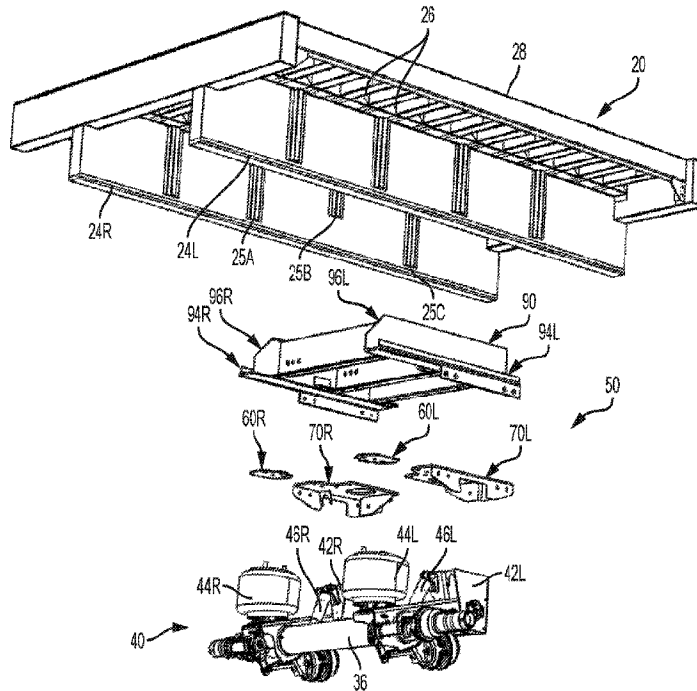




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(54) **Titre : RACCORDEMENT D'UN ENSEMBLE SUSPENSION A UNE STRUCTURE DE REMORQUE COMPOSITE**
 (54) **Title: JOINING A SUSPENSION ASSEMBLY TO A COMPOSITE TRAILER STRUCTURE**



(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**

A cargo vehicle includes a composite floor assembly configured to support cargo, at least one wheel assembly configured to transport the cargo on the composite floor assembly, a suspension assembly associated with the at least one wheel assembly, and an intermediate adapter assembly. The intermediate adapter assembly is permanently coupled to the composite floor assembly and removably coupled to the suspension assembly such that the composite floor assembly is removably coupled to the suspension assembly.

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(54) Title: JOINING A SUSPENSION ASSEMBLY TO A COMPOSITE TRAILER STRUCTURE

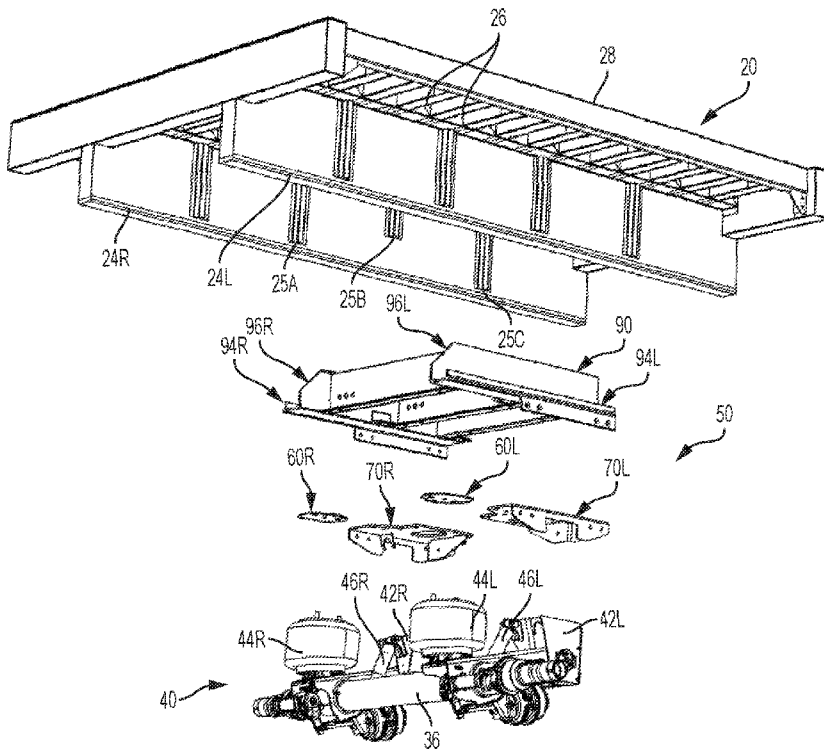
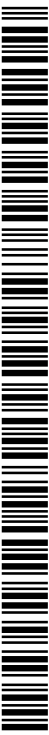


FIG. 4

(57) Abstract: A cargo vehicle includes a composite floor assembly configured to support cargo, at least one wheel assembly configured to transport the cargo on the composite floor assembly, a suspension assembly associated with the at least one wheel assembly, and an intermediate adapter assembly. The intermediate adapter assembly is permanently coupled to the composite floor assembly and removably coupled to the suspension assembly such that the composite floor assembly is removably coupled to the suspension assembly.



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JOINING A SUSPENSION ASSEMBLY TO A COMPOSITE TRAILER STRUCTURE

FIELD OF THE DISCLOSURE

[0001] The present disclosure relates generally to joining a suspension assembly to a composite cargo vehicle structure, such as a trailer structure and, more particularly, to joining a suspension assembly to a composite floor assembly of a trailer.

BACKGROUND OF THE DISCLOSURE

[0002] A trailer or another cargo vehicle which supports and transports cargo may include composite structures formed from various metallic and/or polymeric materials. Due to the configuration of composite structures, coupling another component of the trailer to the composite structure by forming holes in the composite structure for mechanical fasteners (e.g., bolts, rivets) may damage a portion of the composite structure. For example, the fibers in and around the holes of the composite structure may be damaged by the tool used to form the holes and/or by the fasteners placed in the holes. Therefore, a need exists to join various components of a cargo vehicle to a composite structure of the cargo vehicle (e.g., a composite floor assembly) while preserving the structural integrity of the composite structure.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCLOSURE

[0003] According to an exemplary embodiment of the present disclosure, a cargo vehicle is provided including a composite floor assembly configured to support cargo, at least one wheel assembly configured to transport the cargo on the composite floor assembly, a suspension assembly associated with the at least one wheel assembly, and an intermediate adapter assembly permanently coupled to the composite floor assembly and removably coupled to the suspension assembly.

[0004] According to another exemplary embodiment of the present disclosure, a cargo vehicle is provided including a composite floor assembly configured to support cargo, the composite floor assembly including a left longitudinal support beam and a right longitudinal support beam, at least one wheel assembly configured to transport the cargo on the composite floor assembly, a suspension assembly associated with the at least one wheel assembly, and an adapter assembly positioned between the composite floor assembly and the suspension assembly,

the adapter assembly defining a left channel that receives the left longitudinal support beam of the composite floor assembly and a right channel that receives the right longitudinal support beam of the composite floor assembly.

[0005] According to another exemplary embodiment of the present disclosure, a method is provided for joining a suspension assembly of a cargo vehicle to a composite floor assembly of the cargo vehicle. The method includes the steps of: providing an intermediate adapter assembly; permanently coupling the adapter assembly to the composite floor assembly; and removably coupling the adapter assembly to the suspension assembly.

[0006] According to another exemplary embodiment of the present disclosure, a cargo vehicle is provided comprising: a composite floor assembly configured to support cargo; at least one wheel assembly configured to transport the cargo on the composite floor assembly; a suspension assembly associated with the at least one wheel assembly, wherein the suspension assembly comprises a left air bag and a right air bag; and an intermediate adapter assembly permanently coupled to the composite floor assembly and removably coupled to the suspension assembly, wherein the intermediate adapter assembly comprises a left front frame member that rests upon the left air bag of the suspension assembly and a right front frame member that rests upon the right air bag of the suspension assembly.

[0006a] According to another exemplary embodiment of the present disclosure, a cargo vehicle is provided comprising: a composite floor assembly configured to support cargo; at least one wheel assembly configured to transport the cargo on the composite floor assembly; a suspension assembly associated with the at least one wheel assembly, wherein the suspension assembly comprises a left pivoting frame assembly and a right pivoting frame assembly; and an intermediate adapter assembly permanently coupled to the composite floor assembly and removably coupled to the suspension assembly, wherein the intermediate adapter assembly comprises a left rear frame member that rests upon the left pivoting frame assembly of the suspension assembly and a right rear frame member that rests upon the right pivoting frame assembly of the suspension assembly.

[0006b] According to another exemplary embodiment of the present disclosure, a cargo vehicle is provided comprising: a composite floor assembly configured to support cargo; at least one wheel assembly configured to transport the cargo on the composite floor assembly; a suspension assembly associated with the at least one wheel assembly; and an intermediate

adapter assembly permanently coupled to the composite floor assembly and removably coupled to the suspension assembly, wherein the adapter assembly comprises: an upper frame member that is permanently coupled to the composite floor assembly; and at least one lower frame member that is removably coupled to the suspension assembly.

5 **[0006c]** According to another exemplary embodiment of the present disclosure, a cargo vehicle is provided comprising: a composite floor assembly configured to support cargo, the composite floor assembly comprising a left longitudinal support beam and a right longitudinal support beam; at least one wheel assembly configured to transport the cargo on the composite floor assembly; a suspension assembly associated with the at least one wheel assembly; and an
10 adapter assembly positioned between the composite floor assembly and the suspension assembly, the adapter assembly defining a left channel that receives the left longitudinal support beam of the composite floor assembly and a right channel that receives the right longitudinal support beam of the composite floor assembly.

[0006d] According to another exemplary embodiment of the present disclosure, a method
15 of joining a suspension assembly of a cargo vehicle to a composite floor assembly of the cargo vehicle is provided, the composite floor assembly having a left longitudinal support beam and a right longitudinal support beam, the method comprising the steps of: providing an intermediate adapter assembly that defines a left channel and a right channel; positioning the left longitudinal support beam of the composite floor assembly in the left channel of the intermediate adapter
20 assembly and the right longitudinal support beam of the composite floor assembly in the right channel of the intermediate adapter assembly; permanently coupling the adapter assembly to the composite floor assembly; and removably coupling the adapter assembly to the suspension assembly.

[0007] Additional features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art upon consideration of the following detailed description of the illustrative embodiments exemplifying the best mode of carrying out the invention as presently perceived.

5

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] The foregoing aspects and many of the intended advantages of this invention will become more readily appreciated as the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

10 **[0009]** FIG. 1 is a top perspective view of a flatbed trailer;

[0010] FIG. 2 is a bottom perspective view of the flatbed trailer of FIG. 1, the flatbed trailer including a floor assembly, a suspension assembly, and an intermediate adapter assembly between the floor assembly and the suspension assembly;

[0011] FIG. 3 is an assembled perspective view of the floor assembly, the suspension
15 assembly, and the intermediate adapter assembly of FIG. 2;

[0012] FIG. 4 is an exploded perspective view of the floor assembly, the suspension assembly, and the intermediate adapter assembly of FIG. 2, the intermediate adapter assembly including lower front frame members, lower rear frame members, and an upper frame member;

[0013] FIG. 5 is a top perspective view of the lower front frame members of FIG. 4;

5 [0014] FIG. 6 is a top plan view of the lower front frame members assembled to the suspension assembly;

[0015] FIG. 7 is a front elevational view of the assembled components of FIG. 6;

[0016] FIG. 8 is a top perspective view of the lower rear frame members of FIG. 4;

[0017] FIG. 9 is a bottom perspective view of the lower rear frame members of FIG. 8;

10 [0018] FIG. 10 is a top plan view of the lower front frame members and the lower rear frame members assembled to the suspension assembly;

[0019] FIG. 11 is a rear elevational view of the assembled components of FIG. 10;

[0020] FIG. 12 is a top perspective view of the upper frame member of FIG. 4;

[0021] FIG. 13 is a bottom perspective view of the upper frame member of FIG. 12;

15 [0022] FIG. 14 is a top plan view of the lower front frame members, the lower rear frame members, and the upper frame member assembled to the suspension assembly; and

[0023] FIG. 15 is a rear elevational view of the assembled components of FIG. 14.

[0024] Corresponding reference characters indicate corresponding parts throughout the several views. Although the drawings represent embodiments of various features and
20 components according to the present disclosure, the drawings are not necessarily to scale and certain features may be exaggerated in order to better illustrate and explain the present disclosure. The exemplification set out herein illustrates an embodiment of the invention, and such an exemplification is not to be construed as limiting the scope of the invention in any
25 manner.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0025] For the purposes of promoting an understanding of the principals of the invention, reference will now be made to the embodiments illustrated in the drawings, which are described below. The embodiments disclosed below are not intended to be exhaustive or limit the
30 invention to the precise form disclosed in the following detailed description. Rather, the embodiments are chosen and described so that others skilled in the art may utilize their

teachings. It will be understood that no limitation of the scope of the invention is thereby intended. The invention includes any alterations and further modifications in the illustrative devices and described methods and further applications of the principles of the invention which would normally occur to one skilled in the art to which the invention relates.

5

1. Cargo Vehicle

[0026] A flatbed trailer 10 of a cargo vehicle is shown in FIGS. 1 and 2 for supporting and transporting cargo. While the concepts of this disclosure are described in relation to a flatbed trailer, it will be understood that they are equally applicable to other vehicles generally, and more specifically to other trailers (e.g., dry freight semi trailers, refrigerated semi trailers), conventional truck and/or box or van type trailers (e.g., dry vans, refrigerated vans), examples of which include, but are not limited to, straight truck bodies, small personal and/or commercial trailers and the like. Accordingly, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the present invention may be implemented in a number of different applications and embodiments and is not specifically limited in its application to the particular embodiments depicted herein.

[0027] The illustrative trailer 10 of FIGS. 1 and 2 extends along a longitudinal axis L from a front end 12 to a rear end 14. At the front end 12, trailer 10 includes a kingpin 16, as shown in FIG. 2, configured to couple trailer 10 to a tractor (not shown) for towing trailer 10. Between the front end 12 and the rear end 14, trailer 10 includes a floor assembly 20 configured to support cargo. At the rear end 14, trailer 10 includes a tandem wheel assembly 30. The floor assembly 20 and the tandem wheel assembly 30 of trailer 10 are described further below.

[0028] Referring still to FIGS. 1 and 2, the floor assembly 20 of trailer 10 includes a left side rail 22L and a right side rail 22R extending parallel to the longitudinal axis L. Between each side rail 22L, 22R and the longitudinal axis L, the floor assembly 20 includes a left longitudinal support beam 24L and a right longitudinal support beam 24R extending parallel to the longitudinal axis L. Each longitudinal support beam 24L, 24R may include one or more stiffening ribs 25 for added strength. The stiffening ribs 25 may be provided on the inner and/or outer surfaces of each longitudinal support beam 24L, 24R. The illustrative stiffening ribs 25 extend vertically, but it is also within the scope of the present disclosure for the stiffening ribs 25 to extend horizontally or in another suitable direction. The floor assembly 20 also includes a plurality of cross-beams 26 extending transversely to the longitudinal axis L. The longitudinal

support beams 24L, 24R and cross-beams 26 of the floor assembly 20 support an upper surface or platform 28 and any cargo thereon. In certain embodiments, the platform 28 is cooperatively formed by a plurality of floor planks extending along the longitudinal axis L and across the cross-beams 26. The individual components of the floor assembly 20 may be assembled together
5 through welding, bonding (e.g., adhesive), molding, or with mechanical fasteners (e.g., bolts, rivets), for example.

2. Composite Materials

[0029] The floor assembly 20 of trailer 10 may be a composite structure (i.e., a structure
10 constructed of composite materials), in whole or in part. As such, the floor assembly 20 may be referred to herein as a composite floor assembly 20. For example, the longitudinal support beams 24L, 24R, cross-beams 26, and/or platform 28 of the floor assembly 20 may be composite structures. In an exemplary embodiment, at least the longitudinal support beams 24L, 24R of the floor assembly 20 are composite structures. These composite structures may lack internal metal
15 components. Also, each composite structure may be a single, unitary component, which may be formed from a plurality of layers permanently coupled together. Other elements of trailer 10 may be constructed of non-composite (e.g., metallic) materials. For example, the kingpin 16 and the side rails 22L, 22R, of trailer 10 may be constructed of metallic materials.

[0030] The composite construction of floor assembly 20 may present certain advantages.
20 First, because the composite structures may lack internal metal components, the composite floor assembly 20 may have a reduced heat loss coefficient (U_a) and improved thermal efficiency. Also, the composite floor assembly 20 may operate to minimize outgassing of blowing agents, minimize air loss, and minimize water intrusion. Additionally, the composite floor assembly 20 may be lighter in weight than a typical metallic cargo body, which may improve fuel efficiency.
25 Further, the composite floor assembly 20 may have fewer metallic structures than a typical cargo body, which may make the cargo body 130 less susceptible to corrosion. Also, the composite floor assembly 20 may include fewer parts than a typical metallic cargo body, which may simplify construction, reduce inventory, and reduce variation in manufacturing. Further, the composite floor assembly 20 may be suitable for use with sensitive cargo, including foodstuffs,
30 because the composite materials may be inert to avoid reacting with the cargo and other materials and because the composite materials may be easy to clean and maintain to ensure

proper hygiene. As a result, the composite floor assembly 20 may qualify as “food grade” equipment.

[0031] Composite materials are generally formed by combining two or more different constituents that remain separate and distinct in the final composite material. Exemplary composite materials may include fiber-reinforced plastics (FRP), for example carbon-fiber-reinforced plastics (CRP). Such materials may be formed from an extruded preform assembly of a woven or stitched fiberglass cloth, a non-woven spun bond polymeric material, and a foam core (not shown). These preforms may be cut to size, combined in a mold resembling the final shape with other fiberglass and resin layers, and wetted with at least one resin and optionally a catalyst to define a single structure during a curing process. The spun bond polymeric material may be mechanically stitched to the fiberglass cloth and/or the foam before the preforms are wetted with resin. In one embodiment, the spun bond material may be a polyester material, the foam may be a polyurethane material, and the resin may be a thermoset plastic resin matrix. An exemplary resin is the co-cure resin disclosed in U.S. Patent No, 9,371,468.

[0032] The individual preforms may be sized, shaped, and arranged in a manner that accommodates the strength requirements of the final structure. In areas of the final structure requiring less strength, the preforms may be relatively large in size, with the foam cores spanning relatively large distances before reaching the surrounding fiberglass and polymeric skins. By contrast, in areas of the final structure requiring more strength, the preforms may be relatively small in size, with the foam cores spanning relatively small distances before reaching the surrounding fiberglass and polymeric skins. For example, the preforms may be shaped as relatively wide panels in areas of the final structure requiring less strength and as relatively narrow support beams in areas of the final structure requiring more strength. Other exemplary techniques for strengthening such support beams include reinforcing the outer skins, such as by using uni-directional glass fibers or additional cloth in the outer skins, and/or reinforcing the inner cores, such as by using hard plastic blocks or higher density foam in the inner cores.

[0033] After the curing process, a coating may be applied to the inner and/or outer surfaces of the cured preforms. Additionally, metallic or non-metallic sheets or panels may be applied to the inner and/or outer surfaces of the cured preforms, either in place of the coating or with the coating. The metallic sheets or panels may be comprised of stainless steel, aluminum,

and/or coated carbon steel, and the non-metallic sheets or panels may be comprised of carbon fiber composites, for example.

[0034] Exemplary composite structures include DuraPlate[®] structures provided by Wabash National Corporation of Lafayette, Indiana and PRISMA[®] structures provided by Compsys, Inc. of Melbourne, Florida. Such composite structures may be manufactured using technology disclosed in the following patents and published patent applications: U.S. Patent Application Nos. 5,429,066, 5,800,749, 5,664,518, 5,897,818, 6,013,213, 6,004,492, 5,908,591, 6,497,190, 6,911,252, 5,830,308, 6,755,998, 6,496,190, 6,911,252, 6,723,273, 6,869,561, 8,474,871, 6,206,669, 6,543,469, and 9,371,468 and U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2014/0262011.

3. Wheel and Suspension Assemblies

[0035] Referring still to FIGS. 1 and 2, the tandem wheel assembly 30 of trailer 10 includes a front wheel assembly 32 and a rear wheel assembly 34. Each wheel assembly 32, 34 includes an axle 36 supporting one or more left wheels 38L and one or more right wheels 38R.

[0036] Referring next to FIGS. 3 and 4, trailer 10 further includes a fixed suspension assembly 40 associated with each wheel assembly 32, 34 (FIG. 2). An exemplary suspension assembly 40 is an air-type suspension assembly, as shown in FIGS. 3 and 4, but it is also within the scope of the present disclosure to use a spring-type suspension assembly or another suitable suspension assembly. The illustrative suspension assembly 40 includes pivoting frame assemblies 42L, 42R that span between the longitudinal support beams 24L, 24R of the floor assembly 20 and support the axle 36 of the corresponding wheel assembly 32, 34. Between the longitudinal support beams 24L, 24R and axle 36, the suspension assembly 40 includes corresponding air bags 44L, 44R and corresponding shock absorbers 46L, 46R, wherein the air bags 44L, 44R are illustratively positioned forward of the shock absorbers 46L, 46R. In operation, the air bags 44L, 44R may be filled to a desired air pressure to adjust the spacing and movement between the longitudinal support beams 24L, 24R and axle 36, while the shock absorbers 46L, 46R may dampen the movements of the pivoting frame assemblies 42L, 42R. Additional information regarding air-type suspension assemblies is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,536,036, the entire disclosure of which is expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0037] As discussed above, the floor assembly 20, and specifically the longitudinal support beams 24L, 24R of the floor assembly 20, may be composite structures. Due to the configuration of composite structures, the composite support beams 24L, 24R may not be directly coupled to suspension assembly 40 with mechanical fasteners, because forming holes in the composite support beams 24L, 24R for direct insertion of mechanical fasteners (e.g., bolts, rivets) may damage the fibers of the composite material forming the composite support beams 24L, 24R.

[0038] To preserve the structural integrity of the composite support beams 24L, 24R, the composite floor assembly 20 may be coupled to the suspension assembly 40 through an intermediate adapter assembly 50, as shown in FIGS. 3 and 4. The adapter assembly 50 is permanently coupled to the composite floor assembly 20 and is removably coupled to the suspension assembly 40, which enables the composite floor assembly 20 to be removably coupled to the suspension assembly 40 through the adapter assembly 50. As used herein, components that are “removably coupled” together are capable of being repeatedly un-coupled without damage or destruction and then re-coupled together. In certain exemplary embodiments, components may be “removably coupled” together through mechanical fasteners (e.g., bolts). By contrast, components that are “permanently coupled” together require damage or destruction to the components themselves or the coupling mechanism in order to be un-coupled. In certain exemplary embodiments, components may be “permanently coupled” together through bonding (e.g., adhering) and/or molding, for example. In certain embodiments, the strength of the permanent coupling mechanism (e.g., adhesive) may exceed the strength of composite floor assembly 20 itself, so the composite floor assembly 20 may delaminate or otherwise fail before the adhesive fails.

[0039] The adapter assembly 50 may be constructed of a metallic or polymeric material, for example aluminum, titanium, or steel. In one embodiment, the adapter assembly 50 is constructed of a metallic or polymeric material which is dissimilar from the composite materials used to construct the composite floor assembly 20.

[0040] As shown in FIG. 4, the illustrative adapter assembly 50 includes lower front frame members 60L, 60R, lower rear frame members 70L, 70R, and an upper frame member 90. The lower front frame members 60L, 60R of the adapter assembly 50 are associated with corresponding air bags 44L, 44R of the suspension assembly 40. The lower rear frame members

70L, 70R of the adapter assembly 50 are associated with corresponding pivoting frame assemblies 42L, 42R and shock absorbers 46L, 46R of the suspension assembly 40. The upper frame member 90 of the adapter assembly 50 is associated with the longitudinal support beams 24L, 24R of the floor assembly 20. The individual components of the adapter assembly 50 are described further below.

[0041] The lower front frame members 60L, 60R of the adapter assembly 50 are described with reference to FIG. 5. The illustrative lower front frame members 60L, 60R are mirror images of one another about the longitudinal axis L. Each lower front frame member 60L, 60R includes a generally oval-shaped plate 62L, 62R with a plurality of vertically-extending locating holes 64L, 64R and a plurality of vertically-extending fastening holes 66L, 66R. In one embodiment, each plate 62L, 62R has a length, l , of approximately 4 to 15 inches and, more particularly, approximately 9 inches, and has a width, w , of approximately 4 to 15 inches and, more particularly, approximately 8 inches.

[0042] When assembled to the suspension assembly 40, as shown in FIGS. 6 and 7, the plates 62L, 62R of the lower front frame members 60L, 60R rest upon the corresponding air bags 44L, 44R of the suspension assembly 40. Also, the vertically-extending locating holes 64L, 64R in the plates 62L, 62R receive vertically-extending locating posts 45L, 45R from the corresponding air bags 44L, 44R. The plates 62L, 62R are free to slide up and down along the locating posts 45L, 45R.

[0043] Next, the lower rear frame members 70L, 70R of the adapter assembly 50 are described with reference to FIGS. 8 and 9. The illustrative lower rear frame members 70L, 70R are mirror images of one another about the longitudinal axis L. Each lower rear frame member 70L, 70R includes a generally T-shaped plate 72L, 72R, a downwardly-extending outer flange 74L, 74R, and a downwardly-extending L-shaped inner flange 76L, 76R. Each lower rear frame member 70L, 70R also includes a first plurality of vertically-extending fastening holes 80L, 80R in plate 72L, 72R, a second plurality of laterally-extending fastening holes 82L, 82R in the outer flange 74L, 74R, and at least a third longitudinally-extending fastening hole 84L, 84R in the inner flange 76L, 76R. Each lower rear frame member 70L, 70R may further include one or more lightening holes 86L, 86R and other holes for receiving various suspension components. In one embodiment, each plate 72L, 72R has a length, l , of approximately 21 to 25 inches and, more

particularly, approximately 22.75 inches, and has a width, w , of approximately 13 to 17 inches and, more particularly, approximately 15.25 inches.

[0044] When assembled to the suspension assembly 40, as shown in FIGS. 10 and 11, the plates 72L, 72R of the lower rear frame members 70L, 70R rest upon the corresponding pivoting frame assemblies 42L, 42R of the suspension assembly 40. The downwardly-extending outer flanges 74L, 74R and inner flanges 76L, 76R cooperate to receive the pivoting frame assemblies 42L, 42R therebetween, as shown in FIG. 11. The plates 72L, 72R are removably coupled to the corresponding pivoting frame assemblies 42L, 42R. In the illustrated embodiment of FIG. 11, for example, the plates 72L, 72R are removably coupled to the corresponding pivoting frame assemblies 42L, 42R by inserting fasteners (e.g., bolts) (not shown) longitudinally through the fastening holes 84L, 84R (FIG. 9) in the inner flanges 76L, 76R and through corresponding fastening holes 48L, 48R in brackets 49L, 49R of the pivoting frame assemblies 42L, 42R.

[0045] Next, the upper frame member 90 of the adapter assembly 50 is described with reference to FIGS. 12 and 13. The upper frame member 90 includes longitudinal arms 92L, 92R, wherein each longitudinal arm 92L, 92R includes an upwardly-facing U-shaped channel 94L, 94R, an upwardly-facing chamfered edge 96L, 96R, and a downwardly-extending outer flange 98L, 98R. The upper frame member 90 also includes a front cross-brace 100 and a rear cross-brace 102 extending between the longitudinal arms 92L, 92R. The upper frame member 90 further includes a first plurality of vertically-extending fastening holes 104 in the front cross-brace 100, a second plurality of vertically-extending fastening holes 106 in the rear cross-brace 102, and a third plurality of laterally-extending fastening holes 108L, 108R in the outer flanges 98L, 98R. The upper frame member 90 may further include one or more lightening holes 110 and other holes for receiving various suspension components. In one embodiment, the upper frame member 90 has a length, l , of approximately 30 to 60 inches and, more particularly, approximately 42 inches, and has a width, w , of approximately 46 to 50 inches and, more particularly, approximately 48 inches.

[0046] When assembled to the suspension assembly 40, as shown in FIGS. 14 and 15, the longitudinal arms 92L, 92R of the upper frame member 90 rest upon the corresponding lower front frame members 60L, 60R and the corresponding lower rear frame members 70L, 70R. As shown in FIG. 15, the U-shaped channels 94L, 94R in the upper frame member 90 are sized and shaped to receive the longitudinal support beams 24L, 24R of the composite floor assembly 20.

The U-shaped channels 94L, 94R in the upper frame member 90 are centered above the pivoting frame assemblies 42L, 42R of the suspension assembly 40 and, therefore, the longitudinal support beams 24L, 24R of the composite floor assembly 20 are also centered above the pivoting frame assemblies 42L, 42R of the suspension assembly 40. This arrangement allows the suspension assembly 40 to support the weight of the floor assembly 20 and any cargo thereon.

[0047] The upper frame member 90 is removably coupled to the lower front frame members 60L, 60R. In the illustrated embodiment of FIG. 14, for example, the upper frame member 90 is removably coupled to the lower front frame members 60L, 60R by inserting fasteners (e.g., bolts) (not shown) vertically through the fastening holes 104 in the front cross-brace 100 and through corresponding fastening holes 66L, 66R in the plates 62L, 62R of the lower front frame members 60L, 60R (FIG. 6). The upper frame member 90 is also removably coupled to the lower rear frame members 70L, 70R. In the illustrated embodiment of FIG. 14, for example, the upper frame member 90 is removably coupled to the lower rear frame members 70L, 70R by inserting fasteners (e.g., bolts) (not shown) vertically through the fastening holes 106 in the rear cross-brace 102 and through corresponding fastening holes 80L, 80R in the plates 72L, 72R of the lower rear frame members 70L, 70R (FIG. 10). Additionally, the upper frame member 90 is removably coupled to the lower rear frame members 70L, 70R by inserting fasteners (e.g., bolts) (not shown) laterally through the fastening holes 108L, 108R in the outer flanges 98L, 98R of the upper frame member 90 (FIG. 13) and through corresponding fastening holes 82L, 82R in the outer flanges 74L, 74R of the lower rear frame members 70L, 70R (FIG. 9). Advantageously, the outer flanges 98L, 98R of the upper frame member 90 overhang the outer flanges 74L, 74R of the lower rear frame members 70L, 70R in FIG. 15 to accommodate these laterally-extending fasteners outboard of the U-shaped channels 94L, 94R without intruding into the tire clearance areas 120L, 120R.

[0048] The upper frame member 90 is permanently coupled to the composite floor assembly 20. More specifically, the longitudinal arms 92L, 92R of the upper frame member 90 are permanently coupled to the longitudinal support beams 24L, 24R of the composite floor assembly 20. According to an exemplary embodiment of the present disclosure, this permanent coupling is achieved by placing a bonding agent (e.g., adhesive) in the U-shaped channels 94L, 94R of the upper frame member 90. The upper frame member 90 may include one or more injection ports (not shown) for injecting or otherwise supplying the adhesive into the U-shaped

channels 94L, 94R. In one embodiment, the interfacing surfaces of the longitudinal arms 92L, 92R and/or the longitudinal support beams 24L, 24R may be roughened, scuffed, or otherwise texturized to receive the adhesive. In this arrangement, no fasteners or other coupling devices need to extend into the composite floor assembly 20 and, as a result, the composite floor assembly 20 is not damaged by any mechanical fasteners or their corresponding holes. The structural integrity of the composite floor assembly 20 is maintained without the need to receive mechanical fasteners or their corresponding holes. Therefore, through the combination of permanently coupling the upper frame member 90 of the adapter assembly 50 to the composite floor assembly 20 with adhesive and removably coupling the lower front frame members 60L, 60R and the lower rear frame members 70L, 70R of the adapter assembly 50 to the suspension assembly 40 with mechanical fasteners, the composite floor assembly 20 is not damaged by the assembly of the suspension assembly 40 to the composite floor assembly 20, and the suspension assembly 40 is easily removed from the composite floor assembly 20 when necessary.

[0049] The adhesive supplied to the U-shaped channels 94L, 94R for bonding the upper frame member 90 to the composite floor assembly 20 may be a structural adhesive. Structural adhesives may be used for load-bearing applications and, therefore, may be epoxies, acrylics, polyurethanes, cyanoacrylates, anaerobics, phenolics, and/or vinyl acetates with a lap shear strength greater than 1 MPa. Structural adhesives are typically applied to bonding surfaces at a temperature below the glass-transition temperature of the adhesive and subsequently cured over time and/or with heat.

[0050] Returning to FIG. 4, the upper frame member 90 may transfer strong forces from the suspension assembly 40 to the composite floor assembly 20 during operation. The chamfered edges 96L, 96R of the upper frame member 90 may help distribute these forces across the composite support beams 24L, 24R, rather than concentrating these forces at a corner point. Also, stiffening ribs 25 on the composite support beams 24L, 24R may be located adjacent to the upper frame member 90 to strengthen the support beams 24L, 24R in these locations. In the illustrated embodiment of FIG. 4, for example, first relatively long stiffening rib 25A is located just in front of the upper frame member 90, a second relatively short stiffening rib 25B is located just above the upper frame member 90, and a third relatively long stiffening rib 25C is located just behind the upper frame member 90.

[0051] While this invention has been described as having an exemplary design, the present invention may be further modified within the spirit and scope of this disclosure. This application is therefore intended to cover any variations, uses, or adaptations of the invention using its general principles. Further, this application is intended to cover such departures from
5 the present disclosure as come within known or customary practices in the art to which this invention pertains.

What is claimed is:

1. A cargo vehicle comprising:
 - a composite floor assembly configured to support cargo;
 - at least one wheel assembly configured to transport the cargo on the composite floor assembly;
 - a suspension assembly associated with the at least one wheel assembly, wherein the suspension assembly comprises a left air bag and a right air bag; and
 - an intermediate adapter assembly permanently coupled to the composite floor assembly and removably coupled to the suspension assembly, wherein the intermediate adapter assembly comprises a left front frame member that rests upon the left air bag of the suspension assembly and a right front frame member that rests upon the right air bag of the suspension assembly.

2. A cargo vehicle comprising:
 - a composite floor assembly configured to support cargo;
 - at least one wheel assembly configured to transport the cargo on the composite floor assembly;
 - a suspension assembly associated with the at least one wheel assembly, wherein the suspension assembly comprises a left pivoting frame assembly and a right pivoting frame assembly; and
 - an intermediate adapter assembly permanently coupled to the composite floor assembly and removably coupled to the suspension assembly, wherein the intermediate adapter assembly comprises a left rear frame member that rests upon the left pivoting frame assembly of the suspension assembly and a right rear frame member that rests upon the right pivoting frame assembly of the suspension assembly.

3. A cargo vehicle comprising:
 - a composite floor assembly configured to support cargo;
 - at least one wheel assembly configured to transport the cargo on the composite floor assembly;
 - a suspension assembly associated with the at least one wheel assembly; and

an intermediate adapter assembly permanently coupled to the composite floor assembly and removably coupled to the suspension assembly, wherein the adapter assembly comprises:

an upper frame member that is permanently coupled to the composite floor assembly; and

at least one lower frame member that is removably coupled to the suspension assembly.

4. The cargo vehicle of claim 3, wherein the upper frame member is removably coupled to the at least one lower frame member.

5. The cargo vehicle of claim 4, wherein:
the upper frame member includes a first flange;
the at least one lower frame member includes a second flange; and
the first flange of the upper frame member is removably coupled to the second flange of the at least one lower frame member.

6. The cargo vehicle of claim 5, wherein the first and second flanges extend vertically to receive fasteners horizontally.

7. The cargo vehicle of claim 5, wherein:
the composite floor assembly comprises a longitudinal support beam; and
the first flange of the upper frame member is located outboard of the longitudinal support beam.

8. A cargo vehicle comprising:
a composite floor assembly configured to support cargo, the composite floor assembly comprising a left longitudinal support beam and a right longitudinal support beam;
at least one wheel assembly configured to transport the cargo on the composite floor assembly;
a suspension assembly associated with the at least one wheel assembly; and
an adapter assembly positioned between the composite floor assembly and the suspension assembly, the adapter assembly defining a left channel that receives the left

longitudinal support beam of the composite floor assembly and a right channel that receives the right longitudinal support beam of the composite floor assembly.

9. The cargo vehicle of claim 8, wherein the suspension assembly comprises:
a left pivoting frame assembly centered beneath the left longitudinal support beam of the composite floor assembly and the left channel of the adapter assembly; and
a right pivoting frame assembly centered beneath the right longitudinal support beam of the composite floor assembly and the right channel of the adapter assembly.

10. The cargo vehicle of claim 8, wherein the adapter assembly comprises:
an upper left flange that extends vertically upward over an outer left side of the left longitudinal support beam;
an upper right flange that extends vertically upward over an outer right side of the right longitudinal support beam;
a lower left flange that extends vertically downward over an outer left side of the suspension assembly; and
a lower right flange that extends vertically downward over an outer right side of the suspension assembly.

11. The cargo vehicle of claim 8, wherein the adapter assembly comprises:
at least one left chamfered edge in contact with the left longitudinal support beam; and
at least one right chamfered edge in contact with the right longitudinal support beam.

12. The cargo vehicle of claim 8, wherein each of the left and right longitudinal support beams comprises a plurality of stiffening ribs adjacent to the adapter assembly.

13. A method of joining a suspension assembly of a cargo vehicle to a composite floor assembly of the cargo vehicle, the composite floor assembly having a left longitudinal support beam and a right longitudinal support beam, the method comprising the steps of:
providing an intermediate adapter assembly that defines a left channel and a right channel;

positioning the left longitudinal support beam of the composite floor assembly in the left channel of the intermediate adapter assembly and the right longitudinal support beam of the composite floor assembly in the right channel of the intermediate adapter assembly;

permanently coupling the adapter assembly to the composite floor assembly;

and

removably coupling the adapter assembly to the suspension assembly.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein the permanently coupling step comprises adhering the adapter assembly to the composite floor assembly by placing an adhesive in the left and right channels.

15. The method of claim 13, wherein the permanently coupling step is performed without forming holes in the composite floor assembly.

16. The method of claim 13, wherein the removably coupling step comprises mechanically fastening the adapter assembly to the suspension assembly.

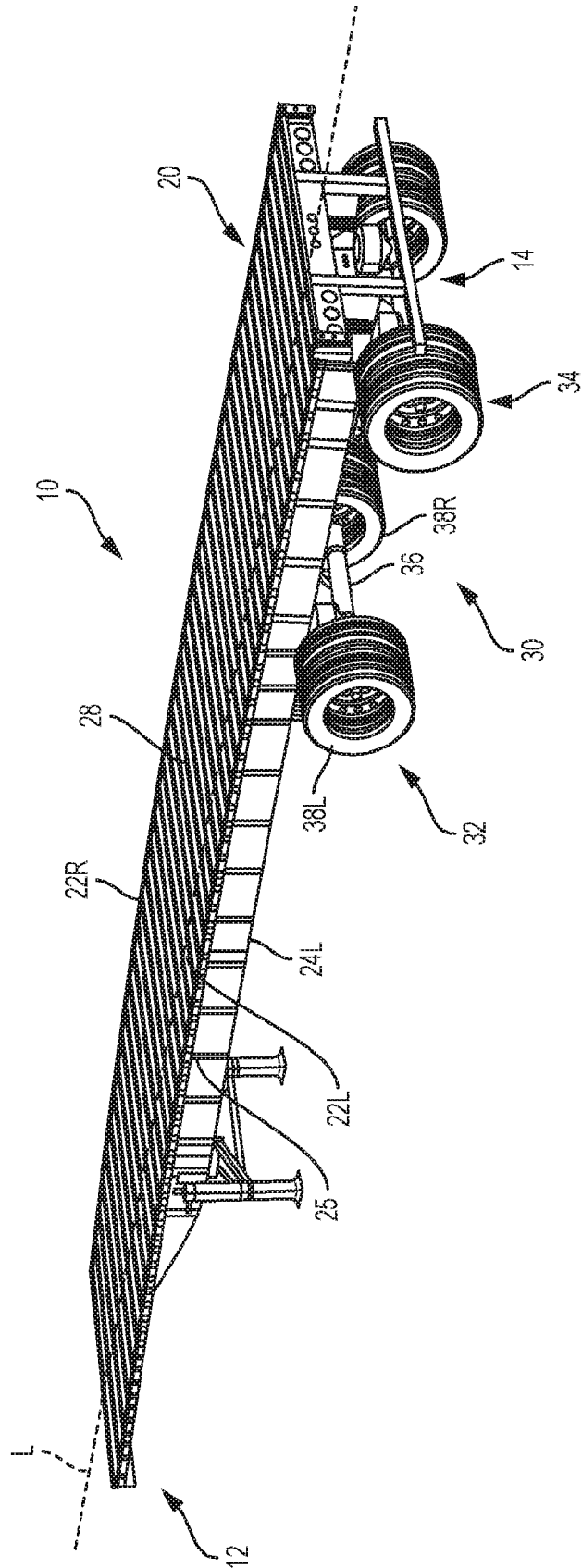


FIG. 1

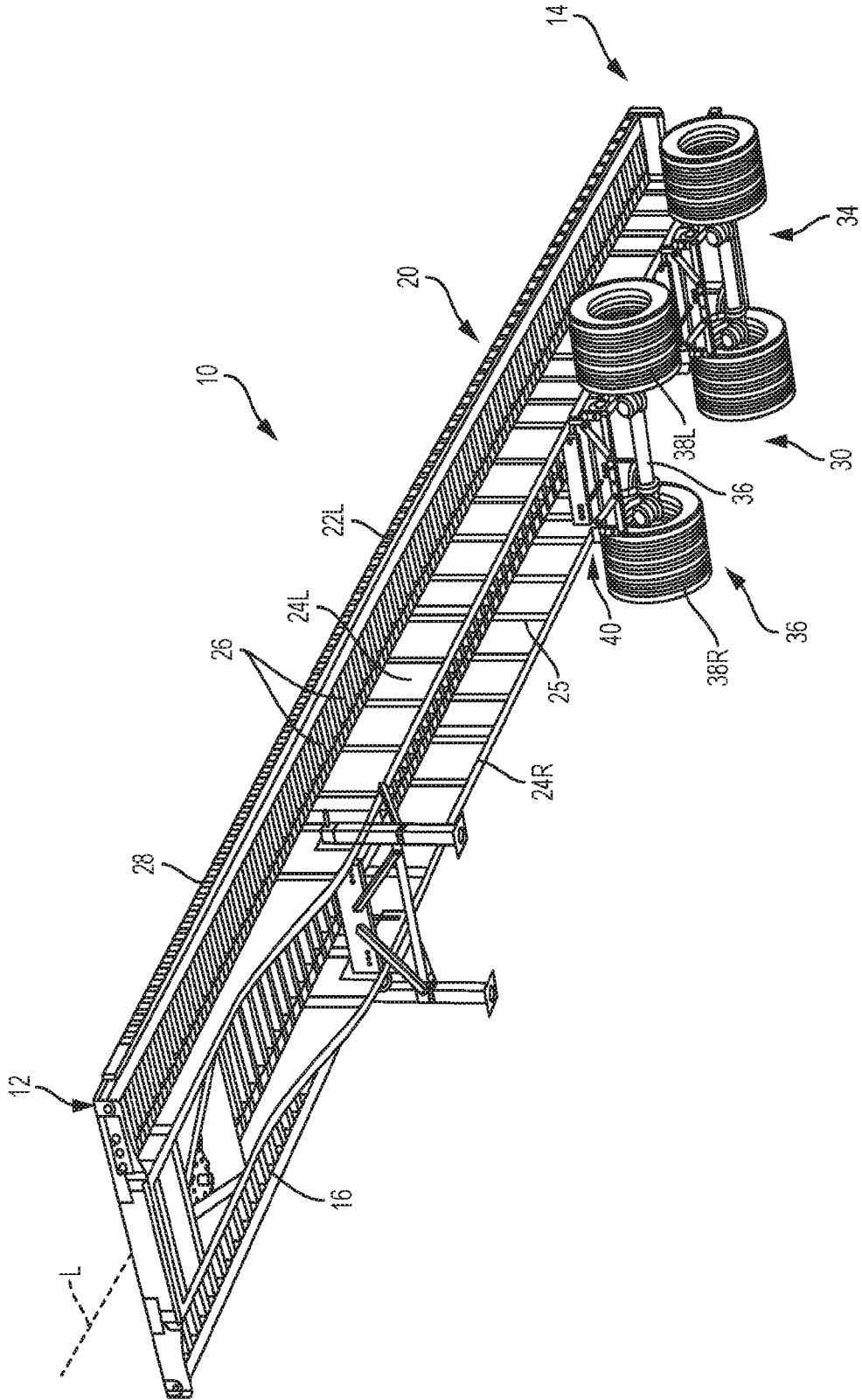


FIG. 2

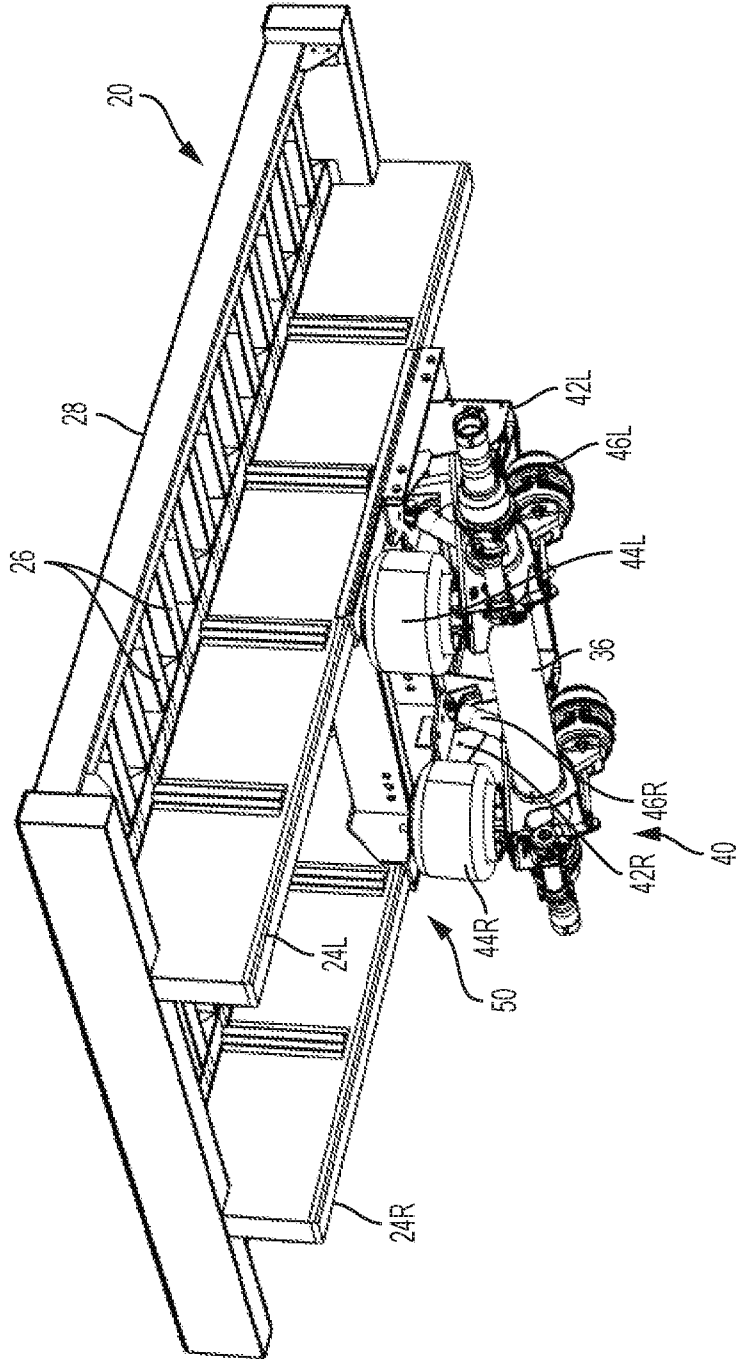


FIG. 3

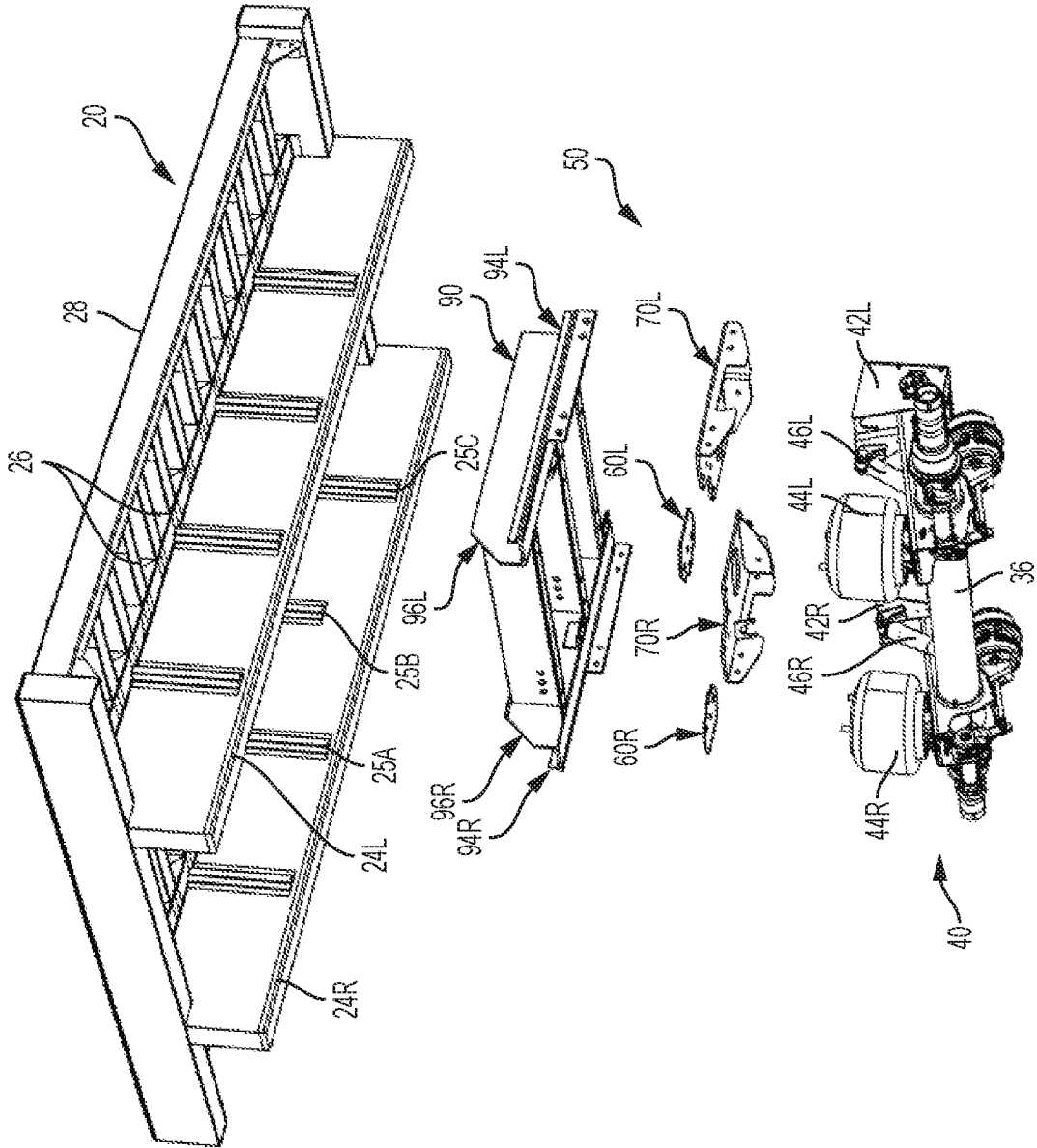


FIG. 4

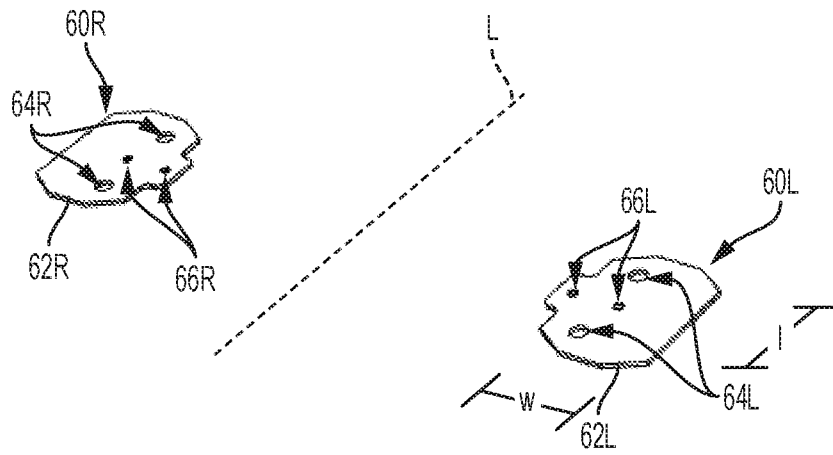


FIG. 5

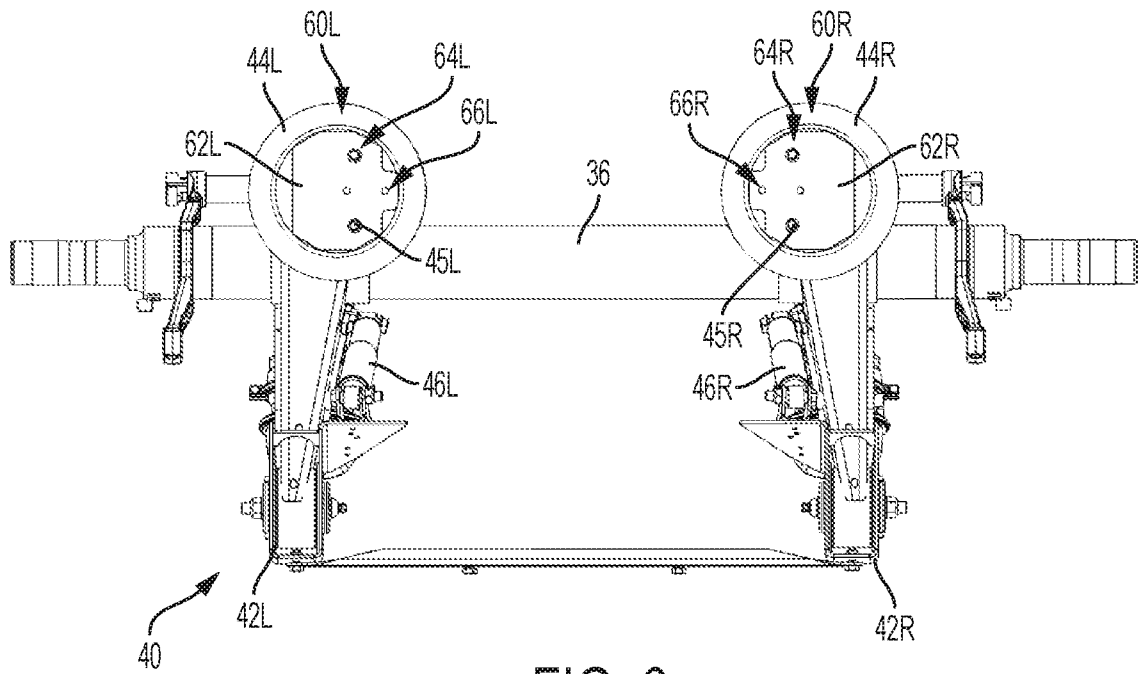


FIG. 6

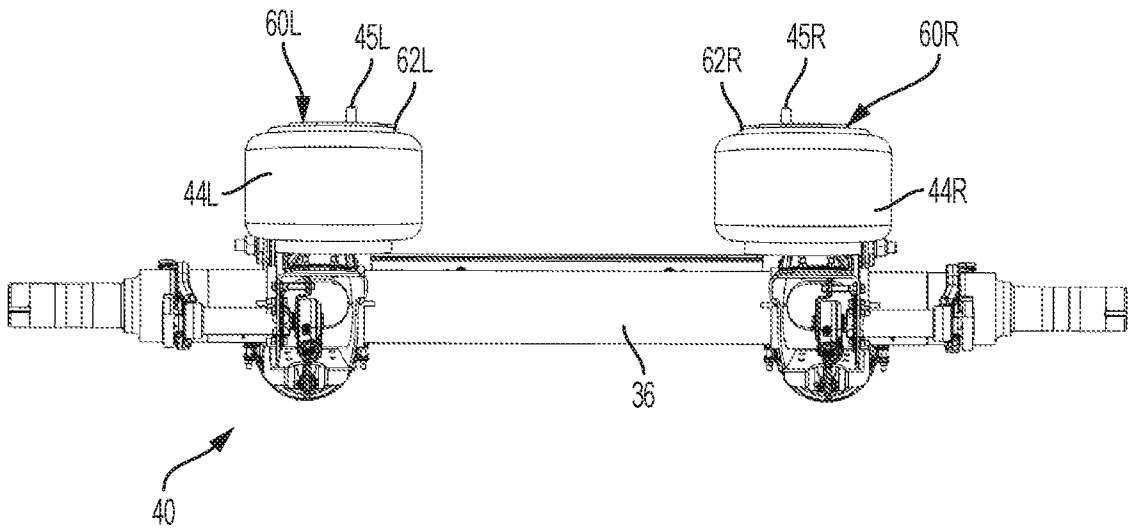


FIG. 7

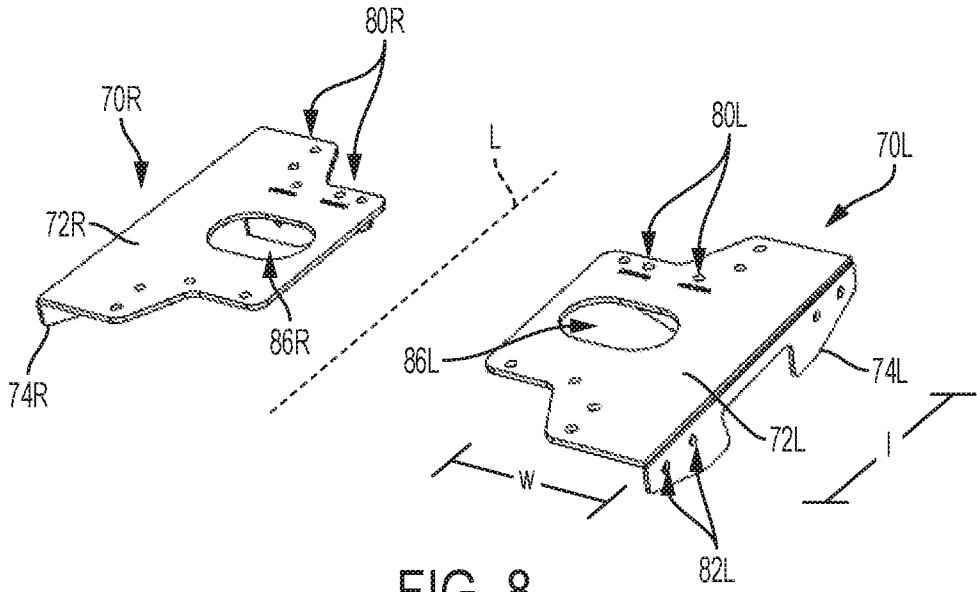


FIG. 8

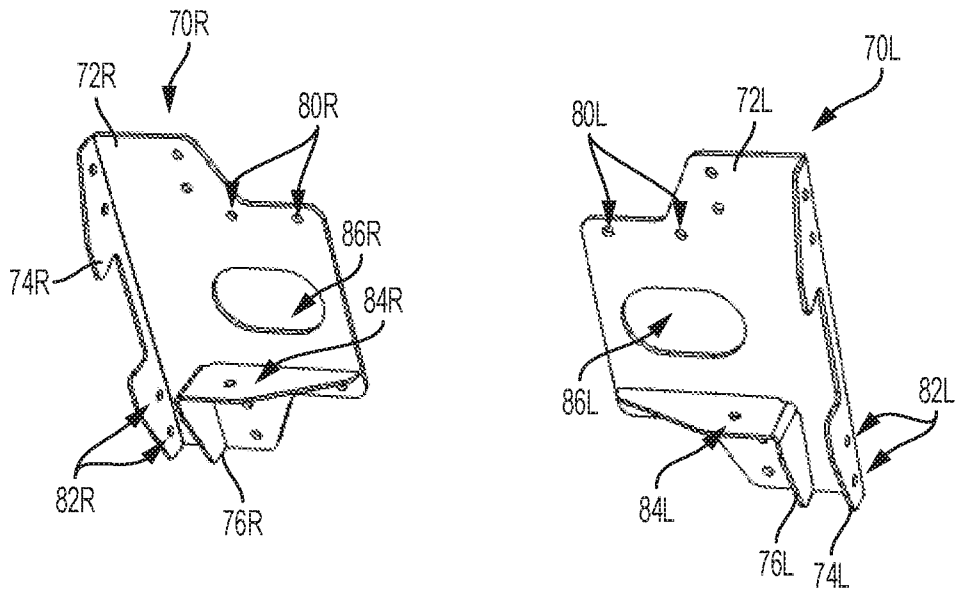


FIG. 9

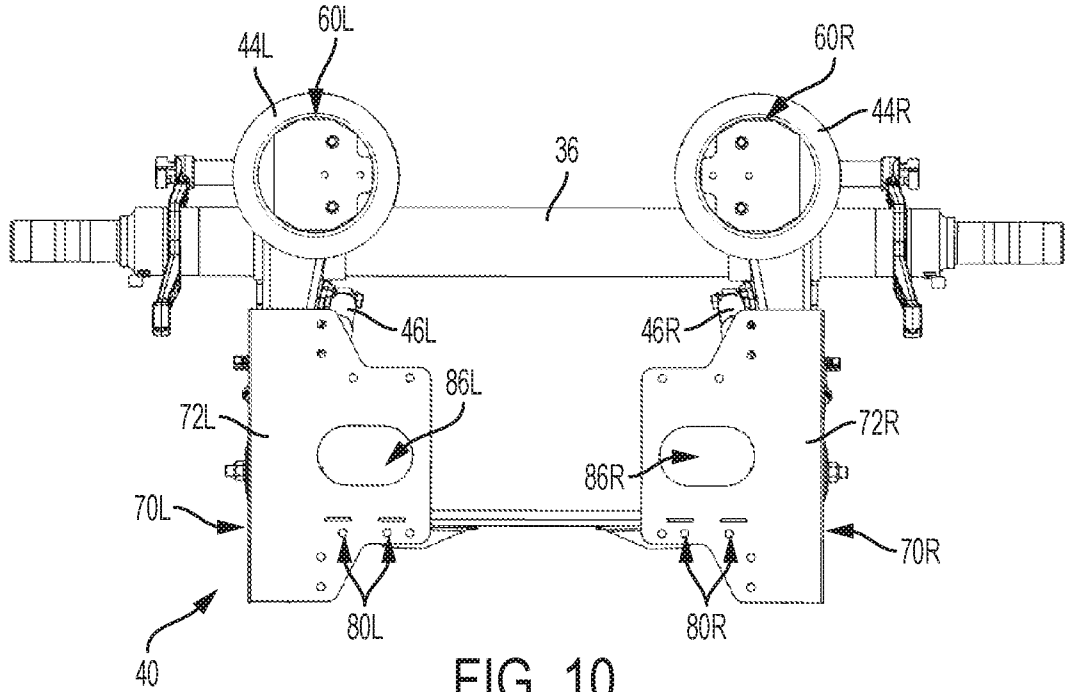


FIG. 10

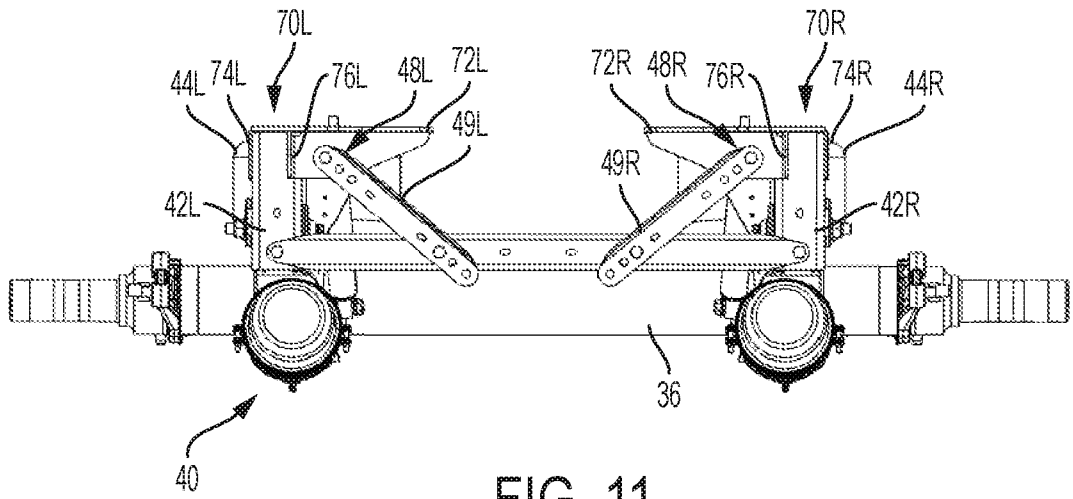


FIG. 11

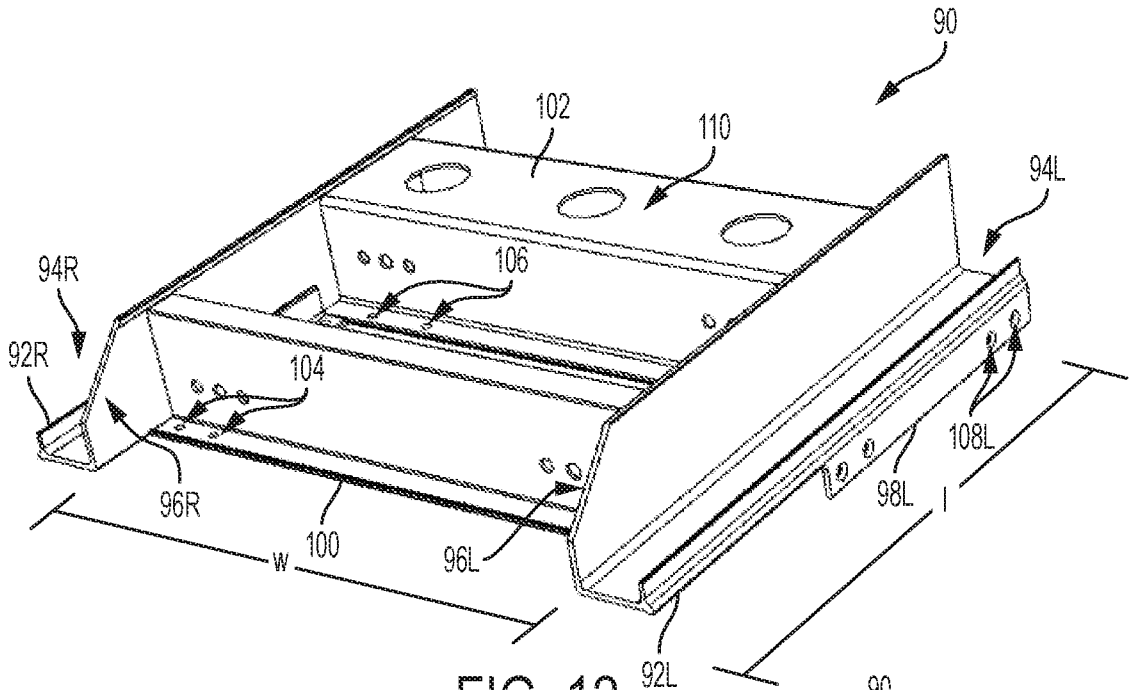


FIG. 12

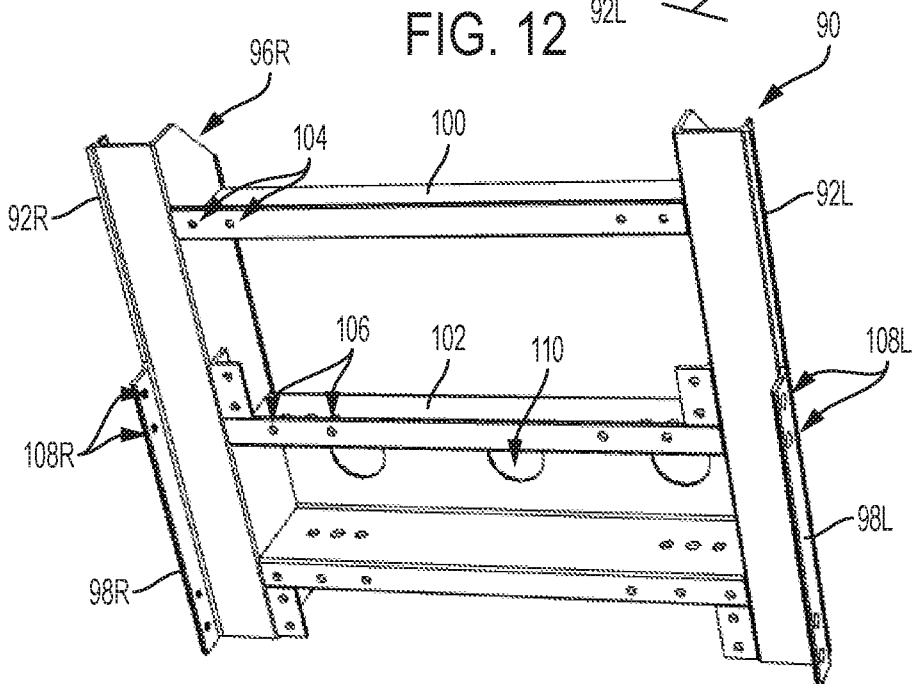


FIG. 13

