

Electromagnetic System for Railroad Track Crack Detection

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1. ABSTRACT

An electromagnetic system for detection cracked rail and enhancing traction when necessary includes wiring coils around wheel axles, and a corresponding power source for supplying power to the coils for producing electromagnetic flux. The produced electromagnetic flux is routed through the wheel axles, wheels and rails in a closed circuit. When a cracked rail is encountered along the route, the circuit will be interrupted or open, resulting in a changed flux pattern. This pattern change is detected by a flux sensor, and the geographic location of the crack in the rail is determined. The electromagnetic system further includes an electromagnetic wheel loading means for generating an attraction to the rails. The generated attraction to the rails increases friction between the rails and the rails, thereby increasing traction to enable hauling greater loads up steep grades.

2. TECHNICAL FIELD

This invention relates to train rail crack detection and traction enhancement and, more particularly, to detection of a cracked train rail by magnetic flux and, additionally, to the increase of traction between a train wheel and the rail, again by magnetic flux.

3. BACKGROUND ART

Cracked rails occur in various geographical areas, in various climates, and at various locations where the rail beds are in less than optimal condition. Undetected cracked rails can cause derailment along with life threatening danger and equipment damage. Currently, ten mile radius of the rail track is probed before a train is allowed to go on the track. The probing creates a delay and backup in freight car areas and in locomotive dispatching, where cost to shipping is added due to these idle waiting rail cars. It is desirable to know the condition of a section of track as the train leaves that section of the track. Self-policing track by simple low cost means for the next user, which may be closer than the ten miles probe area, would allow closer spacing of trains and thus increase throughput of coal etc., throughout the rail system. All sorts of schemes have been conceived to detect cracks in a rail, but none appear to be cost effective. Ultra sound, and like employ detectors to screen out known discontinuities in track mating techniques, but none are cost effective to date.

Further problems occur when train locomotives pull heavy loads under various types of weather, track condition, etc. Wheel slippage causes damage to tracks and wheels themselves. Various techniques have been tried to detect loss of traction as well as slippage and re- direct power to the non- slipping wheels. This resembles the limited slip or traction control offered in many automobiles. Such techniques have had varying degrees of success.

It is desired to greatly increase traction to enable locomotives to pull greater loads up. Maintenance of damaged wheels and track due to slippage is time consuming and costly. Therefore the desire to minimize or eliminate slippage is another issue for the subject of the present invention.

4. SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A method to detect train rail cracks easily, and at low cost, is implemented with a circuit for detection of cracks in train rails and rail discontinuity. The invention provides both train truck and trailer embodiments for rail crack detection with little complexity.

The invention also involves use of a method of magnetic traction to inhibit slippage between train wheel and track, using electromagnetic energy with no current in or through the train axle bearing. The method uses opposing electromagnetic fields to generate and complete the magnetic circuit, enabling both aspects of this invention to take place. An electromagnet structure is used to pull the train locomotive downward toward the track, thus increasing the loading force on the wheel, producing greater friction and therefore improved traction. A train operator can apply his magnetic traction at will, or under computer control.

A preferred embodiment of the invention combines a crack detector and traction enhancement concept for locomotive and end of train crack detection. The magnetic structure force enhancer is placed where it will not interfere with proper operation of the train. Additionally, the invention provides a way to use electromagnetic energy that does not require electric current in the bearing assemblies of the train axles.

An electromagnetic system for rail detection and traction enhancement comprises, in a preferred embodiment, wheel axles, wiring coils around the wheel axles, respectively, and a power source coupled to the wiring coils for supplying power to produce electromagnetic flux. The wiring coils produce opposite magnetic north and South Pole pairs on the axles.

The electromagnetic system further comprises means for monitoring a flux pattern if different, interrupted or open, and means for locating the position where the circuit pattern is detected as open. The power source is generated for generating power by wheel rotating, or by a locomotive engine. The system further includes an electromagnetic wheel loading means connected to said power source, for generating artificial load of a train.

5. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

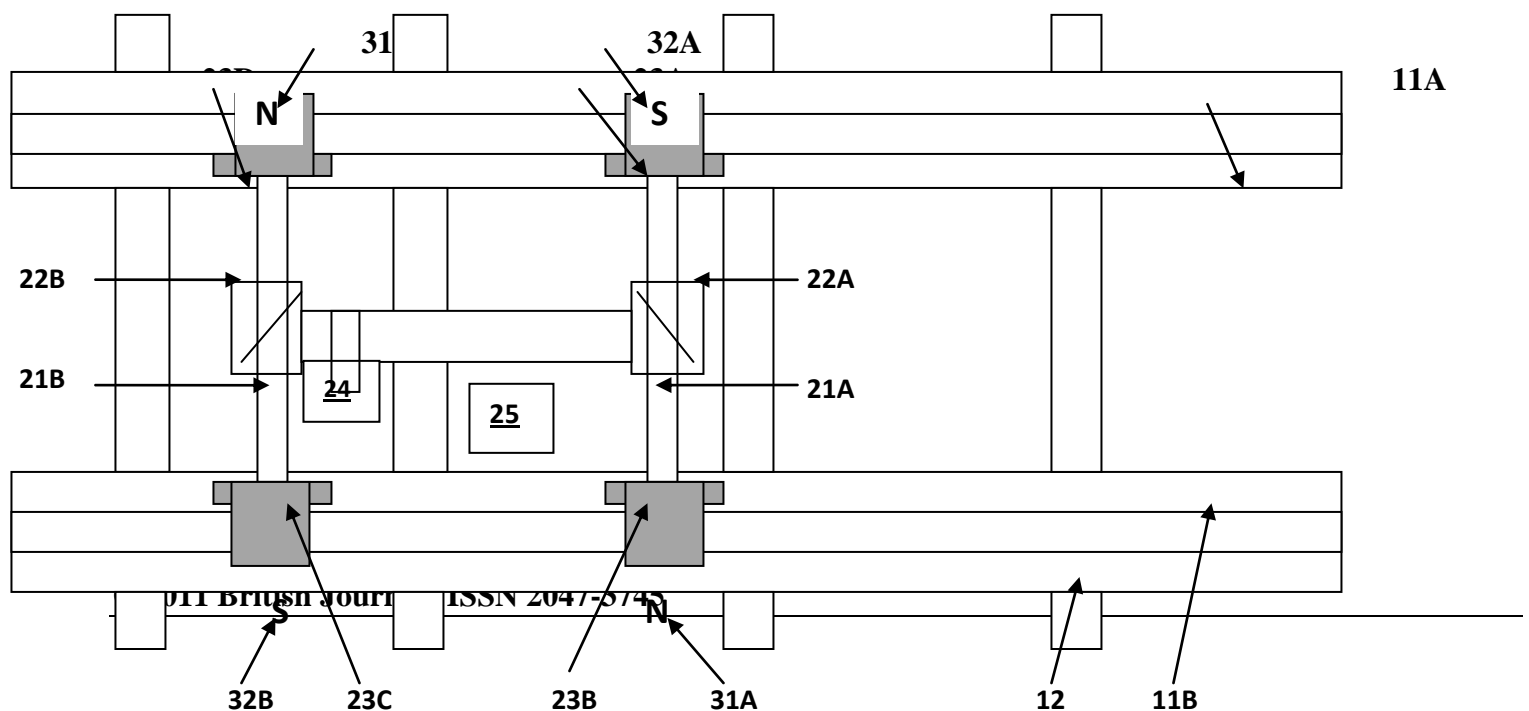
Figure 1: Schematic view of the invention

Figure 2: Schematic view of the invention illustrating a situation where the rail is cracked

Figure 3: Pictorial diagram of an embodiment of the invention presented as a trailer module

Figure 4: Block diagram of the system of the invention

Figure 5: The flux field expanding to the traction area



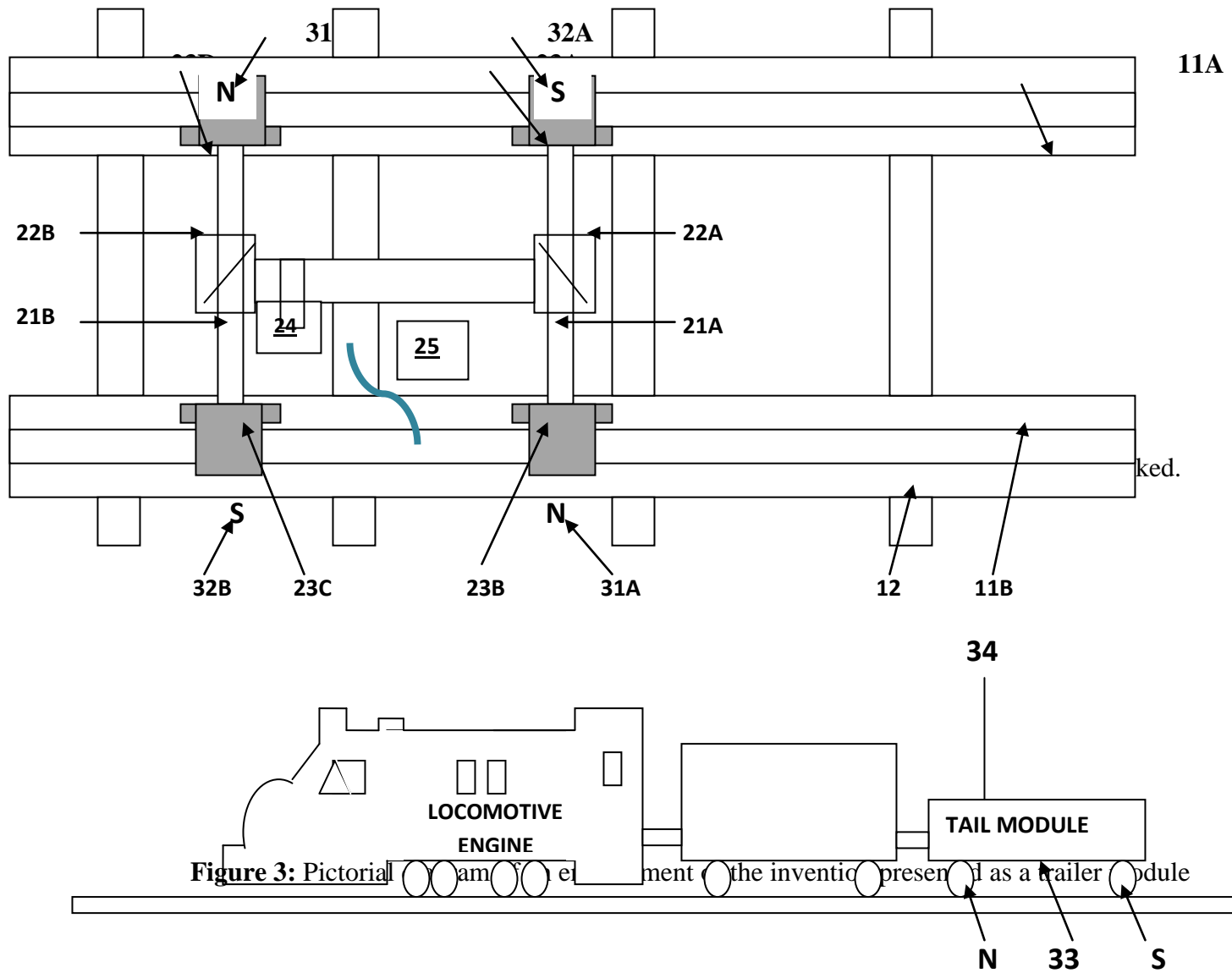


Figure 3: Pictorial representation of the invention presented as a trailer module

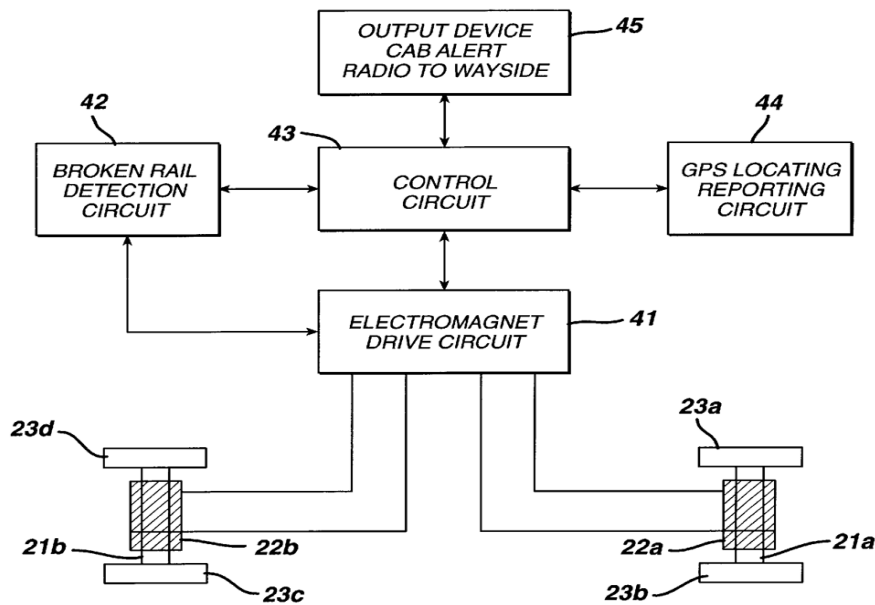
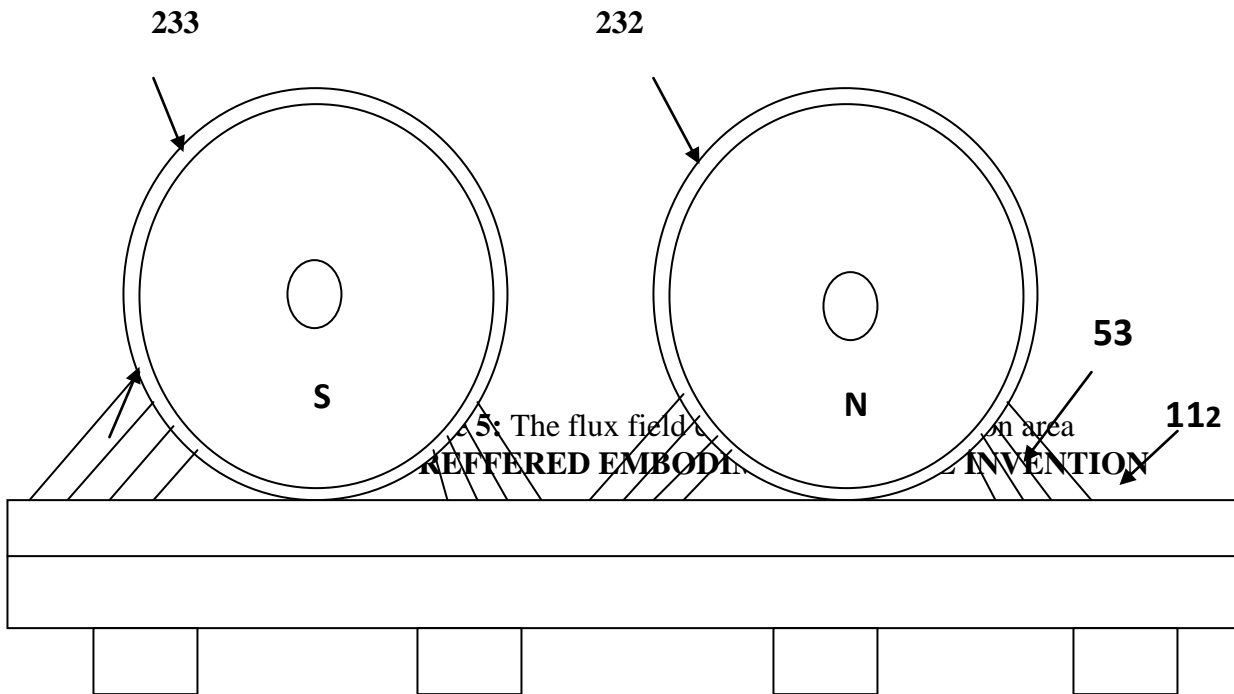


Figure 4: Block diagram of the system of the invention



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FIG 1 illustrates a preferred embodiment of the invention. The schematic view shows an ordinary railroad track having train rails 11a and 11b and rail ties 12. Train wheels 23a, 23b, 23c, and 23d are placed on, and contact, rails 11a and 11b. The train wheels may be part of a train truck carriage.

FIG 1 further illustrates wiring coils 22a, 22b placed around wheel axles 21a, and 21b, respectively. A power generator 24 supplies current to wiring coils 22a, 22b for generating electromagnetic flux. These fluxes are preferably out of magnetic phase with each other, producing north-south opposing pairs of magnetic poles 31a, 32a and 31b, 32b. More particularly, magnetic pairs 31a, 32a of wheel axle 21a are opposite to magnetic pairs 21b, 32b of the wheel axle and 21b. Therefore, wheel axles 21a, 21b and corresponding portions of the rails 11a and 11b form a closed magnetic or electromagnetic circuit pattern through the contacts made by the wheels. The magnetic or electromagnetic circuit is encompassed within an area that moves along the track with the vehicle on which it is carried. The magnetic flux is continuous among magnetic pole pairs 31a, 32a, and 31b, 32b. So that the magnetic flux is smooth in the route of the closed electromagnetic circuit. Importantly, there is no electrical current to pass through the bearing assemblies from the power generator, thereby avoiding potential damage to the bearing assemblies.

Generator 24 may be powered by the locomotive prime mover, which may comprise a diesel engine or electric motor or alternately may be an internal generator that is turned by one of the wheels itself, either way thus generating the electrical current for energizing the electromagnetic circuit. It will also be noted that permanent magnets can accomplish this function by magnetizing the wheel assembly.

Monitoring means, such as a magnetometer or other flux sensor 25 is utilized to monitor the magnetic circuit pattern. In non cracked rails areas, a magnetic flux is induced in the wheel axle which continues through the train rail and passes back through the wheel and second axle assembly, closing a magnetic loop, namely north pole through the rail to south pole through the axle to the north pole. The flux induced in the electromagnetic circuit will be smooth and continuous if no cracked rail is encountered as the electromagnetic circuit is moved along the track.

However as illustrated in FIG 2 if a crack 13 in the rail, a partially cracked rail, or other discontinuity in the rail is encountered and the electromagnetic circuit passes over this area an interrupted open or very different circuit pattern will be monitored. The flux sensor marks this discontinuity and notes its geographic location by employing for example a GPS locator, odometer and track database or the like. A ground crew can then be dispatched to investigate and repair the cracked rail. As a further refinement, the discontinuity can be compared to a track database to identify known track breaks at isolation joints which do not require repair.

FIG 3 illustrates application of the aforementioned procedure. The invention is implemented in a tail module 33 and powered by the locomotive engine. When a cracked rail is detected the locating means, such as GPS locator with future inspection and repair. Tail module 33 may be placed in at various locations in the train consist i.e., it may trail the train, as illustrated as FIG 3, it may lead the locomotive or it may be part of the locomotive. The magnetic flux may be low so as not to pick debris inside the track area, such as loose rail spikes, etc

FIG 4 illustrates the electrical system for detecting the broken rail. An electromagnet drive circuit 41 provides the electromagnetic flux to wheel axles 21a, 21b through wiring coils 22a, 22b respectively. Thus through the corresponding rail and contacts made by the wheels an electromagnetic circuit is achieved. Broken rail detection circuit 42 monitors the electromagnetic circuit pattern to determine if the pattern is changed or interrupted. If a discontinuity or different pattern is detected a broken rail signal is passed to a control circuit 43. Control circuit 43 acquires a position from GPS locating and reporting circuit 44, and combines and formats the broken rail signal from detection circuit 42 with the position information from the GPS locator of the circuit 44. The combined and formatted signal is transferred to an output circuit 45 for producing a locomotive cab alert and or activating a transmitter for supplying a radio signal to wayside stations

Control circuit 43 also provides capability to increase or decrease electromagnetic flux in the wheel axles in order to prevent slippage, as described below.

FIG.5 illustrates usage of the concept of “magnetraction”. This principle is used to stop train wheel slippage during power pulling, downhill braking and stationary braking. As described in conjunction with FIGS 1 and 4 the magnetraction force is controlled by control circuit 43, either by computer or manually when needed. Particularly, wiring coils 22a, 22b (FIG 1) are energized when slippage is detected. Thus, electromagnetic forces are generated to stop the slippage and hold wheels 23a, 23b, 23c and 23d tighter to the track. In this use of magnetraction wheels 23a, 23b, 23c, and 23d are the driving wheels of the locomotive.

In the use of magnetraction the reason for the increase in traction due to the increase in magnetic flux is that the flux pattern 53 shown in FIG 5 essentially increases the wheels traction force, due to the attractive flux field. This electromagnetic power provided to the wheels may be modulated or applied fully, depending on conditions, and may be operator or computer controlled. Basically instead of dispensing sand on the track, as is conventionally done, electromagnetic energy is used to stop slippage and increase traction. By employing electromagnetic force to increase traction, damage to wheels and rails if slippage were to occur is avoided.

While only certain preferred features of the invention have been illustrated and described many modifications and changes will occur to those skilled in the art. It is therefore to be understood that the appended claims are intended to cover all such modifications and changes as fall within the truth spirit of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. An electromagnetic system for rail road track crack detection and traction enhancement adapted to be carried aboard a rail vehicle said system comprising;
 - First and second wheel axles
 - A first pair of wheels supported on said first axle
 - A second pair of wheels supported on said second axle
 - A first one of the wheels of said first and second pairs being adapted to contact a first rail of said railroad track
 - A second one of the wheels of said first and second pairs being adapted to contact a second rail of said railroad track
 - A first wiring coil wound on the first one of said axles
 - A second wiring coil wound on the second one of said axles
 - A power source coupled to each of said wiring coils for supplying power to produce electromagnetic flux in a magnetic circuit comprising
 - a.) Said first pair of wheels and said first axle
 - b.) Said first rail
 - c.) Said second pair of wheels and said second axle
 - d.) Said second rail
 - A magnetic flux sensor for monitoring a flux pattern produced by said magnetic circuit and for generating an output indication if the flux pattern varies
2. The electromagnetic system of claim 1 wherein said wiring coils are phased to induce opposite magnetic north South Pole pairs in each of said wheel axles and to induce opposite magnetic north south pole pairs in each of said first one of the wheels of said first and second pairs.
3. The electromagnetic system of claim 2 further comprising means for geographically loading a position where said flux pattern is detected to vary
4. The electromagnetic system of claim 3 wherein said means for geographically locating is a GPS

5. The electromagnetic system of claim 1 further comprising electromagnetic wheel loading means coupled to said power source for generating an artificial load imposed by said vehicle on said railroad track.
6. The electromagnetic system of claim 5 wherein said power source comprises a generator driven by rotation of a wheel on said railroad track
7. The electromagnetic system of claim 5 wherein said wheel loading means comprises an electromagnet
8. The electromagnetic system of claim 5 wherein said power source comprises a generator driven by a locomotive prime mover
9. The electromagnetic system of claim 1 further comprising means for geographically locating a position where said flux pattern is detected to vary.
10. The electromagnetic system of claim 9 wherein said means for geographically locating a position is GPS
11. The electromagnetic system of claim 1 wherein said power source comprises a generator driven by rotation of a wheel on said railroad track
12. The electromagnetic system of claim 1 wherein said power source comprises a generator driven by locomotive prime mover
13. An electromagnetic system for railroad track crack detection and traction enhancement adapted to be carried aboard a railroad locomotive said system comprising;
 - First and second wheel axles
 - First pair of wheels supported on said second axle
 - Power source included on said locomotive; electromagnetic wheel loading means coupled to said power source for generating an artificial load imposed by said locomotive road track and
 - Control circuit for providing power from said power source to said wheel loading means when wheel slippage is detected during power pulling and downhill braking and during stationary braking
14. The electromagnetic system of claim 13 wherein said wheel loading means comprises an electromagnet
15. A method of detecting a broken rail of a railroad track comprising the steps of:
 - Forming a complete electromagnetic circuit joining one rail of the track at two locations on the one rail with a second rail of the track at two locations on the second rail, respectively
 - Moving the electromagnetic circuit along the track so as to encompass the two locations on each of said first and second rails within an area moving along the track and detecting a change in magnetic flux in said circuit as an indication that said area encompasses at least one crack in at least one of the rails.
16. The method of claim 15 including means for geographically locating a position along the track where said at least one crack has been found
17. The method of detecting from a moving rail of claim 15 wherein said electromagnetic circuit encompasses a respective wheel contacting the track at each of the two locations on the rail and each of the two location on the second rail respectively.
18. A method for detecting from a moving rail vehicle a break in either rail of a pair of rails on which said vehicle is moving said vehicle including at least a first pair of wheels supported on a first axle and a second pair of wheels supported on a second axle said method comprising the steps of:
 - Forming a complete magnetic circuit comprising said first and second pair of wheels said first and second axles and a portion of each of said rails situated between the wheels of said first pair and wheels of said second pair

- Generating constant magnetic flux within said magnetic circuit and monitoring the magnetic flux within said magnetic circuit to detect variation in the level of said flux as an indication of a broken rail situated between the wheels of said first pair and second pair.
19. The method of claim 18 including the step of ascertaining a geographic location for each detected break in a rail
 20. A method of increasing friction between a railcar and a railroad track said railcar including a source of electrical power comprising the steps of;
 - Detecting wheel slippage during power pulling and downhill braking
 - Employing said electrical power to generate an electromagnetic field between said railcar and said railroad track while said wheel slippage is detected and during stationary braking such that said electromagnetic field acts to pull said railcar downward toward said track.

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