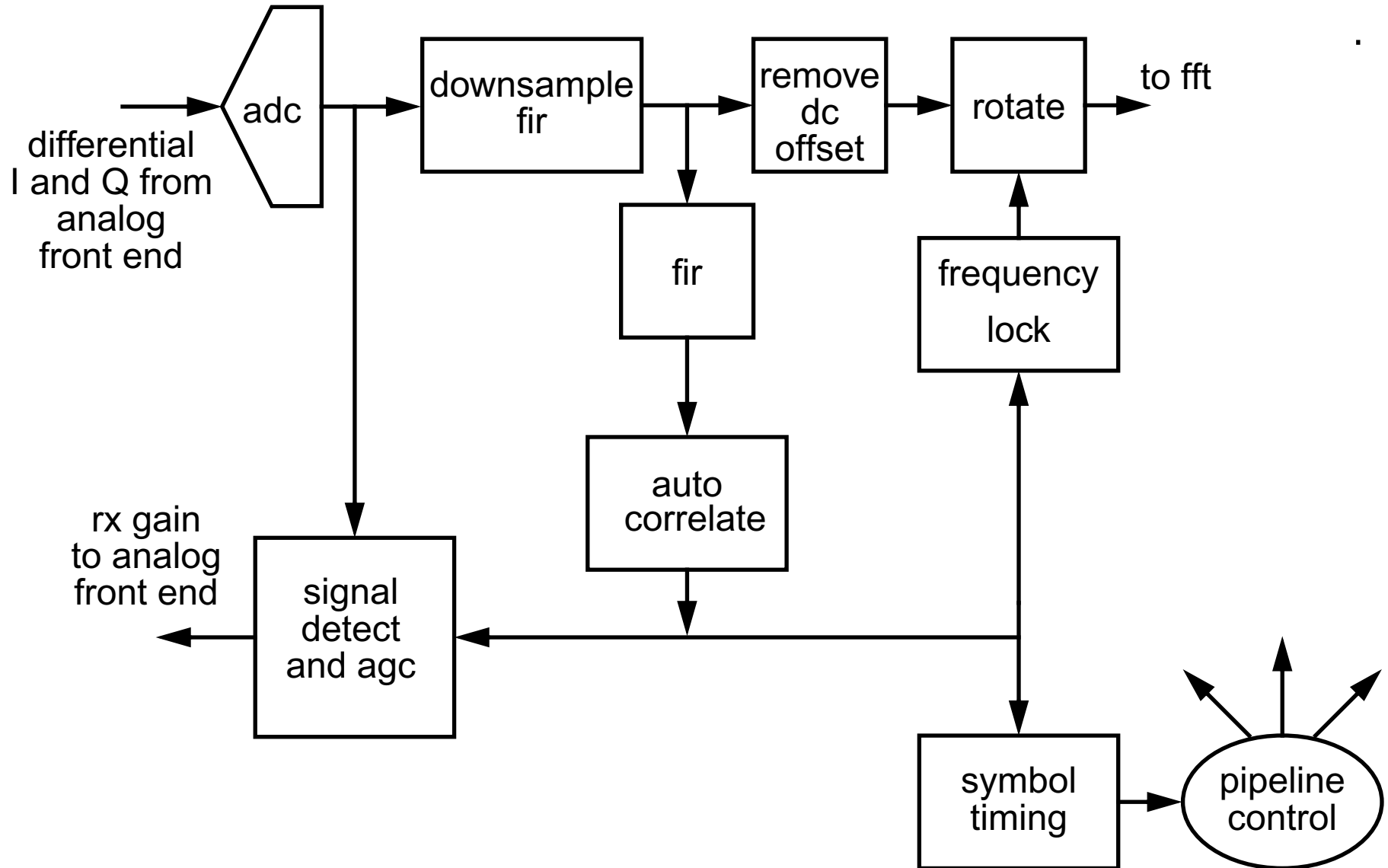
Non-timing-critical functions:

- performed in the driver software executing on the host
- include complex frame exchanges (e.g.: authentication and association), fragmentation, frame buffering and bridging, and other network management functions

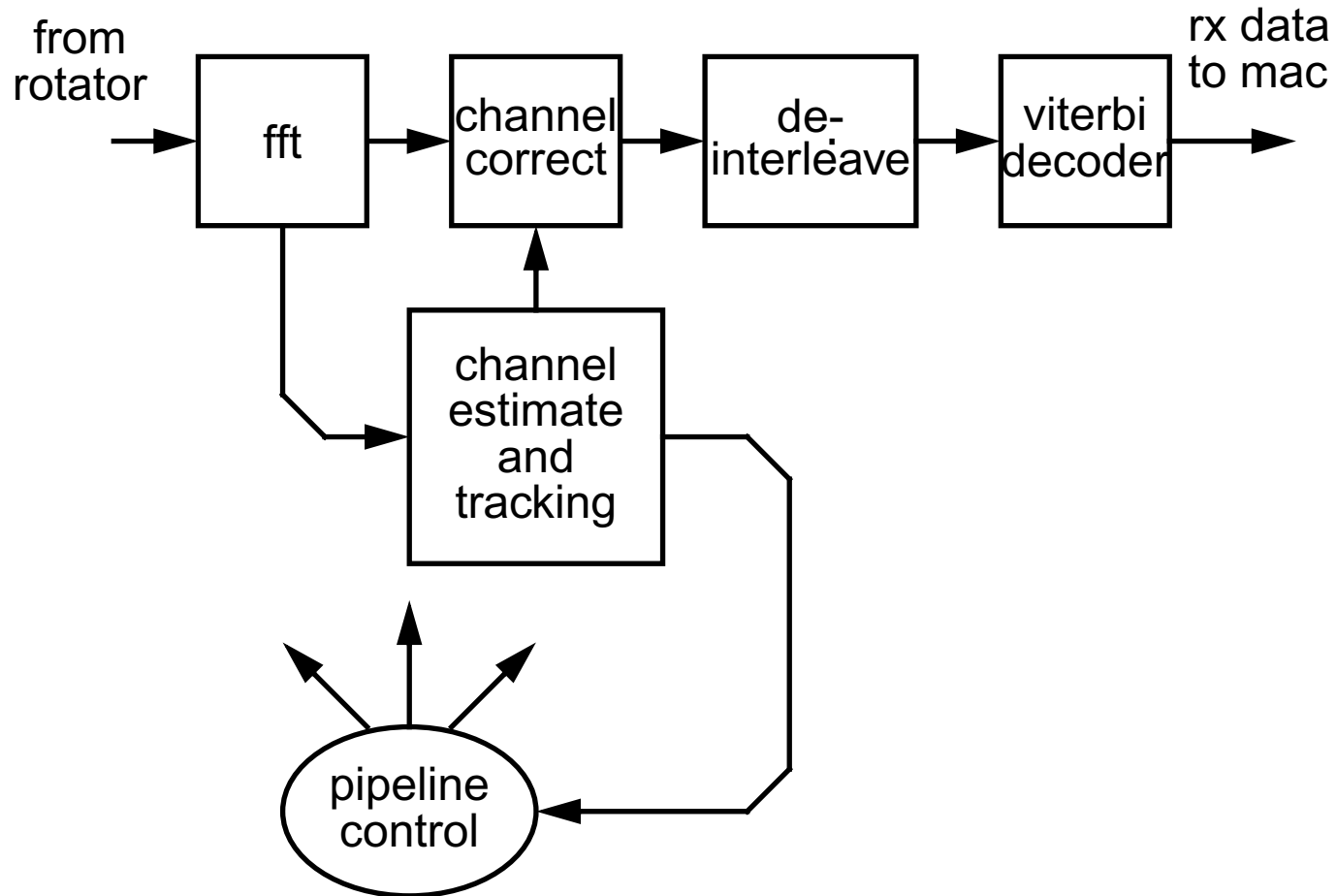
Baseband Transmitter



Baseband Receiver



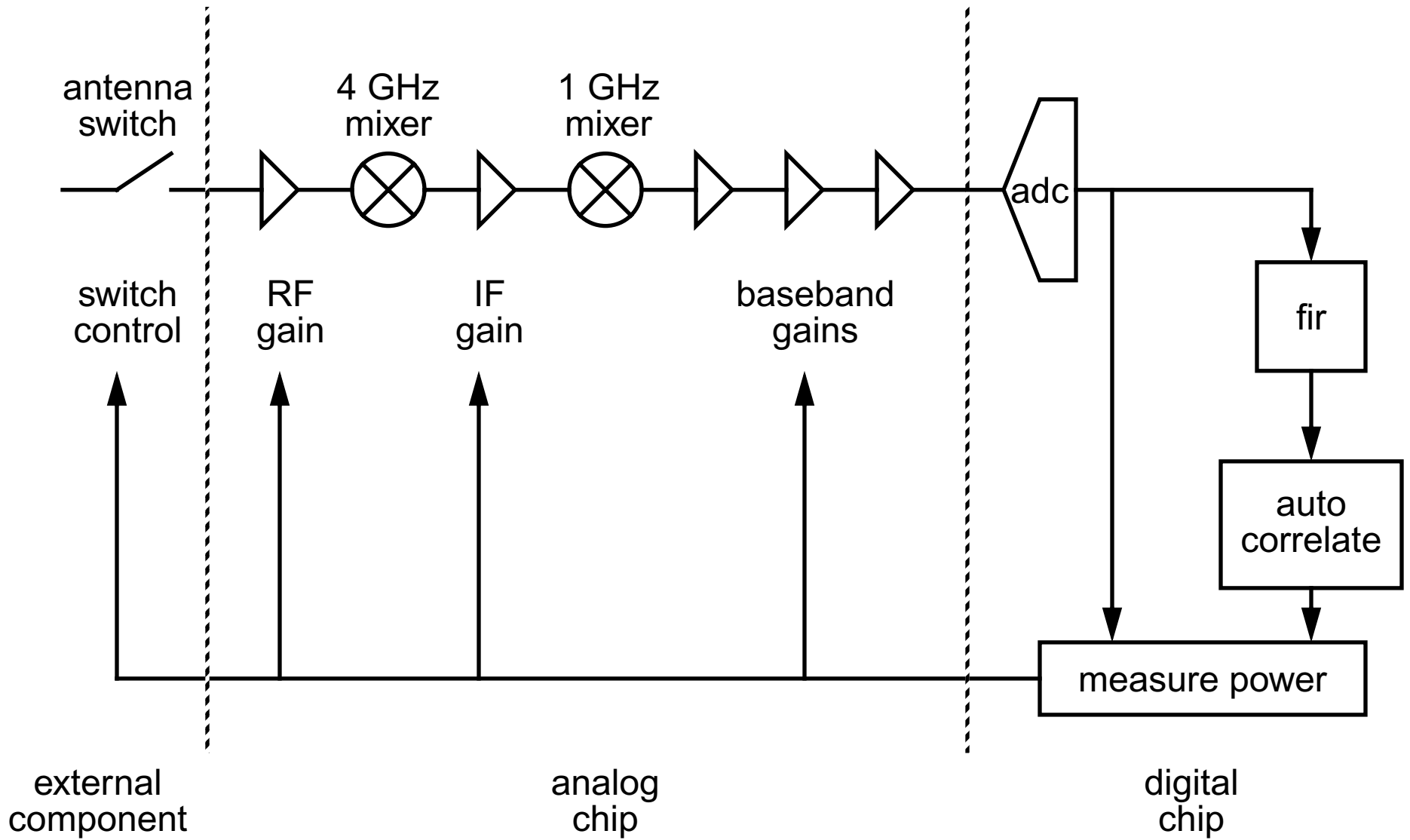
Baseband Receiver (cont)



Signal Detection and Automatic Gain Control

- need to detect $\sim 60\text{dB}$ range of received signal strength
- may require multiple power measurements and gain changes within $\sim 4\mu\text{s}$
- for weak signal detection, auto-correlated power is measured with a period of $0.8\mu\text{s}$ (short symbol duration)
- for strong signal detection, raw power is measured, especially saturation at the ADC
- the goal is to maximize signal size at the ADC while providing headroom for adjacent channel interference and the peak-to-average-ratio of OFDM symbols

AGC Loop



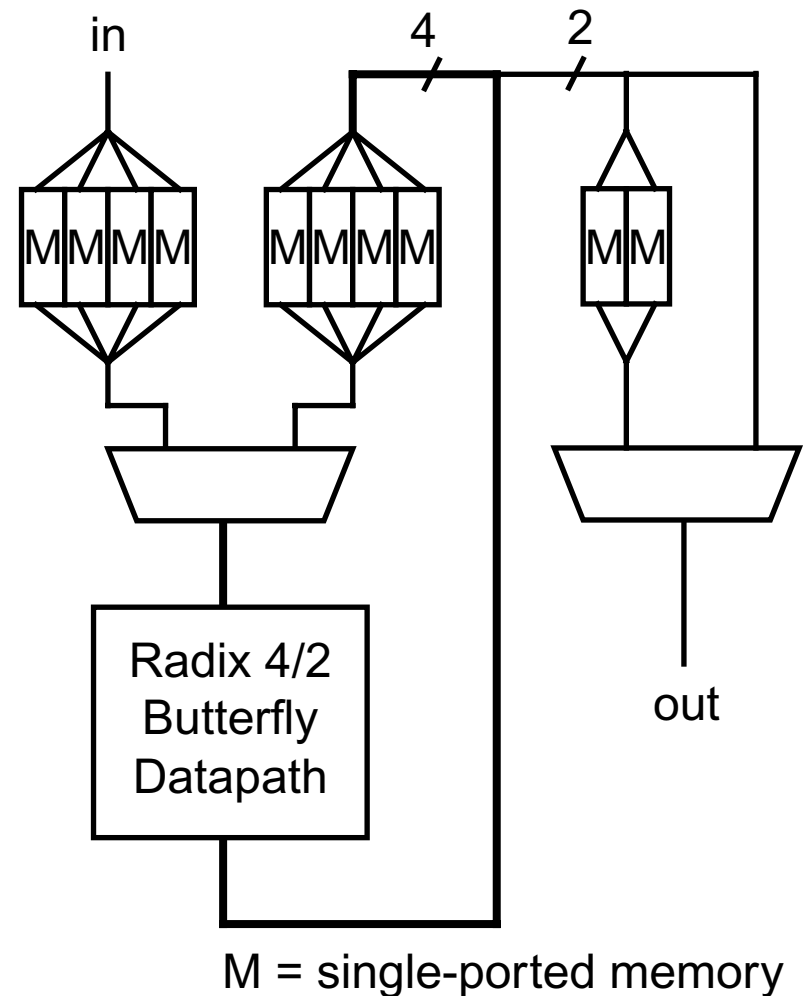
Fast Fourier Transform

128-pt FFT reduces adjacent channel filtering requirements and preserves the guard interval

time-multiplexed radix 4/2 butterfly datapath

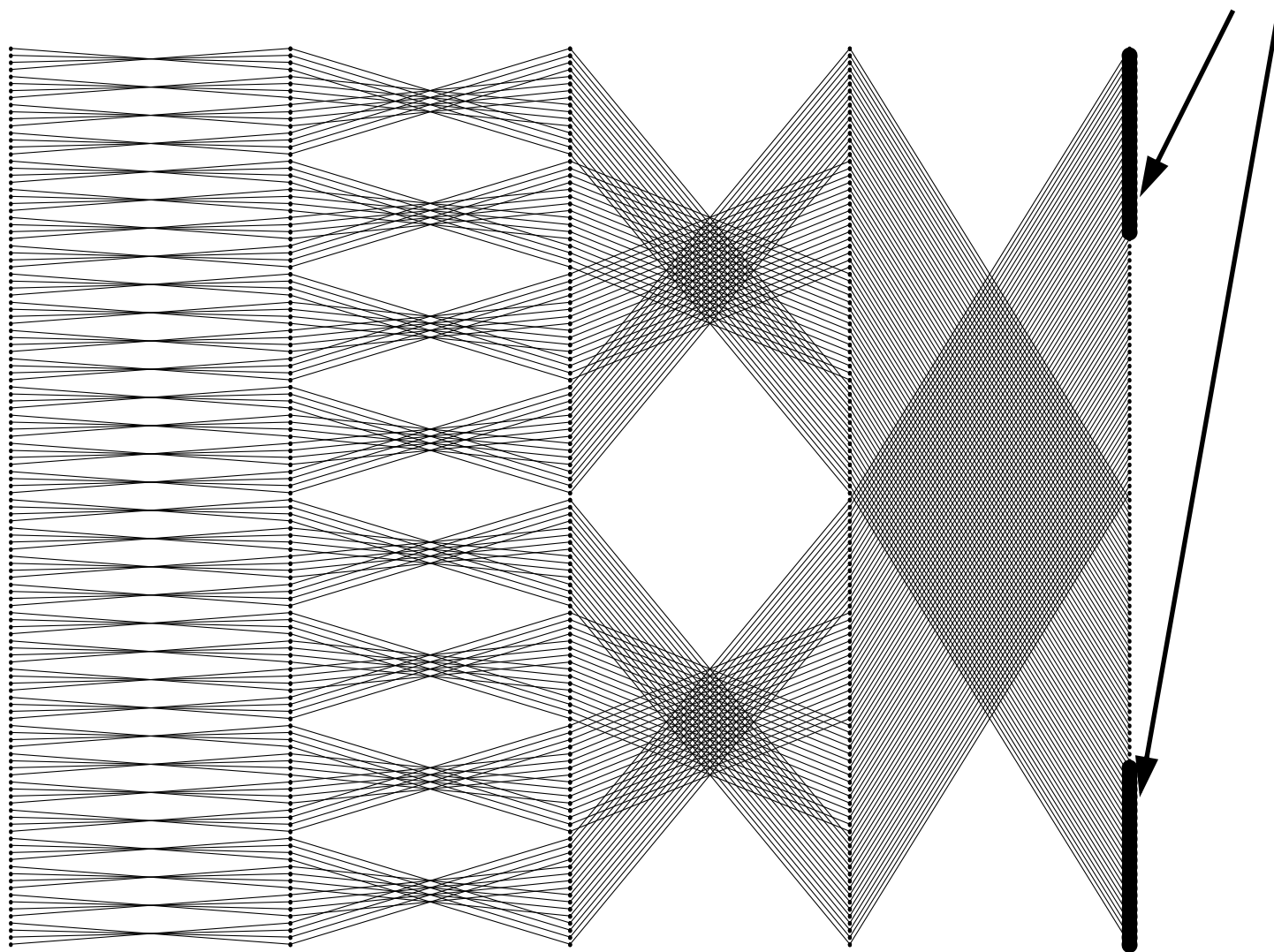
contains memory for input, temporary storage and output

shares hardware with the IFFT

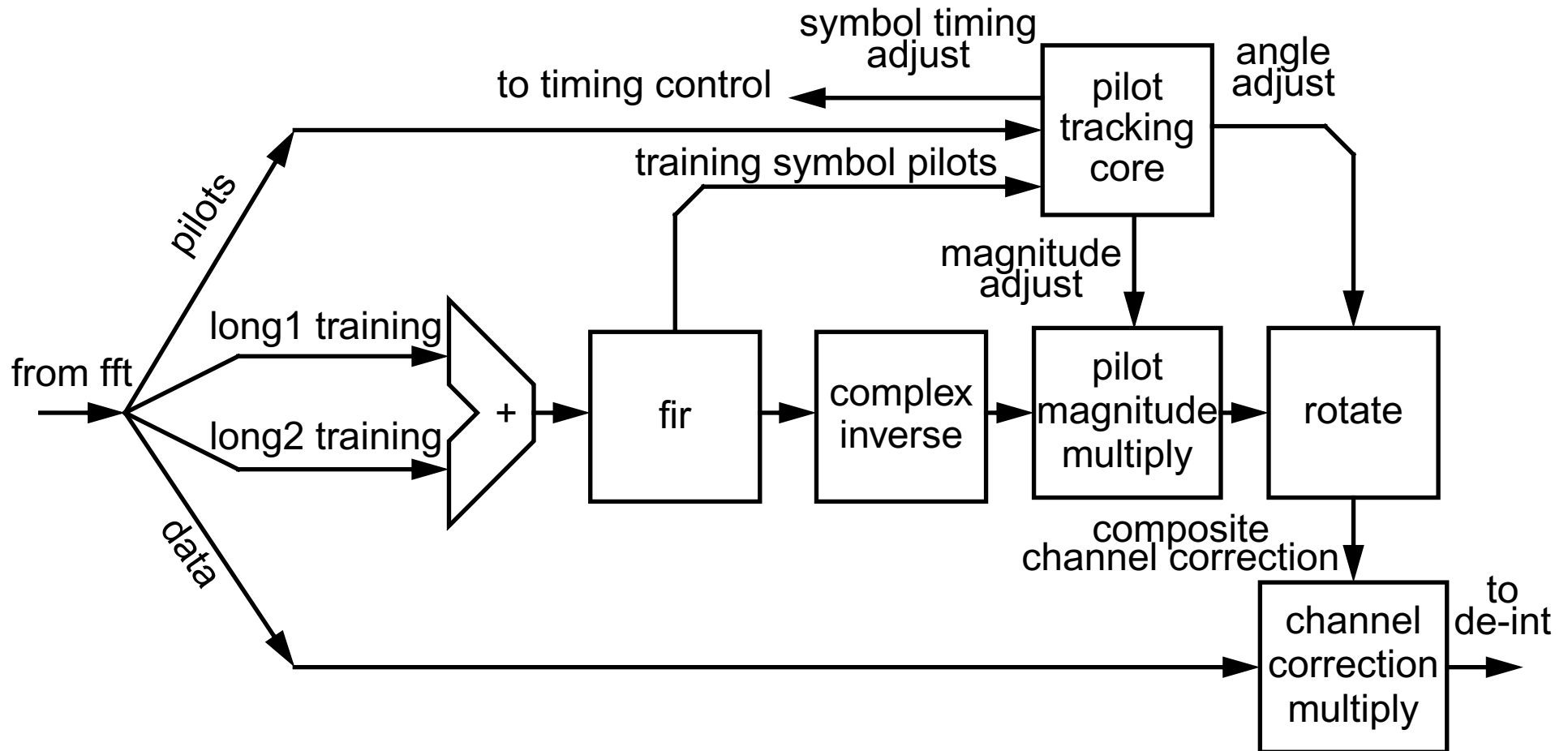


FFT RX Butterfly Diagram

Frequency-domain outputs

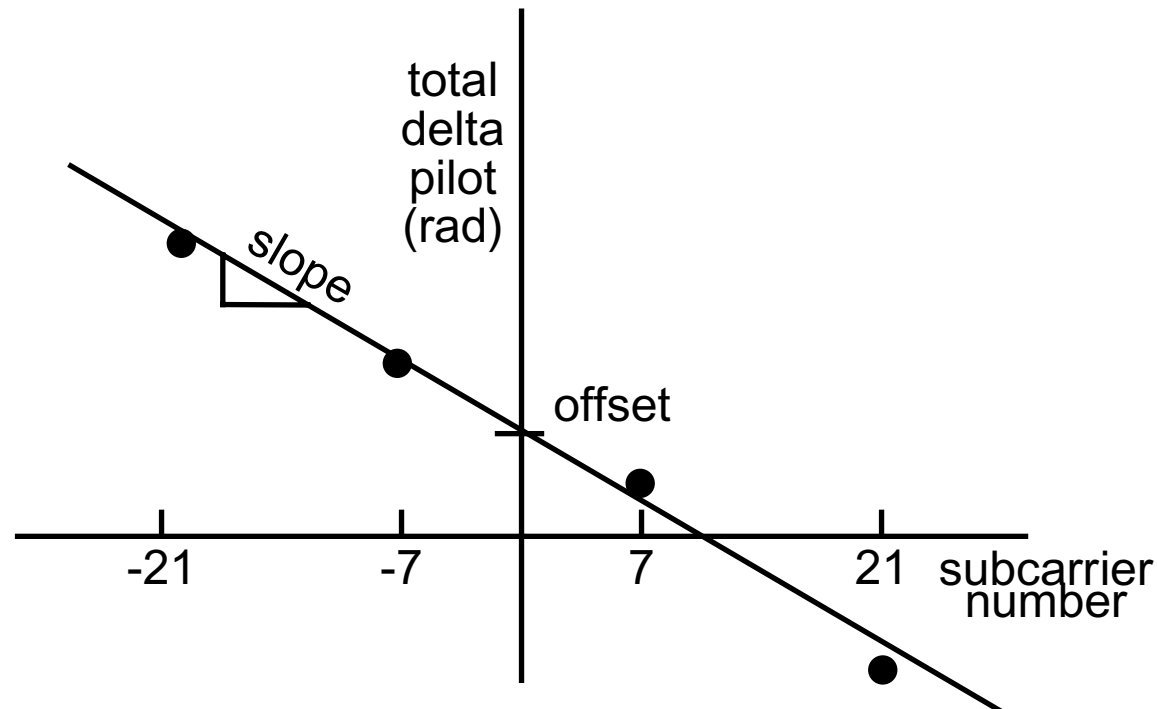


Pilot Tracking and Channel Correction



Pilot Phase Tracking

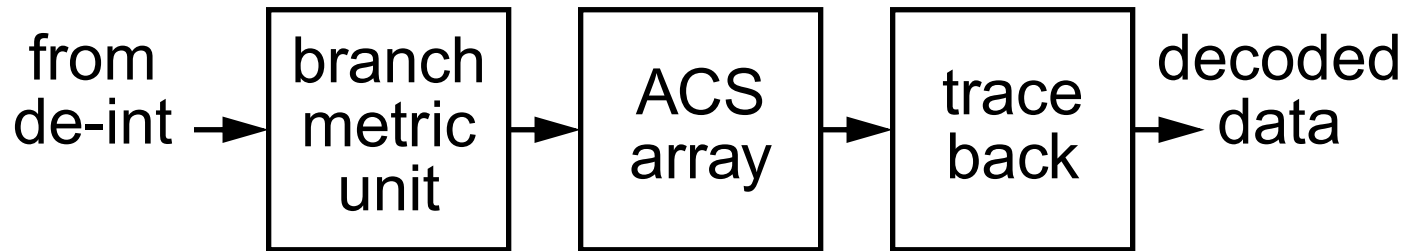
- for each data symbol, for each of the 4 pilots, track total change in phase compared to the training symbols
- perform a least squares fit to determine phase correction for each data subcarrier



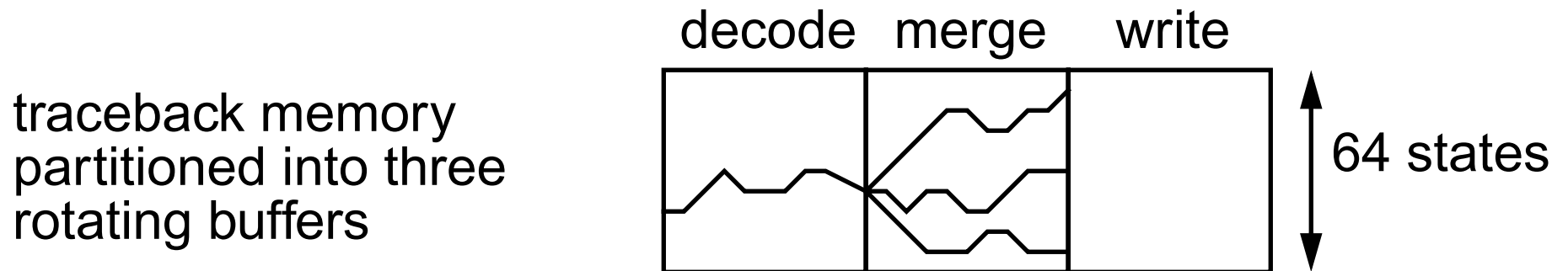
Pilot Tracking (cont)

- adjust channel estimates to account for frequency estimation error, phase noise and symbol timing drift
- drift in offset indicates frequency estimation error. Apply to rotator before FFT to reduce inter-carrier interference
- drift in slope indicates a shift in symbol timing. As slope becomes steeper, adjust symbol timing later. As slope becomes flatter, adjust symbol timing earlier
- pilot magnitude tracking monitors amplitude variations by comparing pilot power in the training symbols to pilot power in the data symbols

Viterbi Decoder



- branch metric unit computes soft trellis weights from the decoded constellations
- add-compare-select (ACS) array is radix-4, fully parallel



Power Management

Sleep:

- the chip can be programmed to sleep automatically and awake just before the next beacon
- the PCU parses the beacon to determine whether to remain awake for additional frames or re-enter sleep. Host interaction is required only if additional frames are to be processed.

Design Optimization:

- streamlined design, especially for datapaths
- MAC implemented with dedicated logic (yet still highly flexible), requiring no off-chip RAM or program storage
- aggressive clock gating

Chip Details

Technology	Standard 0.25u CMOS, 5 layer metal, 2.5V core, 3.3V I/O
Transistor Count	4.0M
Die Size	6.8 mm x 6.8 mm
Package	196-pin BGA
Power at 54Mb/s (Tx/Rx)	
Core	219 / 203 mW
DACs + supporting circuitry	68 / 0 mW
ADCs + supporting circuitry	0 / 211mW
I/O	25 / 24 mW
PLL	14 / 14 mW
Total	326 / 452 mW

Die Photograph

