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(54) **INTERMEDIATE LAYERS FOR ELECTRODE FABRICATION**

Publication Classification

(75) Inventors: **William S. DelHagen**, Menlo Park, CA (US); **Rainer J. Fasching**, Mill Valley, CA (US); **Ghyrn E. Loveness**, Menlo Park, CA (US); **Song Han**, Foster City, CA (US); **Eugene M. Berdichevsky**, Menlo Park, CA (US); **Constantin I. Stefan**, San Jose, CA (US); **Yi Cui**, Sanford, CA (US); **Mark C. Platshon**, Menlo Park, CA (US)

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(73) Assignee: **AMPRIUS INC.**, Menlo Park, CA (US)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

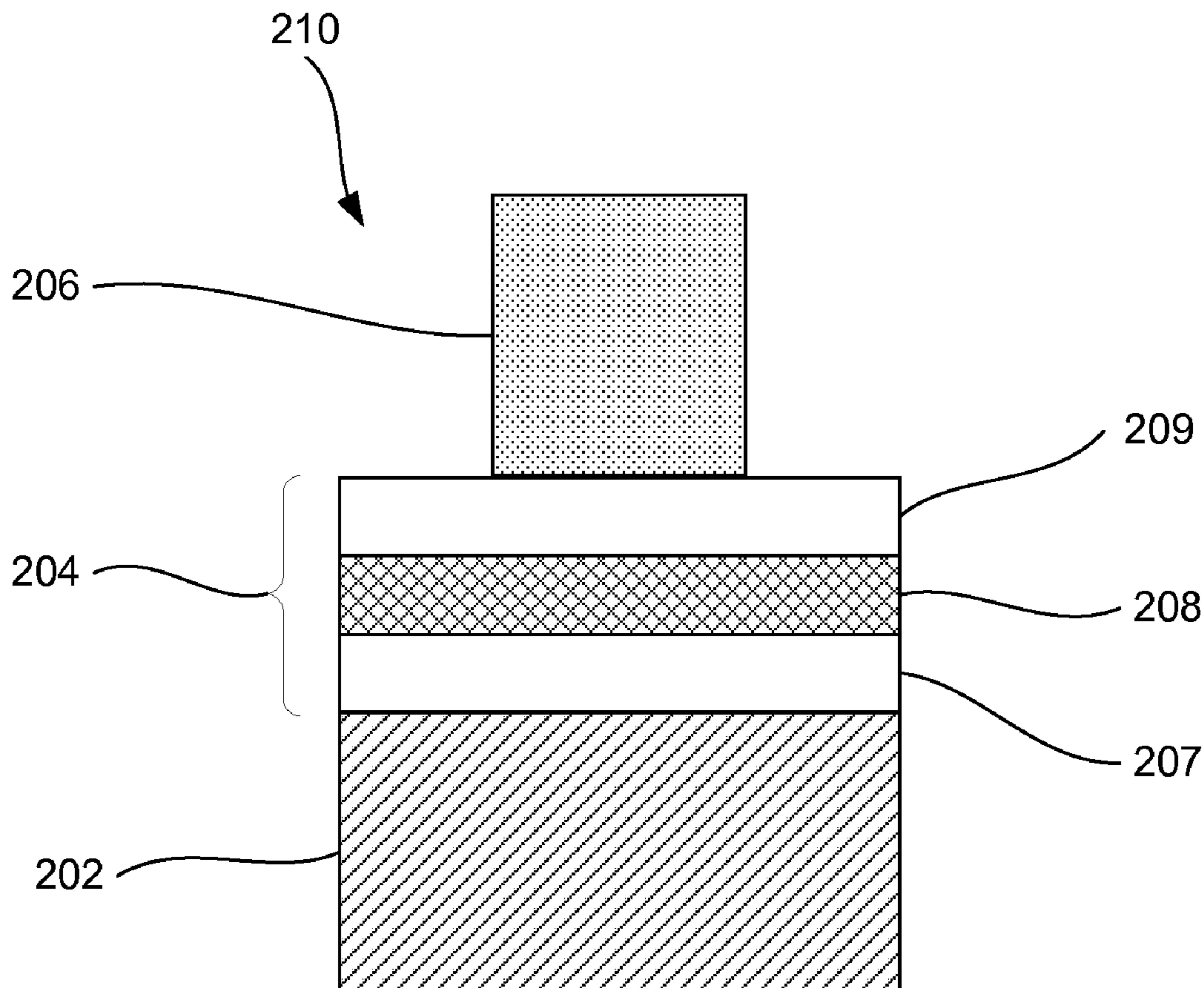
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Provided are novel electrodes for use in lithium ion batteries. An electrode includes one or more intermediate layers positioned between a substrate and an electrochemically active material. Intermediate layers may be made from chromium, titanium, tantalum, tungsten, nickel, molybdenum, lithium, as well as other materials and their combinations. An intermediate layer may protect the substrate, help to redistribute catalyst during deposition of the electrochemically active material, improve adhesion between the active material and substrate, and other purposes. In certain embodiments, an active material includes one or more high capacity active materials, such as silicon, tin, and germanium. These materials tend to swell during cycling and may loose mechanical and/or electrical connection to the substrate. A flexible intermediate layer may compensate for swelling and provide a robust adhesion interface. Provided also are novel methods of fabricating electrodes containing one or more intermediate layers.

(22) Filed: **Nov. 11, 2010**

Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 61/260,297, filed on Nov. 11, 2009.



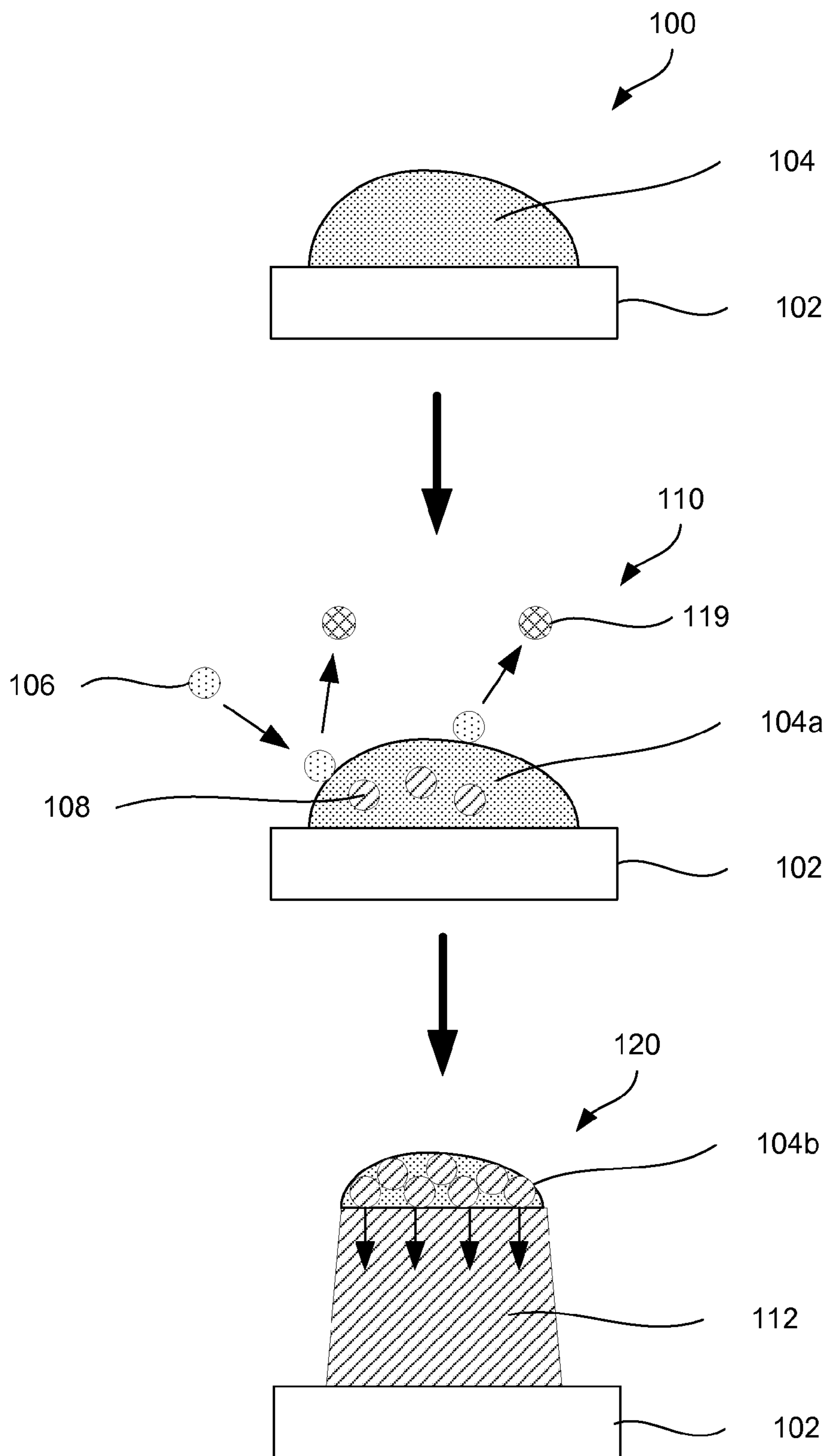


FIG. 1

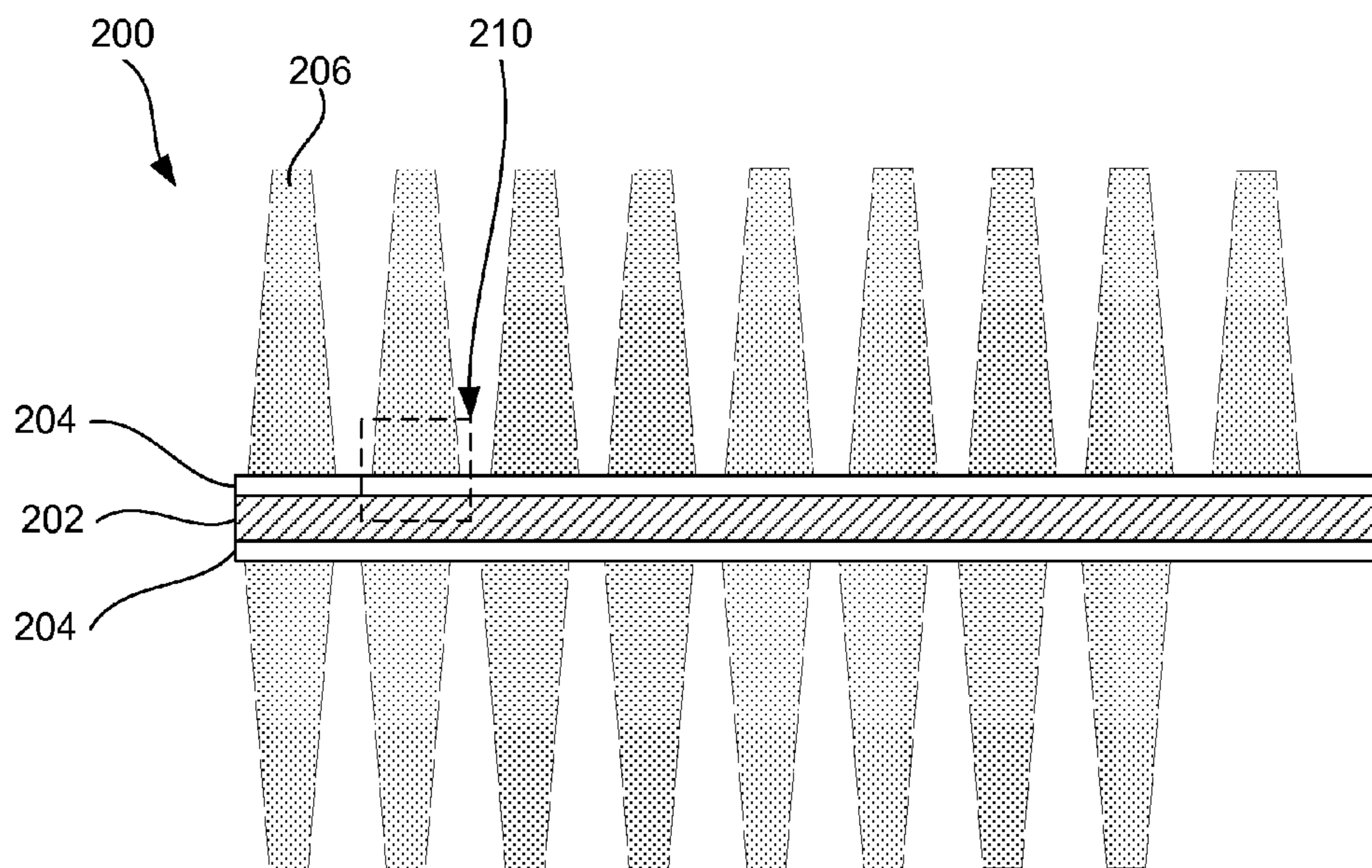


FIG. 2

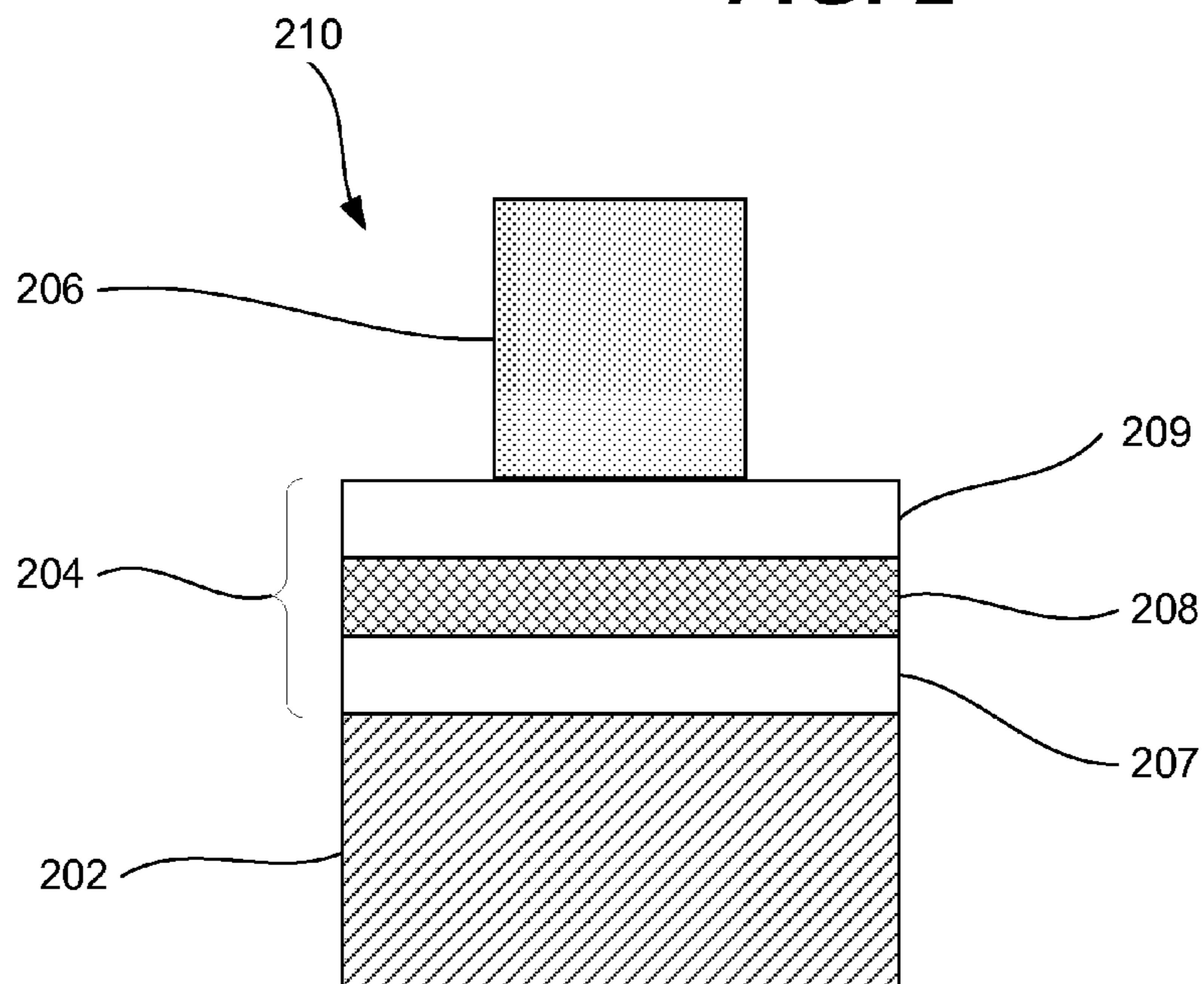


FIG. 3

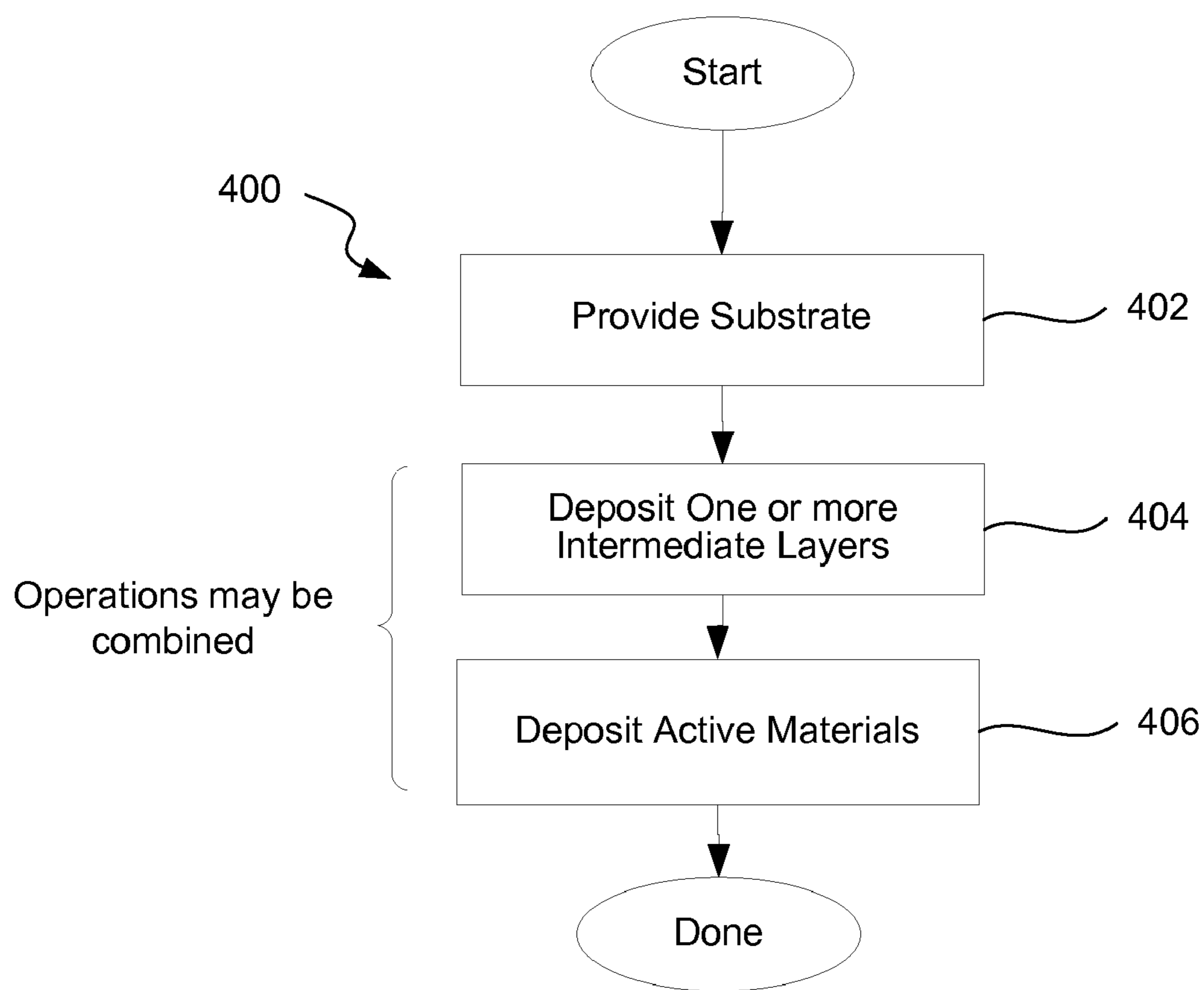


FIG. 4

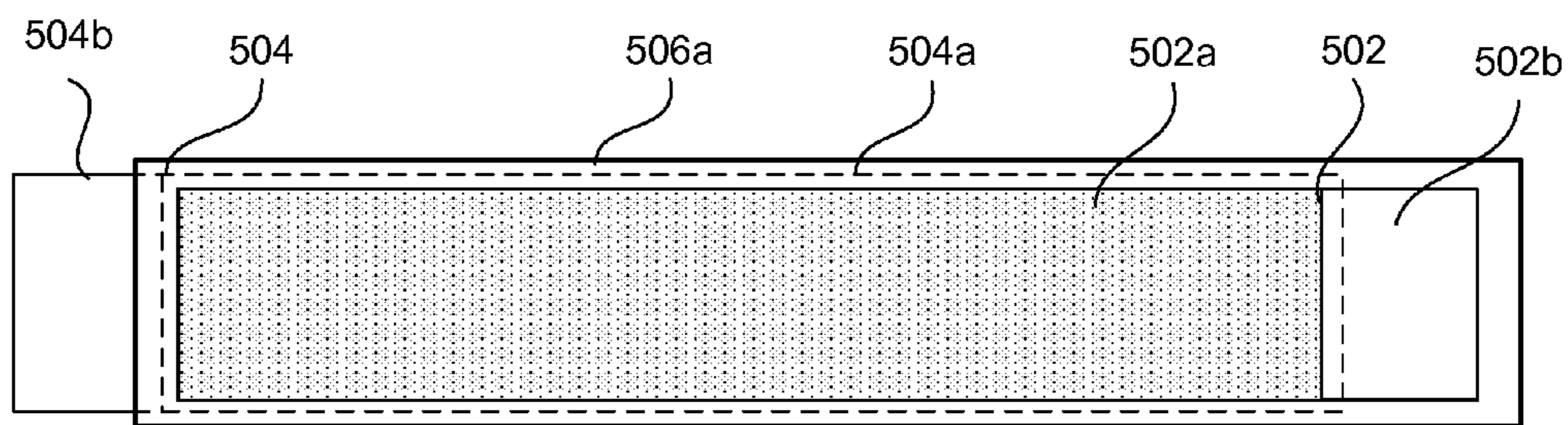


FIG. 5A

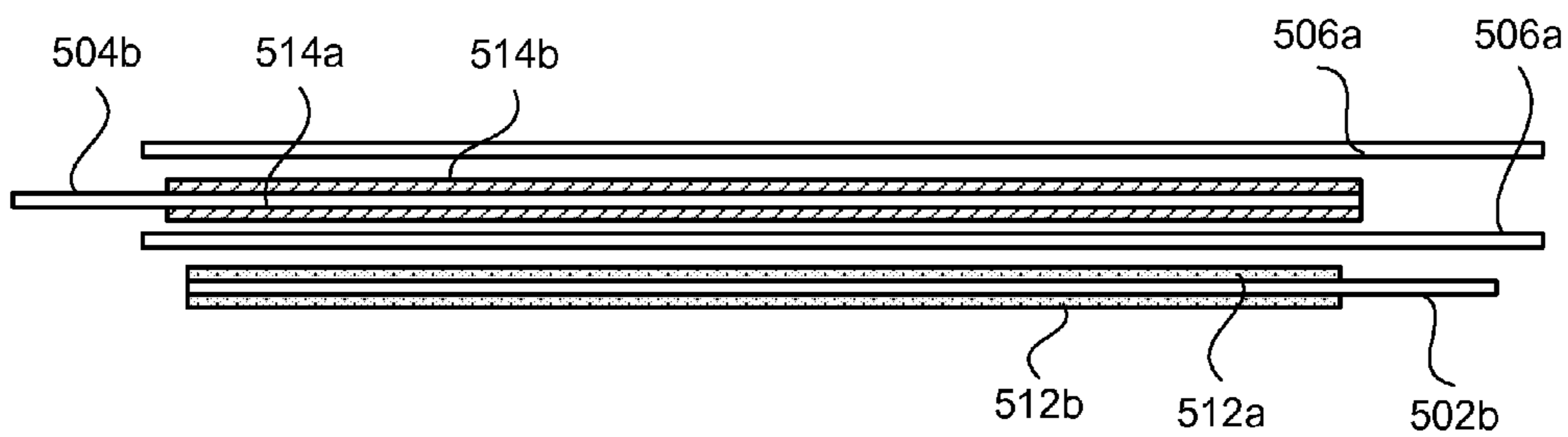


FIG. 5B

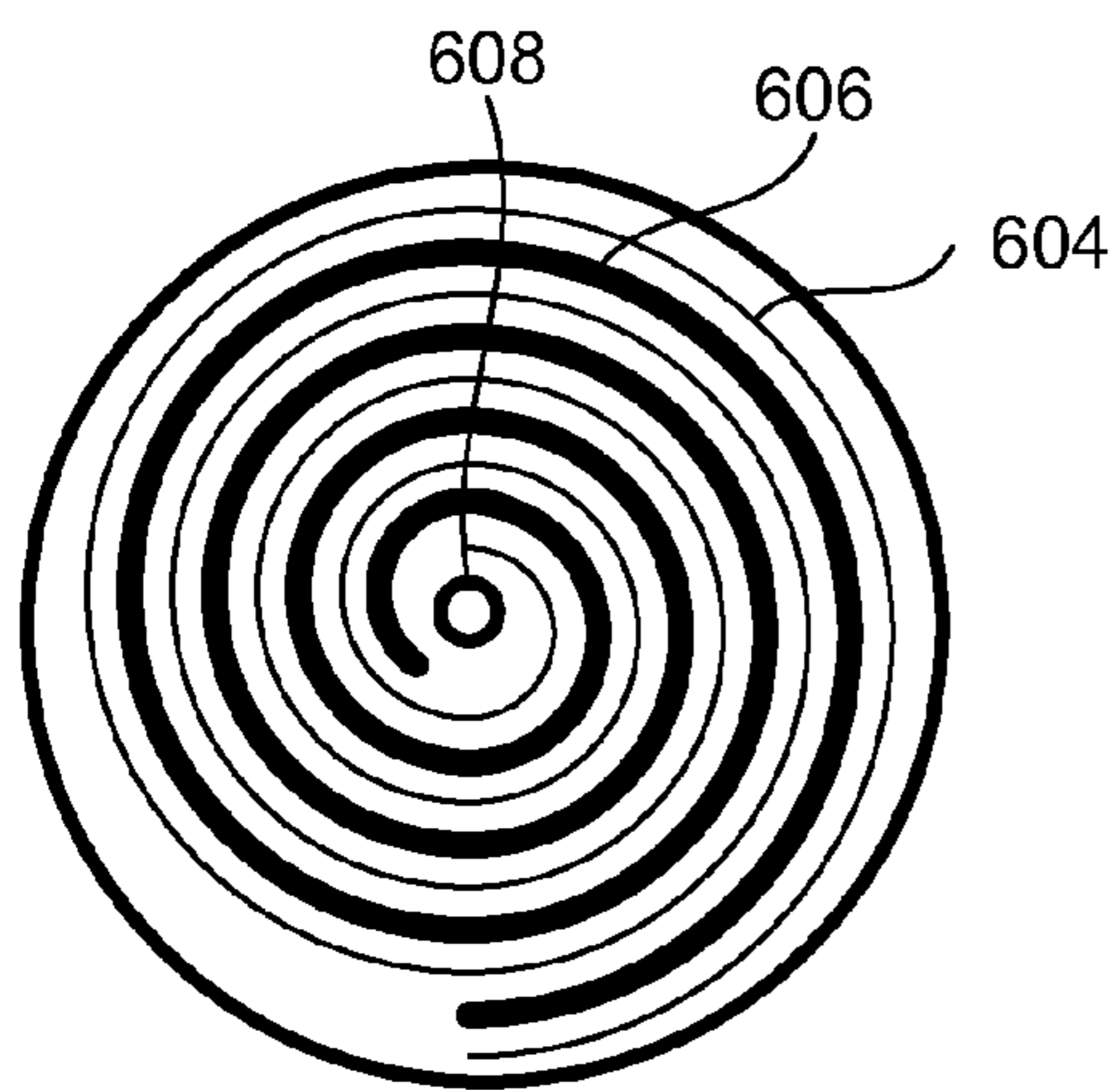


FIG. 6A

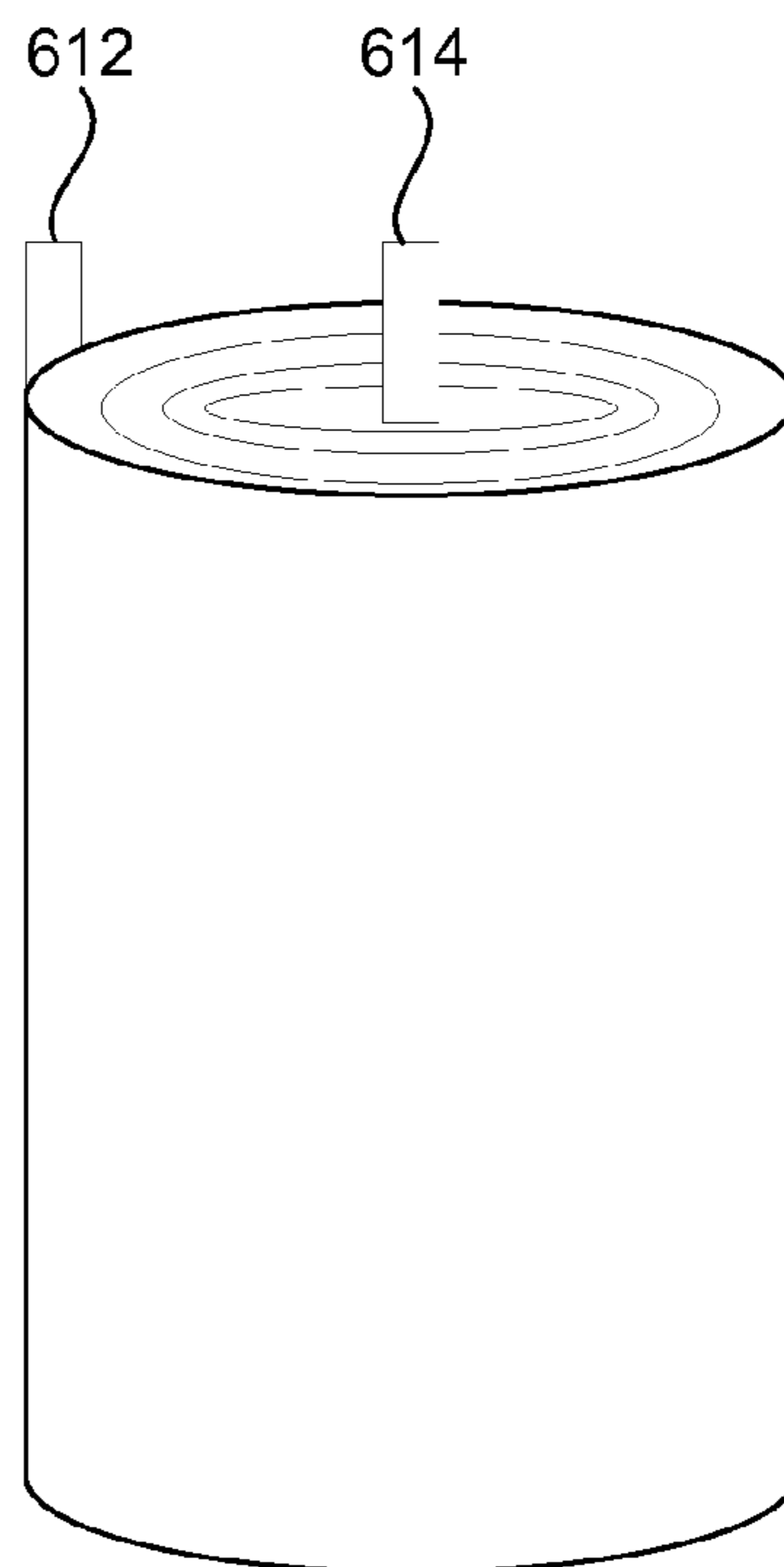


FIG. 6B

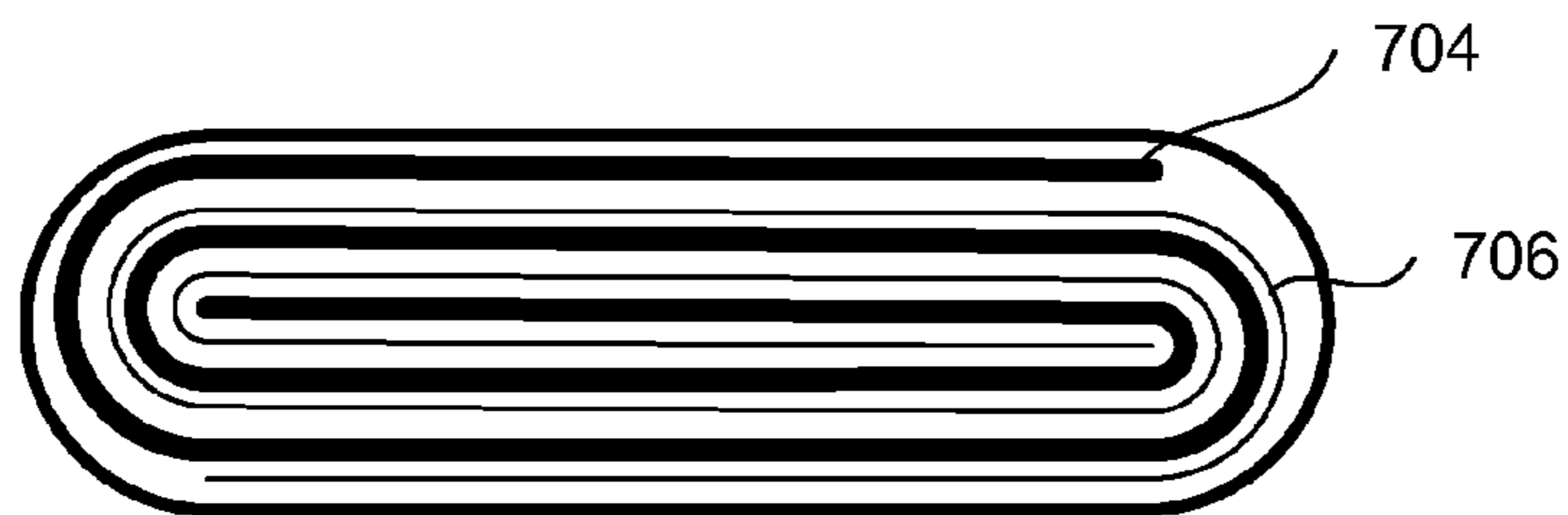


FIG. 7

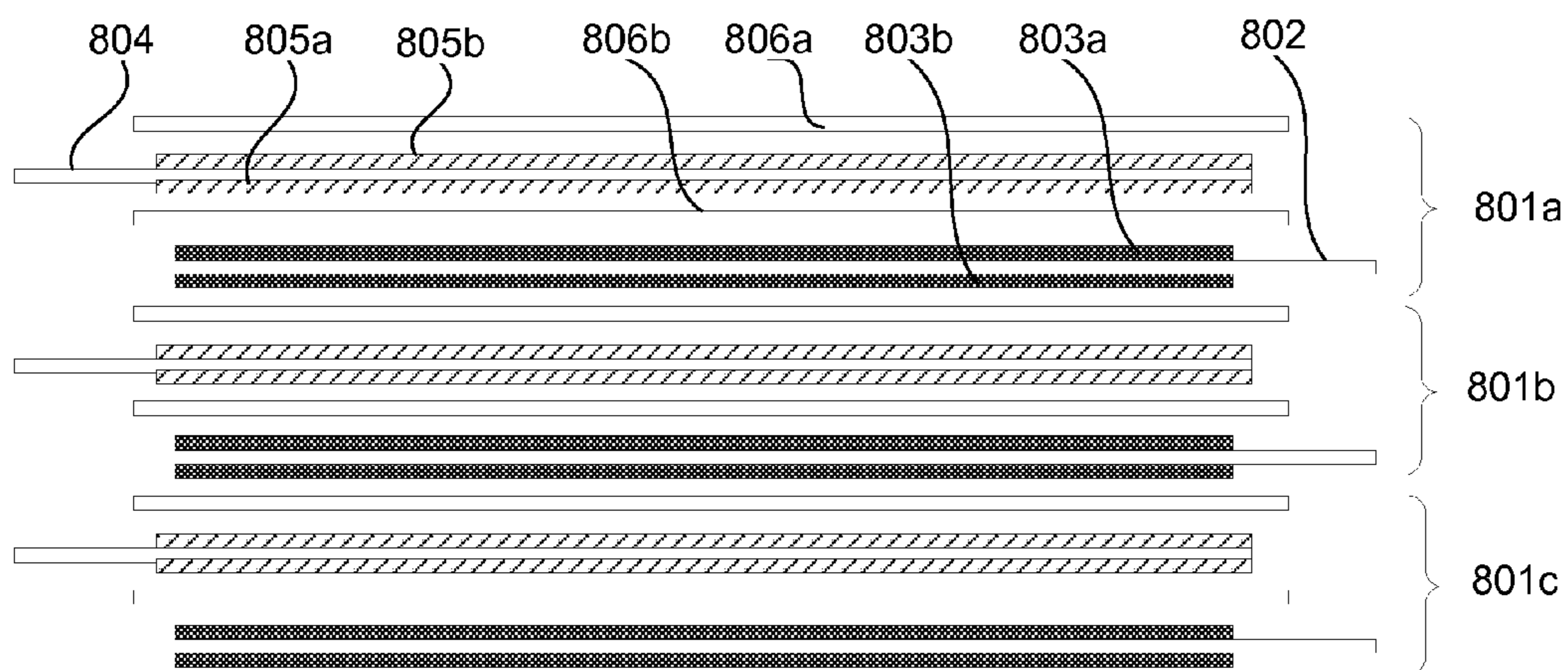


FIG. 8A

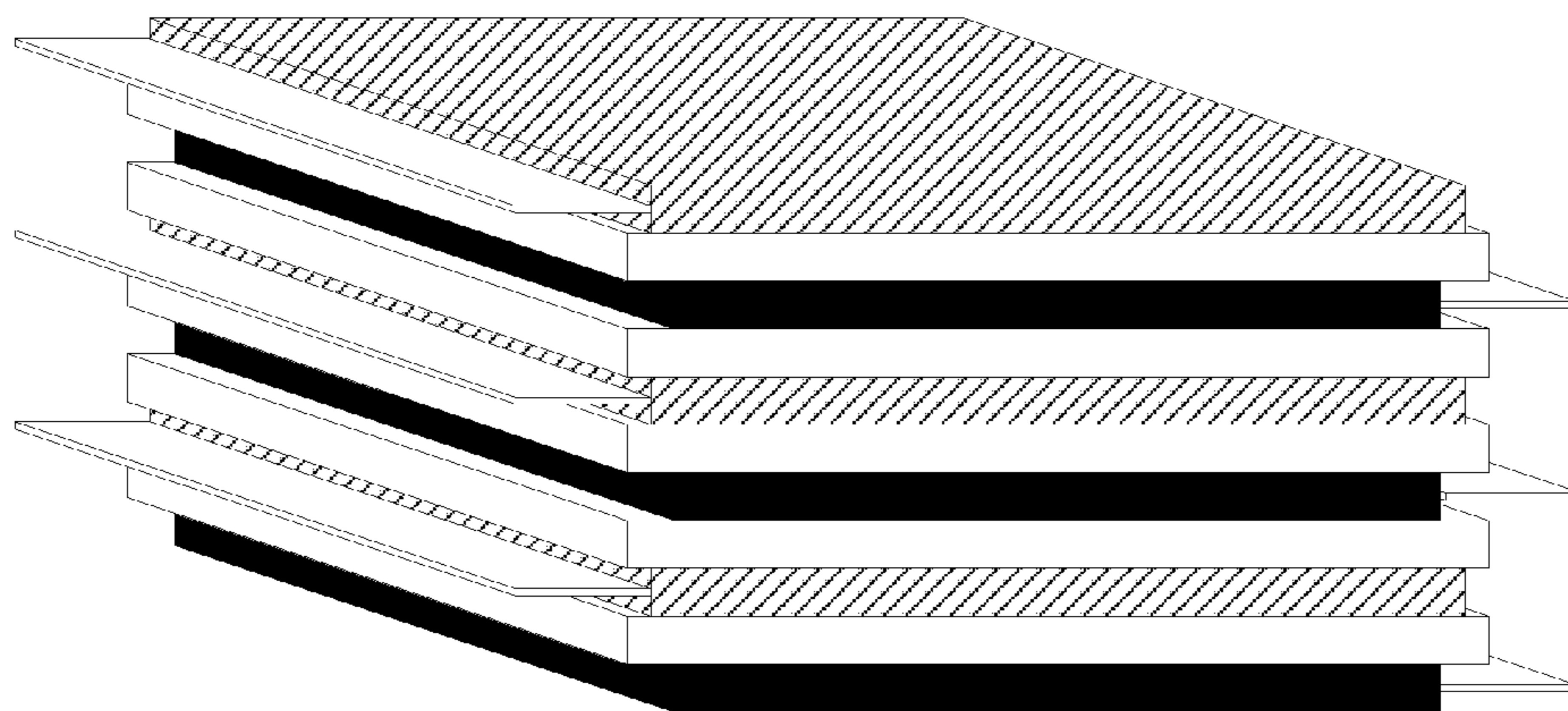


FIG. 8B

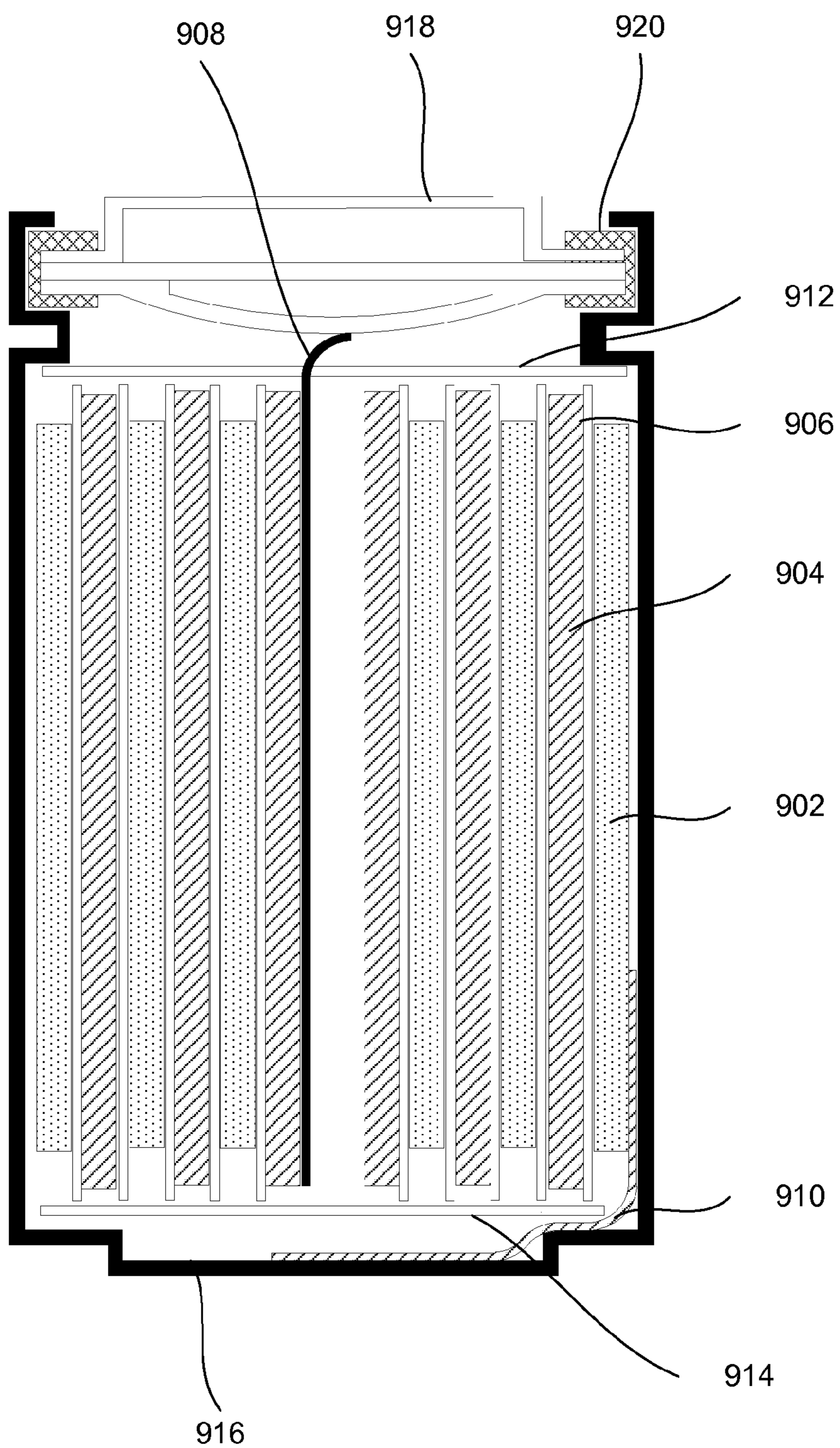


FIG. 9

INTERMEDIATE LAYERS FOR ELECTRODE FABRICATION

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/260,297, filed Nov. 11, 2009, entitled "INTERMEDIATE LAYERS FOR ELECTRODE FABRICATION," which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety for all purposes.

BACKGROUND

[0002] The demand for high capacity rechargeable batteries is strong. Many areas of application, such as aerospace, medical devices, portable electronics, and automotive, require high gravimetric and/or volumetric capacity cells. Lithium ion battery technology represents a significant improvement in this regard. However, to date, application of this technology has been primarily limited to graphite electrodes, and graphite has a theoretical capacity of only about 372 mAh/g during lithiation.

[0003] Silicon, germanium, tin, and many other materials are attractive active materials because of their high electrochemical capacity. For example, the theoretical capacity of silicon in lithium ion cells has been estimated at about 4200 mAh/g. Yet many of these materials not been widely adopted in commercial batteries. One reason is the substantial change in volume they undergo during cycling. For example, silicon swells by as much as 400% when charged to a level at or near its theoretical capacity ($\text{Li}_{4.4}\text{Si}$). Volume changes of this magnitude can cause substantial stresses in active material structures resulting in fractures and pulverization, loss of electrical connections within the electrode, and capacity fading of the battery.

[0004] Conventional methods of electrode fabrication using slurries, where slurries include high capacity active material particles and polymer binders, typically result in electrochemical cells with poor cycle life. Most polymer binders are not sufficiently elastic to accommodate active material's swelling, which results in separation between polymers and active material particles during the discharge and loss of electrical connection between the active material particles and the current collector.

[0005] Overall, there is a need for improved application of high capacity active materials in battery electrodes that minimize the drawbacks described above.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0006] FIG. 1 illustrates three general stages a Vapor Liquid Solid (VLS) deposition process in accordance with certain embodiments.

[0007] FIG. 2 is a schematic representation of an electrode cross-section containing active materials, a substrate, and an intermediate layer in accordance with certain embodiments.

[0008] FIG. 3 is an expanded schematic representation of a portion of an electrode cross-section further illustrating certain details of an intermediate layer in accordance with certain embodiments.

[0009] FIG. 4 is a flow chart of a general process for fabricating an electrode containing an intermediate layer in accordance with certain embodiments.

[0010] FIGS. 5A-B are a top schematic view and a side schematic view of an illustrative electrode arrangement in accordance with certain embodiments.

[0011] FIGS. 6A-B are a top schematic view and a perspective schematic view of an illustrative round wound cell in accordance with certain embodiments.

[0012] FIG. 7 is a top schematic view of an illustrative prismatic wound cell in accordance with certain embodiments.

[0013] FIGS. 8A-B are a top schematic view and a perspective schematic view of an illustrative stack of electrodes and separator sheets in accordance with certain embodiments.

[0014] FIG. 9 is a schematic cross-section view of an example of a wound cell in accordance with embodiments.

SUMMARY

[0015] Provided are novel electrodes for use in lithium ion batteries. An electrode includes one or more intermediate layers positioned between a substrate and an electrochemically active material. Intermediate layers may be made from chromium, titanium, tantalum, tungsten, nickel, molybdenum, lithium, as well as other materials and their combinations. An intermediate layer may protect the substrate, help to redistribute catalyst during deposition of the electrochemically active material, improve adhesion between the active material and substrate, and other purposes. In certain embodiments, an active material includes one or more high capacity active materials, such as silicon, tin, and germanium. These materials tend to swell during cycling and may lose mechanical and/or electrical connection to the substrate. A flexible intermediate layer may compensate for swelling and provide a robust adhesion interface. Provided also are novel methods of fabricating electrodes containing one or more intermediate layers.

[0016] In certain embodiments, an electrode for use in a lithium ion battery includes a substrate, one or more intermediate layers formed on the substrate, and an electrochemically active material in the form of nanostructures formed over the one or more intermediate layers and operable for inserting and removing lithium ions during battery cycling. The electrochemically active material is in electrical communication with the substrate. In certain embodiments, a substrate includes one or more of the following materials: copper, nickel, aluminum, stainless steel, and titanium. In the same or other embodiments, the active material includes one or more of the following materials: silicon, tin, germanium, a silicon-germanium combination, tin oxide, silicon oxycarbide (SiOC), and their compounds. In more specific embodiments, the active material includes silicides or, even more specifically, nickel silicides. For example, an active material may include nickel silicide nanowires with an amorphous silicon layer formed over the nanowires. In certain embodiments, the active material nanostructures are substrate-rooted nanowires.

[0017] In certain embodiments, one or more intermediate layers include one or more of the following elements: chromium, titanium, tantalum, tungsten, nickel, molybdenum, iron, and lithium. A thickness of the intermediate layers may be between about 1 nanometer and 2000 nanometers. An electrical resistance over a unit of surface area of the intermediate layers may be less than about 1 Ohm-centimeter squared.

[0018] In certain embodiments, one or more intermediate layers include a diffusion barrier layer configured to shield

the substrate during formation of the electrochemically active material. In the same or other embodiments, the intermediate layers include an adhesion layer configured to maintain mechanical connection between the substrate and the electrochemically active material during battery cycling. An intermediate layer may have a surface tension configured for depositing a catalyst layer and forming catalyst islands from the catalyst layer during formation of the active material. In the same or other embodiments, one or more intermediate layers are configured to separate catalyst particles from a carrier fluid. An intermediate layer may include an exposed surface having a roughness that enables distribution of a catalyst in discreet patches. An intermediate layers may have a surface condition providing nucleation sites for facilitating deposition of the electrochemically active material.

[0019] Provided also a method of manufacturing a battery electrode for use in a lithium ion battery. A method may involve receiving a substrate for the battery electrode, forming a conductive intermediate layers on the substrate, and depositing an electrochemically active material comprising nanowires on the one or more intermediate layers. The electrochemically active material is configured for inserting and removing lithium ions during battery cycling. Depositing the electrochemically active material may involve a vapor-solid-solid chemical (VLS) vapor deposition (CVD) technique. In certain embodiments, depositing the active material involves first depositing a catalyst on the one or more intermediate layers. Two or more intermediate layers may be deposited. In certain embodiments, an intermediate layer includes a surface condition that enhances nucleation of the active material during the deposition of the active material.

[0020] These and other aspects of the invention are described further below with reference to the figures.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EXAMPLE EMBODIMENTS

[0021] In the following description, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. The present invention may be practiced without some or all of these specific details. In other instances, well known process operations have not been described in detail to not unnecessarily obscure the present invention. While the invention will be described in conjunction with the specific embodiments, it will be understood that it is not intended to limit the invention to the embodiments.

Introduction

[0022] Instead of binding active materials to a substrate using a polymer binder as is conventionally done in lithium ion battery manufacturing, active materials may be attached directly to the current collecting substrate either during their fabrication by deposition or otherwise (thereby producing “growth rooted” active materials) or after their fabrication (by, e.g., sintering or otherwise fusing). In certain embodiments, a surface of the substrate may need to be protected during the fabrication or attachment process. The reasons for needing such protection, as well as techniques for applying such protection are described below. For now, it should be understood that the protection is provided by one or more “intermediate layers” interposed between the electrode substrate and the active materials. It should also be understood

that the active material is often in the form of a small particles or “nanostructures,” which will be described in more detail below.

[0023] High capacity active materials generally experience substantial volume change during electrochemical cycling of the cell. Such active materials may loose electrical and mechanical connection with the substrate leading to cell degradation. One way to address this issue is by bonding the active materials, which may be in the form of nanostructures, to the substrate. In some cases, the active material attaches to the substrate in a manner referred to as “substrate-rooting.” This arrangement provides direct mechanical support and electrical communication between the substrate and active materials; often this will provide a metallurgical connection (which does not necessarily mean that the connection is lattice matched) and/or electrical coupling (and/or connection) between the substrate and the active materials. Various examples of the substrate-rooted nanostructures and corresponding fabrication methods are described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/437,529 filed on May 7, 2009, which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety for purposes of describing substrate rooted nanostructures.

[0024] In certain embodiments, nanostructures have one dimension that is substantially larger than the other two. The largest dimension is referred to as a length. Some nanostructures, especially ones with high aspect ratios, may have curved shapes. In these cases, the length of the nanostructure is the length of the representative curve. A cross-section is defined as a profile of a nanostructure in a plane perpendicular to the length. Nanostructures may have many varying cross-sectional (transverse) dimensions along their lengths. Further, an active layer may have nanostructures with different cross-sections, both shapes and dimensions (e.g., tapered nanostructures). Examples of nanostructure shapes include spheres, cones, rods, wires, arcs, saddles, flakes, ellipsoids, tapes, etc.

[0025] Cross-sectional shapes are generally dependent on compositions, crystallographic structures (e.g., crystalline, poly-crystalline, amorphous), sizes, deposition process parameters, and many other factors. Shapes may also change during cycling. Irregularities of cross-sectional shapes require a special dimensional characterization. For the purposes of this application, a cross-section dimension is defined as a distance between the two most separated points on a periphery of a cross-section that is transverse to the principal dimension, such as length. For example, a cross-section dimension of a cylindrical nano-rod circle is the diameter of the circular cross-section. In certain embodiments, a cross-section dimension of nanostructures is between about 1 nanometer and 10,000 nanometers. In more specific embodiments, a cross-section dimension is between about 5 nanometers and 1000 nanometers, and more specifically between 10 nanometers and 400 nanometers. Typically, these dimensions represent an average or mean across the nanostructures employed in an electrode.

[0026] In certain embodiments, nanostructures are hollow. They may be also described as tube or tube-like structures. Therefore, the cross-sectional profile of these hollow nanostructures includes void regions surrounded by annular solid regions. An average ratio of the void regions to the solid regions may be between about 0.01 and 100, more specifically between about 0.01 and 10. The cross-section dimension of the hollow nanostructures may be substantially constant along the principal dimension (e.g., typically the axis).

Alternatively, the hollow nanostructures may be tapered along the principal dimension. In certain embodiments, multiple hollow nanostructures may form a core-shell arrangement similar to multiwall nanotubes. Additional examples of hollow nanostructures are provided in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/787,138, entitled "INTERCONNECTED HOLLOW NANOSTRUCTURES CONTAINING HIGH CAPACITY ACTIVE MATERIALS FOR USE IN RECHARGEABLE BATTERIES" filed on May 10, 2010, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety for purposes of describing hollow nanostructures.

[0027] In certain embodiments, a "nanowire" is defined as a structure that has, on average, an aspect ratio of at least about four. In certain examples, the average aspect ratio may be at least about ten, at least about one hundred, or even at least about one thousand. In some cases, the average nanowire aspect ratio may be at least about ten thousand, and can even reach about one hundred thousand. Nanowire active materials can undergo substantial swelling without disrupting the overall structure of the active layer, provide better electrical and mechanical connections with the layer, and can be easily realized using the vapor-liquid-solid and vapor-solid template free growth methods or other templated methods.

[0028] Substrate-rooted nanostructures may be deposited on a substrate using various methods. One such method is a chemical-vapor deposition (CVD) that employs a vapor-liquid-solid (VLS) phase transformation of a deposited material. This approach will be referred to herein as a "VLS" technique. Another method includes a CVD with a vapor-solid-solid (VSS) phase transformation, referred to herein as a "VSS" technique.

[0029] In various embodiments, an intermediate layer is positioned between the substrate and the active material to facilitate the fabrication or use of a lithium negative electrode. In one example, an intermediate layer serves to protect the substrate from reactants used to deposit the active material. Such intermediate layer may also (or alternatively) facilitate formation of the active material by VLS or other suitable process. It may accomplish this by, e.g., preventing a deposition catalyst from being contaminated by materials diffusing from the substrate or prevent catalyst diffusing into the substrate.

[0030] A general description of a VLS process is provided here to better understand certain functions and structures of intermediate layers and other components of the electrode, in accordance with certain embodiments. VLS is a mechanism for the growth of one-dimensional structures, such as nanowires, from CVD. The VLS process introduces a catalytic liquid alloy phase, which can rapidly adsorb a precursor vapor to super-saturation levels, and thereby facilitate crystal growth at the liquid-solid interface.

[0031] FIG. 1 illustrates three general stages of a typical VLS deposition process in accordance with certain embodiments. During the initial stage **100**, discrete catalyst islands **104** are formed on the surface of the substrate **102**. The surface typically has an intermediate layer, not shown, which is described below in more detail.

[0032] A substrate may be a metallic foil, an open structure substrate (e.g., mesh, foam), a composite that include structural and conductive materials, and other forms. Substrate materials for electrodes used in various lithium ion cells may include copper and/or copper dendrite coated metal oxides, stainless steel, titanium, aluminum, nickel (also used as a diffusion barrier), chromium, tungsten, metal nitrides, metal

carbides, metal oxides, carbon, carbon fiber, graphite, graphene, carbon mesh, conductive polymers, or combinations of above including multi-layer structures. It will be understood by one having ordinary skills in the art that selection of the materials also depends on electrochemical potentials of the materials. The substrate material may be formed as a foil, films, mesh, laminate, wires, tubes, particles, multi-layer structure, or any other suitable configurations. For example, the substrate **102** may be a stainless steel foil having thickness of between about 1 micrometer and 50 micrometers. In other embodiments, the substrate **102** is a copper foil with thickness of between about 5 micrometers and 50 micrometers. Certain substrate examples are described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/437,529 filed on May 7, 2009 and U.S. patent application Attorney Docket No. AMPRP005P filed herewith, which are incorporated by reference herein in their entirety for purposes of describing substrates.

[0033] The catalyst islands **104** may be formed by first depositing a continuous layer containing catalyst and then removing parts of the layer (by, e.g., using lithographic etching, ablating) or breaking the continuous layer by thermal annealing. An intermediate layer may be used to protect the substrate during this removal. In other embodiments, a continuous or partial layer containing catalyst (typically, a eutectic alloy containing metallic catalyst, such as gold) is heated, which leads to formation of discrete droplets due to the surface tension. An intermediate layer may be used to change the surface properties of the substrate, to form a eutectic alloy with catalyst containing material, prevent catalyst losses into the substrate (e.g., a gold catalyst over the copper substrate), and other purposes. Some properties that may impact formation of discontinuous catalyst islands include surface roughness, grain structure and porosity, magnetic orientation, and electronic structure.

[0034] An intermediate layer may contain a catalyst, which may be, e.g., plated, sputtered, and/or evaporated on the intermediate layer. In certain embodiments, materials of the intermediate layer and catalyst may be deposited together and then subjected to phase separation to control distribution of the materials in this combined layer. Nano and/or micro crystals may occur near or at the exposed surface of the intermediate layer. The size of the crystals may be controlled during the deposition process. For example, the power level, chamber pressure, and/or temperature may be controlled during sputtering. If plating is used for deposition of the materials, then plating currents and bath composition can be controlled. Furthermore, certain post deposition treatment parameters (e.g., temperature and/or duration for annealing) may be controlled. As resulting distribution of the catalyst on the surface effect density and size of nanowires in some of these embodiments.

[0035] In certain embodiments, roughness of the intermediate layer and formation of catalyst islands is established by chemical etching. Etchant may be introduced after the deposition of the intermediate layer or during such deposition (e.g., close the end of the deposition) and react with the intermediate layer to create rougher surface and form catalyst islands.

[0036] Further, an intermediate layer may have portions with different chemical or physical properties (e.g., polarization, binding sites, magnetic properties), which can be used to distribute catalysts particles or to form islands during a deposition process.

[0037] In certain embodiments, catalyst containing materials may be deposited on a substrate as discrete catalyst islands without first forming a continuous layer. For example, a slurry solution with catalyst particles and/or a catalyst suspension (e.g., a colloid suspension) may be used to coat the substrate surface. The slurry is then dried to form catalyst islands. Certain details of these embodiments are described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/103,642 filed on Apr. 12, 2005, which is incorporated herein in its entirety for purposes of describing process examples of forming catalyst islands. In these embodiments, intermediate layers may be used to provide desirable surface properties for slurry flow and drying and protect the substrate from the slurry. In other embodiments, catalytic materials are embedded onto the intermediate layer such that only a portion of the catalyst material is exposed. Other methods for depositing a catalyst include electroless deposition and mixing a salt precursor with catalyst elements followed by heating or annealing the mixtures with a presence of hydrogen.

[0038] Materials suitable for the catalyst include any materials capable of reacting and forming a compound with the process gas in, for example, VLS or VSS types of deposition processes. Examples include gold, nickel, cobalt, aluminum, copper, gallium, indium, silver, titanium, carbon, carbides, alloys, and mixtures of thereof. Catalysts can be deposited using thermal evaporation, sputtering, electroplating, and filtration methods, etc. Depending on the deposition condition, either a continuous film or discrete catalyst islands form on the intermediate layer.

[0039] In certain embodiments, deposition using evaporation or sputtering of catalyst over a rough surface of the substrate or an intermediate layer creates shadowing effects, which results in clustered deposition. This may eliminate a need for a separate post-deposition treatment to create catalyst islands. Further, plating on rough surfaces may result in preferential deposition on the extending tips of the rough surface structure caused by uneven field distribution.

[0040] In certain embodiments, depositing small amounts of certain catalyst materials on certain surfaces (e.g. gold on silicon oxides and/or silicon) do not form a homogenous single atomic layer and instead deposit in clusters. Without being restricted to any particular theory, it is believed that thermodynamic driving forces of the surface tension effect such distribution). Clustering may be controlled by controlling deposition process conditions, such as temperature and deposition rate.

[0041] In certain embodiments, plating on partially oxidized surfaces or surfaces with a porous template (e.g., porous polymers) on the top of it (porous polymer) is used to form catalyst islands. For example, a substrate or an intermediate layer may be partially oxidized by heating at ambient conditions or by introducing an oxidizing agent into the deposition chamber. Alternatively or in addition to this method, a surface may be then coated with a polymer that forms a porous structure during the deposition or during subsequent treatment (e.g., heating).

[0042] In certain embodiments, pulse plating of the catalyst may result in catalyst islands formed on the surface. For example, relatively short pulse duration can be used to form a discontinuous film. The duration of the pulse depends on the plating bath configuration, plating currents, plating bath composition, deposition surface materials and geometry (e.g., surface roughness), and other process parameters.

[0043] In certain embodiments, a partial electrochemical dissolution of the catalyst layer is used to form islands of the metal. For example, a pulsed current, a template, roughening or oxidizing the surface may be used to establish selective dissolution.

[0044] Various criteria may be taken into account in selecting catalyst materials. Such criteria include melting and eutectic points with nanostructure materials, wetting properties such as surface tension on the intermediate layer (to form catalyst islands upon melting), bulk diffusivity in the intermediate layer, impact on electrochemical and electrical properties of deposited nanostructures, and others. For example, aluminum has lower diffusivity in crystalline silicon than gold but also makes a eutectic with silicon, though at higher temperature than gold (about 577° C.). Copper, in turn, diffuses very fast in silicon but has even higher eutectic (about 802° C.). Copper may be used to grow silicon nanowires in a Vapor-Solid-Solid mode. Further, gallium has both low melting temperature and low diffusivity in silicon in comparison to gold.

[0045] In the next stage **110** of the VLS process, one or more precursor gases **106** are provided to the surface of the substrate **102** containing catalyst islands **104a**. These precursor gases can decompose or otherwise react to form electrochemically active materials, such as silicon, germanium, silicon-germanium alloys (SiGe), silicon oxycarbide (SiOC), tin, tin oxide, titanium oxide, carbon, a variety of metal hydrides (e.g., MgH₂), silicides, phosphides, carbides and nitrides, that later form nanostructures **112**. The precursor gases **106** react at the surface of the catalyst islands **104** releasing certain materials **108** that are adsorbed by the islands **104a** and other materials **119** and then released to the environment. This process is sometimes referred to as a dissociative chemisorption. For example, silane (SiH₄) decomposes at high temperatures or with an assist of plasma to produce silicon, silane radical, and hydrogen. Deposited silicon or silicon-containing material then diffuses into the catalyst islands and form alloys with the catalysts. Another example is chloride based silane such as dichloride, trichloride, and tetrachloride silane. Chlorosilanes (H_xSiCl_{4-x}) may react with hydrogen (H₂) on the surface of a gold containing catalyst island and release silicon (Si) into the islands and hydrogen chloride (HCl) into environment of the processing chamber.

[0046] As the dissociative chemisorption process continues, the catalyst islands **104a** increase the concentration of the adsorbed materials **108** until it reaches the saturation level. At this point, shown in the next stage **120**, further adsorption of the material **108** causes precipitation of this material at the substrate interface leading to formation of a solid nanostructure **112**. This nanostructure **112** contains active materials and, in certain embodiments, other materials configured to enhance conductivity (e.g., dopants), structural integrity, adhesion to the substrate, and other properties of the nanostructures. The nanostructures may be functionalized during or after deposition, e.g., forming core-shell arrangement with other materials, pre-loaded with lithium.

[0047] In these and other embodiments, an intermediate layer may be used to protect the substrate **102** from interacting with materials in the catalyst islands **104a** and, as well, the nanostructures **112**, precursors **106** and released reaction products **119** during the VLS-type deposition process, and during functionalization. For example, a gold-containing catalyst may be used to deposit silicon nanowires. However,

depositing gold on a copper substrate leads to formation of a gold-copper alloy, which may negatively impact the catalytic effect and require more gold to be deposited. Further, copper may form silicides when exposed to silane, silicon tetrachloride, or other silicon containing precursor gas. Copper silicides are generally not desirable in silicon based electrodes due to its poor mechanical and undesired electrochemical properties.

[0048] Providing an intermediate layer allows using various substrate materials that otherwise would react or with precursor gases (e.g., silane) or form alloys with the deposited materials during or after the deposition. For example, depositing silicon nanowires directly on a copper or nickel substrate may result in formation of undesirable silicides. An intermediate layer serves as a barrier during deposition and prevents contact between such substrates and precursor gases. As a result, a number of possible material alternatives for substrates is greatly increased.

[0049] In certain embodiments, pre-fabricated nanostructures are bonded (e.g., fused or sintered) to the substrate surface using a combination of heat and pressure or other techniques. An intermediate layer may enhance the bonding formed by these techniques. In other embodiments, substrate-rooted nanostructures are formed by depositing a bulk layer of the active material onto the substrate and then selectively etching parts of the layer forming substrate-rooted nanostructures. A substrate may need to be protected from etchants in these embodiments, e.g., using an intermediate barrier layer.

[0050] In certain other embodiments, high capacity materials may be bound to the substrate using polymeric binders. An intermediate layer deposited on the substrate may allow using binders to accommodate for excessive swelling of high capacity materials yet to maintain a sufficient electrical and mechanical communication with the substrate. For example, an intermediate layer may be used to increase substrate surface roughness. In other embodiments, an intermediate layer includes functional groups on its surface that provide better adhesion of the polymer to the substrate. It should be understood that embodiments relying on binders will not typically provide a substrate-rooted structure nor will they provide a metallurgical bond between the substrate and the active materials nanostructures.

[0051] In certain embodiments, pre-synthesized (e.g., pre-formed) nanoparticles are deposited on the substrate followed by thermal annealing steps to form metallurgical connections between the nanoparticles and substrates. An intermediate layer may be used to assist during this bond formation or other parts of the overall process.

Structure and Materials of Intermediate Layer

[0052] An intermediate layer may be used as a diffusion barrier. For example, an intermediate layer may prevent substrate materials from diffusing into (and thereby degrading the performance of) catalysts used to grow active material nanostructures. Additionally, in some cases, the intermediate layer may prevent interaction between the substrate and active material precursors and/or other reagents used during active material fabrication and other processing operations. Further, the intermediate layer may enhance adhesion of the active material to the substrate, especially when nanostructures undergo substantial volume change during cycling. Still further, an intermediate layer may provide, e.g., an epitaxial or chemical-bond connection between the substrate and active material nanostructures (to address a lattice mismatch

and reduce strain), and/or a thermal expansion coefficient that allows electrode sub-assemblies to be brought from processing temperatures (e.g., deposition temperature, post-deposition treatment temperatures) to the room temperature without causing fractures at the substrate-active material interface, and be electrically conductive. An intermediate layer could facilitate or accelerate nanowire growth since surface roughness and wettability between the intermediate layer and catalyst islands can be optimized by choosing different deposition process and different intermediate materials. An intermediate layer may be also used to promote mechanical integrity during a roll to roll or other method of fabrication (e.g., prevent deformation because of a high temperature, high tension environment).

[0053] Selection of materials for an intermediate layer depends on substrate materials, active materials, contact/attachment conditions, targeted functionality of the intermediate layer, and other parameters. Examples of intermediate layer materials include refractory metals, such as tungsten, molybdenum, niobium, tantalum, rhenium, tungsten nitride, tungsten carbide, titanium, titanium oxide, titanium nitride, titanium carbide, zirconium, zirconium nitride, tantalum, tantalum nitride, cobalt, ruthenium, indium oxide, cadmium, hafnium, tellurium, tellurium oxide, tellurium nitride, chromium, iron, chromium oxide, a titanium-tungsten combination, an iron-tungsten combination, a cobalt-tungsten combination, molybdenum, nickel, lithium and others. A thickness of the intermediate layer may be between about 1 nanometer and 5 micrometers, more specifically between about 5 nanometers and 1 micrometer, even more specifically between about 25 nanometers and 100 nanometers. Introducing certain materials into the layer, such as copper nickel, chromium, and titanium may improve adhesion of deposited nanostructures to the substrate surface. The thickness generally depends on functionality required from the layer and corresponding properties of the materials included in the layer. In certain embodiments, the intermediate layer has a contact resistance per unit surface area of the layer that is less than about 10 Ohm-centimeter squared or in more specific embodiments less about 5 Ohm-centimeter squared. A resistance over a unit of surface area is defined as a resistivity of the intermediate layer materials multiplied by a thickness of the layer.

[0054] In certain embodiments, an intermediate layer includes tungsten having a thickness of between about 150 nanometers and 250 nanometers. Tungsten does not form alloys with many materials that can be used as a catalyst to deposit high capacity nanostructured materials. In other embodiments, a composite intermediate layer is used containing a sub-layer of tungsten containing material (e.g., between about 150 nanometer and 250 nanometer thick) and a sub-layer of titanium containing material (e.g., between about 1 nanometers and 50 nanometers thick). The titanium sub-layer may be used to enhance adhesion of the intermediate layer to the substrate. Intermediate layers described above may be used with copper and nickel substrates.

[0055] In certain embodiments, an intermediate layer includes chromium and has a thickness of between about 500 nanometers and 1,500 nanometers. While chromium forms an alloy with gold (and possibly can not be used with this type of catalyst), it can be successfully used with other catalyst and be deposited over copper, nickel, and silver substrate layers.

[0056] In certain embodiments, the electrode includes multiple intermediate layers that form a stack. Each of these layers may contain the same or different materials. A stack of the intermediate layers may also be referred to as a “barrier system”. For examples, FIG. 2 illustrates a schematic cross-section of an electrode 200 with a stack 204 that is positioned between the substrate 202 and the active material nanostructures 206. FIG. 3 illustrates an expanded view of an electrode portion 210 with a stack 204 containing three layers 208, 210, and 212. It should be understood that a stack may include any number of intermediate layers (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6). A number of layers may depend on materials used, deposition techniques, and targeted functionality. In certain embodiments, a composite intermediate layer is used, for example, as a combination of an adhesion layer and a diffusion barrier, as a combination of a diffusion barrier and a nucleation surface layer, as a combination of an adhesion layer, a diffusion barrier, and a nucleation surface layer, and in a case where two materials provide better diffusion barrier than just one (e.g., synergistic diffusion barrier effects).

[0057] In certain embodiments, one layer in a stack may be used to improve adhesion of the nanostructures to the substrate. In more specific examples, one layer (e.g., layer 207 in FIG. 3) may be used to improve adhesion of the substrate to the stack, while another layer (e.g., layer 209 in FIG. 3) may be used to improve adhesion of the nanostructures to the stack. Examples of materials for such layers include chromium, titanium, tungsten, tantalum, nickel, and molybdenum. An adhesion layer may be chosen to accommodate substantial swelling of the nanostructure base, while the substrate remains substantially static.

[0058] A layer, for example layer 208 in FIG. 3, may be used as a diffusion barrier. This layer may prevent the substrate from interacting with catalyst islands, precursors, and reaction products. In certain embodiments, an intermediate layer (e.g., layer 209 in FIG. 3), may be used to assist in formation of catalyst islands during the VLS and/or VSS deposition process. For example, a layer may be used to modify surface properties of the substrate to provide adequate surface tension so that the catalyst islands are agglomerated or aggregated. In other embodiments, the layer may be used to prevent substrate damage during lithographic etching, ablation, and other methods of forming catalyst islands.

[0059] In certain embodiments, an intermediate layer or a portion of the intermediate layer (e.g., a top sub-layer, such as layer 209 in FIG. 3) has a surface condition that facilitates nucleation of the nanostructures deposited onto the substrate, or more specifically onto the intermediate layer of the substrate. The surface condition may be created as a part of an overall catalyst island formation operation or a separate operation. As understood, in VLS or VSS deposition methods a solution containing an active material (or a precursor thereof) precipitates a solid phase containing the active material when the concentration of the active material in the solution reaches a certain high level. Initiation of this precipitation can be controlled, to a certain degree, by controlling the surface properties of the intermediate layer in the contact with the solution. Examples of these properties include surface roughness, surface polarization, surface tension, and morphology of the surface materials (e.g., crystalline, amorphous, lattice size and orientation). These properties can be controlled by selecting certain materials for an intermediate layer (or portions thereof). Examples of such materials include chrome, tungsten, nickel, molybdenum, iron, as well

as mixtures and alloys containing one or more of these materials. Further, these properties can be controlled by using certain deposition methods and controlling process parameters during the deposition. Examples of deposition methods include sputtering, electrodeposition (e.g., electroless deposition, pulse-plating), evaporation, chemical vapor deposition (CVD), physical vapor deposition (PVD), and atomic layer deposition (ALD). In certain embodiments, a post-deposition treatment, such as back-plating, electro-etching, resputtering, CVD, annealing, plasma etching, and oxidation, is used to further control properties of the intermediate layer. While the specific surface condition(s) chosen to facilitate nucleation will depend on the composition of the intermediate layer, the active material, and the catalyst (if any), generally a surface having a surface roughness of at least about 0.01 $\mu\text{m R}$, more specifically at least about 0.05 $\mu\text{m R}$, or at least about 0.1 $\mu\text{m R}$. Frequently, surface conditions that match properties of the active material will be preferred. For example, substantially similar lattice constants, polarizations, surface tensions, etc. for the intermediate layer and active material are preferred.

Process

[0060] FIG. 4 illustrates a flow chart of a general process 400 for depositing active material on a substrate with one or more intermediate layer positioned between the substrate and the active material(s). The process 400 may start with providing a substrate (block 402). In certain embodiments, a substrate may be provided into a processing chamber, such a CVD apparatus, in a roll-to-roll format. A deposition area of the substrate is generally preheated to a predetermined temperature established by deposition conditions of the intermediate layer and/or active materials.

[0061] The process 400 may continue with depositing one or more intermediate layers (block 404). In certain embodiments, intermediate layer materials are deposited using a Physical Vapor Deposition, a Chemical Vapor Deposition, electrodeposition, or any other suitable deposition technique. For example, a layer of titanium and/or titanium nitride may be deposited using a sputtering target containing titanium as well as evaporation, sputtering, plating, laser ablation, Atomic Layer Deposition, and Chemical Vapor Deposition. This deposition operation (block 404) may be followed by one or more post deposition treatment operations, such as back-plating/electro-etching, resputtering, CVD treatment, annealing, plasma etching, and oxidation. For example, surface properties of the intermediate layer may need to be controlled to allow formation of the catalyst islands and/or nucleation of the active material during active material deposition operation 406. In certain embodiments, intermediate layer deposition operation 404 and/or post-deposition treatment may be repeated a number of times to build an intermediate layer stack as, for example, shown in FIG. 4.

[0062] The process 400 may continue with depositing active materials (block 406). Details of some embodiments of this operation are described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/437,529 filed on May 7, 2009, which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety for purposes of describing an operation for depositing active materials.

[0063] In certain embodiments, particularly those involving a VLS or VSS process, the deposition operation 406 starts with depositing catalyst islands on the substrate surface. In addition to single material catalyst embodiments, catalyst islands may include two or more materials (e.g., binary catalysts, tertiary catalysts, etc.). Besides modifying catalytic

functions, a combination of catalyst may lead to changes in eutectic properties, rheological properties (e.g., viscosity, surface tension), and other described above.

[0064] In certain embodiments, deposition processes other than a VLS may be used to deposit active materials in operation 406. Certain examples are described above.

[0065] It should be noted that the above mentioned operations could be implemented on a single apparatus or a series of apparatus such that operations are performed soon after completion of the previous operation. For example, an apparatus may include one or more sputtering stations for adding intermediate layer and catalyst materials and one or more CVD stations for depositing active material nanostructures onto the moving web. In other embodiments, different apparatuses may be used for one or more of these. A period of time may pass before two sequential operations, in which case, a partially manufactured electrodes may need to be protected from the storage environment by adding a protective layer.

Sub-Assembly: Electrodes with Separators

[0066] Two common arrangements of the electrodes in lithium ion cells are wound and stacked. One goal is to position and align the surfaces of active layers of the two electrodes surfaces as close as possible without causing an electrical short. Close positioning allows lithium ions to travel more rapidly and more directly between the two electrodes leading to better performance.

[0067] FIG. 5A illustrates a side view of an aligned stack including a positive electrode 502, a negative electrode 504, and two sheets of the separator 506a and 506b in accordance with certain embodiments. The positive electrode 502 may have a positive active layer 502a and a substrate portion 502b not coated with a positive active material (but may include an intermediate layer coating), i.e., an uncoated portion. Similarly, the negative electrode 504 may have a negative active layer 504a and a negative substrate portion 504b not coated with a negative active material (but may include an intermediate layer coating), i.e., an uncoated portion. In many embodiments, the exposed area of the negative active layer 504a is slightly larger than the exposed area of the positive active layer 502a to ensure trapping of the lithium ions released from the positive active layer 502a by intercalation material of the negative active layer 504a. In one embodiment, the negative active layer 504a extends at least between about 0.25 and 5 mm beyond the positive active layer 502a in one or more directions (typically all directions). In a more specific embodiment, the negative layer extends beyond the positive layer by between about 1 and 2 mm in one or more directions. In certain embodiments, the edges of the separator sheets 506a and 506b extend beyond the outer edges of at least the negative active layer 504a to provide electronic insulation of the electrode from the other battery components. The positive uncoated portion 502b may be used for connecting to the positive terminal and may extend beyond negative electrode 504 and/or the separator sheets 506a and 506b. Likewise, the negative uncoated portion 504b may be used for connecting to the negative terminal and may extend beyond positive electrode 502 and/or the separator sheets 506a and 506b.

[0068] FIG. 5B illustrates a top view of the aligned stack. The positive electrode 502 is shown with two positive active layers 512a and 512b on opposite sides of the flat positive current collector 502b. Similarly, the negative electrode 504 is shown with two negative active layers 514a and 514b on

opposite sides of the flat negative current collector. Any gaps between the positive active layer 512a, its corresponding separator sheet 506a, and the corresponding negative active layer 514a are usually minimal to non-existent, especially after the first cycle of the cell. The electrodes and the separators are either tightly wound together in a jelly roll or are positioned in a stack that is then inserted into a tight case. The electrodes and the separator tend to swell inside the case after the electrolyte is introduced and the first cycles remove any gaps or dry areas as lithium ions cycle the two electrodes and through the separator.

[0069] A wound design is a common arrangement. Long and narrow electrodes are wound together with two sheets of separator into a sub-assembly, sometimes referred to as a jellyroll, shaped and sized according to the internal dimensions of a curved, often cylindrical, case. FIG. 6A shows a top view of a jelly roll comprising a positive electrode 606 and a negative electrode 604. The white spaces between the electrodes represent the separator sheets. The jelly roll is inserted into a case 602. In some embodiments, the jellyroll may have a mandrel 608 inserted in the center that establishes an initial winding diameter and prevents the inner winds from occupying the center axial region. The mandrel 608 may be made of conductive material, and, in some embodiments, it may be a part of a cell terminal. FIG. 6B presents a perspective view of the jelly roll with a positive tab 612 and a negative tab 614 extending from the jelly roll. The tabs may be welded to the uncoated portions of the electrode substrates.

[0070] The length and width of the electrodes depend on the overall dimensions of the cell and thicknesses of active layers and current collector. For example, a conventional 18650 cell with 18 mm diameter and 65 mm length may have electrodes that are between about 300 and 1000 mm long. Shorter electrodes corresponding to low rate/higher capacity applications are thicker and have fewer winds.

[0071] A cylindrical design may be desirable for some lithium ion cells because the electrodes swell during cycling and exert pressure on the casing. A round casing may be made sufficiently thin and still maintain sufficient pressure. Prismatic cells may be similarly wound, but their case may bend along the longer sides from the internal pressure. Moreover, the pressure may not be even within different parts of the cells and the corners of the prismatic cell may be left empty. Empty pockets may not be desirable within the lithium ions cells because electrodes tend to be unevenly pushed into these pockets during electrode swelling. Moreover, the electrolyte may aggregate and leave dry areas between the electrodes in the pockets negating lithium ion transport between the electrodes. Nevertheless, in certain applications, such as those dictated by rectangular form factors, prismatic cells are appropriate. In some embodiments, prismatic cells employ stacks rectangular electrodes and separator sheets to avoid some of the difficulties encountered with wound prismatic cells.

[0072] FIG. 7 illustrates a top view of a wound prismatic jellyroll. The jelly roll comprises a positive electrode 704 and a negative electrode 706. The white space between the electrodes is representative of the separator sheets. The jelly roll is inserted into a rectangular prismatic case. Unlike cylindrical jellyrolls shown in FIGS. 6A and 6B, the winding of the prismatic jellyroll starts with a flat extended section in the middle of the jelly roll. In one embodiment, the jelly roll may include a mandrel (not shown) in the middle of the jellyroll onto which the electrodes and separator are wound.

[0073] FIG. 8A illustrates a side view of a stacked cell including a plurality of sets (801a, 801b, and 801c) of alternating positive and negative electrodes and a separator in between the electrodes. One advantage of a stacked cell is that its stack can be made to almost any shape, and is particularly suitable for prismatic cells. However, such cell typically requires multiple sets of positive and negative electrodes and a more complicated alignment of the electrodes. The current collector tabs typically extend from each electrode and connected to an overall current collector leading to the cell terminal.

Housing

[0074] FIG. 9 illustrates a cross-section view of the wound cylindrical cell in accordance with one embodiment. A jelly roll comprises a spirally wound positive electrode 902, a negative electrode 904, and two sheets of the separator 906. The jelly roll is inserted into a cell case 916, and a cap 918 and gasket 920 are used to seal the cell. In some cases, cap 912 or case 916 includes a safety device. For example, a safety vent or burst valve may be employed to break open if excessive pressure builds up in the battery. Also, a positive thermal coefficient (PTC) device may be incorporated into the conductive pathway of cap 918 to reduce the damage that might result if the cell suffered a short circuit. The external surface of the cap 918 may be used as the positive terminal, while the external surface of the cell case 916 may serve as the negative terminal. In an alternative embodiment, the polarity of the battery is reversed and the external surface of the cap 918 is used as the negative terminal, while the external surface of the cell case 916 serves as the positive terminal. Tabs 908 and 910 may be used to establish a connection between the positive and negative electrodes and the corresponding terminals. Appropriate insulating gaskets 914 and 912 may be inserted to prevent the possibility of internal shorting. For example, a Kapton™ film may be used for internal insulation. During fabrication, the cap 918 may be crimped to the case 916 in order to seal the cell. However prior to this operation, electrolyte (not shown) is added to fill the porous spaces of the jelly roll.

[0075] A rigid case is typically required for lithium ion cells, while lithium polymer cells may be packed into a flexible, foil-type (polymer laminate) case. A variety of materials can be chosen for the case. For lithium-ion batteries, Ti-6-4, other Ti alloys, Al, Al alloys, and 300 series stainless steels may be suitable for the positive conductive case portions and end caps, and commercially pure Ti, Ti alloys, Cu, Al, Al alloys, Ni, Pb, and stainless steels may be suitable for the negative conductive case portions and end caps.

CONCLUSION

[0076] Although the foregoing invention has been described in some detail for purposes of clarity of understanding, it will be apparent that certain changes and modifications may be practiced within the scope of the appended claims. It should be noted that there are many alternative ways of implementing the processes, systems, and apparatus of the present invention. Accordingly, the present embodiments are to be considered as illustrative and not restrictive, and the invention is not to be limited to the details given herein.

What is claimed is:

1. An electrode for use in a lithium ion battery, the electrode comprising:

a substrate;

one or more intermediate layers formed on the substrate; and

an electrochemically active material in the form of nanostructures formed over the one or more intermediate layers and operable for inserting and removing lithium ions during battery cycling,

wherein the electrochemically active material is in electrical communication with the substrate.

2. The electrode of claim 1, wherein the substrate comprises one or more materials selected from the group consisting of copper, nickel, aluminum, stainless steel, and titanium.

3. The electrode of claim 1, wherein the active material comprises one or more materials selected from the group consisting of silicon, tin, germanium, a silicon-germanium combination, tin oxide, silicon oxycarbide (SiOC), and their compounds.

4. The electrode of claim 3, wherein the active material comprises silicides.

5. The electrode of claim 4, wherein the active material comprises nickel silicides.

6. The electrode of claim 1, wherein at least one of the one or more intermediate layers comprises one or more elements selected from the group consisting of chromium, titanium, tantalum, tungsten, nickel, molybdenum, iron, and lithium.

7. The electrode of claim 1, wherein a thickness of the one or more intermediate layers is between about 1 nanometer and 2000 nanometers.

8. The electrode of claim 1, wherein an electrical resistance over a unit of surface area of the one or more intermediate layers is less than about 1 Ohm-centimeter squared.

9. The electrode of claim 1, wherein the nanostructures comprise substrate-rooted nanowires.

10. The electrode of claim 1, wherein the one or more intermediate layers comprise a diffusion barrier layer configured to shield the substrate during formation of the electrochemically active material.

11. The electrode of claim 1, wherein the one or more intermediate layers comprise an adhesion layer configured to maintain mechanical connection between the substrate and the electrochemically active material during battery cycling.

12. The electrode of claim 1, wherein the one or more intermediate layers has a surface tension configured for depositing a catalyst layer and forming catalyst islands from the catalyst layer during formation of the active material.

13. The electrode of claim 1, wherein the one or more intermediate layers are configured to separate catalyst particles from a carrier fluid.

14. The electrode of claim 1, wherein the one or more intermediate layers comprise an exposed surface having a roughness that enables distribution of a catalyst in discreet patches.

15. The electrode of claim 1, wherein the one or more intermediate layers comprise a surface condition providing nucleation sites for facilitating deposition of the electrochemically active material.

16. A method of manufacturing a battery electrode for use in a lithium ion battery, the method comprising:

receiving a substrate for the battery electrode;

forming a conductive intermediate layers on the substrate; and

depositing an electrochemically active material comprising nanowires on the one or more intermediate layers,

wherein the electrochemically active material is configured for inserting and removing lithium ions during battery cycling.

17. The method of claim **16**, wherein depositing the electrochemically active material comprises a vapor-solid-solid chemical (VLS) vapor deposition (CVD) process.

18. The method as in one of claims **16**, wherein depositing the active material includes depositing a catalyst on the one or more intermediate layers.

19. The method as in one of claims **16**, wherein the formation of the conductive intermediate layers comprises depositing at least two intermediate layers.

20. The method as in one of claims **16**, wherein the intermediate layer comprises a surface condition that enhances nucleation of the active material during the deposition of the active material.

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