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HTTP/1.1, part 6: Caching
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Abstract

The Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) is an application-level protocol for distributed, collaborative, hypermedia information systems. This document is Part 6 of the seven-part specification that defines the protocol referred to as "HTTP/1.1" and, taken together, obsoletes [RFC 2616](#). Part 6 defines requirements on HTTP caches and the associated header fields that control cache behavior or indicate cacheable response messages.

Editorial Note (To be removed by RFC Editor)

Discussion of this draft should take place on the HTTPBIS working group mailing list (ietf-http-wg@w3.org). The current issues list is at <http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/report/3> and related documents (including fancy diffs) can be found at <http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/>.

The changes in this draft are summarized in [Appendix C.13](#).

Status of This Memo

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HTTP/1.1, Part 6

October 2010

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[1.](#) Introduction

HTTP is typically used for distributed information systems, where performance can be improved by the use of response caches. This document defines aspects of HTTP/1.1 related to caching and reusing response messages.

[1.1.](#) Purpose

An HTTP cache is a local store of response messages and the subsystem that controls its message storage, retrieval, and deletion. A cache stores cacheable responses in order to reduce the response time and network bandwidth consumption on future, equivalent requests. Any client or server MAY employ a cache, though a cache cannot be used by a server that is acting as a tunnel.

Caching would be useless if it did not significantly improve performance. The goal of caching in HTTP/1.1 is to reuse a prior response message to satisfy a current request. In some cases, a stored response can be reused without the need for a network request, reducing latency and network round-trips; a "freshness" mechanism is used for this purpose (see [Section 2.3](#)). Even when a new request is

required, it is often possible to reuse all or parts of the payload of a prior response to satisfy the request, thereby reducing network bandwidth usage; a "validation" mechanism is used for this purpose (see [Section 2.4](#)).

[1.2](#). Terminology

This specification uses a number of terms to refer to the roles played by participants in, and objects of, HTTP caching.

cacheable

A response is cacheable if a cache is allowed to store a copy of the response message for use in answering subsequent requests. Even when a response is cacheable, there might be additional constraints on whether a cache can use the cached copy to satisfy a particular request.

explicit expiration time

The time at which the origin server intends that a representation no longer be returned by a cache without further validation.

heuristic expiration time

An expiration time assigned by a cache when no explicit expiration time is available.

age

The age of a response is the time since it was sent by, or successfully validated with, the origin server.

first-hand

A response is first-hand if the freshness model is not in use; i.e., its age is 0.

freshness lifetime

The length of time between the generation of a response and its expiration time.

fresh

A response is fresh if its age has not yet exceeded its freshness lifetime.

stale

A response is stale if its age has passed its freshness lifetime (either explicit or heuristic).

validator

A protocol element (e.g., an entity-tag or a Last-Modified time) that is used to find out whether a stored response has an equivalent copy of a representation.

shared cache

A cache that is accessible to more than one user. A non-shared cache is dedicated to a single user.

[1.3.](#) Requirements

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in [[RFC2119](#)].

An implementation is not compliant if it fails to satisfy one or more

of the "MUST" or "REQUIRED" level requirements for the protocols it implements. An implementation that satisfies all the "MUST" or "REQUIRED" level and all the "SHOULD" level requirements for its protocols is said to be "unconditionally compliant"; one that satisfies all the "MUST" level requirements but not all the "SHOULD" level requirements for its protocols is said to be "conditionally compliant".

[1.4.](#) Syntax Notation

This specification uses the ABNF syntax defined in Section 1.2 of [\[Part1\]](#) (which extends the syntax defined in [\[RFC5234\]](#) with a list rule). [Appendix B](#) shows the collected ABNF, with the list rule expanded.

The following core rules are included by reference, as defined in [\[RFC5234\]](#), [Appendix B.1](#): ALPHA (letters), CR (carriage return), CRLF (CR LF), CTL (controls), DIGIT (decimal 0-9), DQUOTE (double quote), HEXDIG (hexadecimal 0-9/A-F/a-f), LF (line feed), OCTET (any 8-bit sequence of data), SP (space), VCHAR (any visible USASCII character), and WSP (whitespace).

[1.4.1.](#) Core Rules

The core rules below are defined in Section 1.2.2 of [\[Part1\]](#):

```
quoted-string = <quoted-string, defined in \[Part1\], Section 1.2.2>
token         = <token, defined in \[Part1\], Section 1.2.2>
OWS          = <OWS, defined in \[Part1\], Section 1.2.2>
```

[1.4.2.](#) ABNF Rules defined in other Parts of the Specification

The ABNF rules below are defined in other parts:

```
field-name    = <field-name, defined in \[Part1\], Section 3.2>
HTTP-date     = <HTTP-date, defined in \[Part1\], Section 6.1>
port          = <port, defined in \[Part1\], Section 2.6>
pseudonym     = <pseudonym, defined in \[Part1\], Section 9.9>
uri-host      = <uri-host, defined in \[Part1\], Section 2.6>
```

[2.](#) Cache Operation

[2.1.](#) Response Cacheability

A cache MUST NOT store a response to any request, unless:

- o The request method is understood by the cache and defined as being cacheable, and

- o the response status code is understood by the cache, and

- o the "no-store" cache directive (see [Section 3.2](#)) does not appear in request or response header fields, and
- o the "private" cache response directive (see [Section 3.2.2](#)) does not appear in the response, if the cache is shared, and
- o the "Authorization" header field (see Section 4.1 of [\[Part7\]](#)) does not appear in the request, if the cache is shared, unless the response explicitly allows it (see [Section 2.6](#)), and
- o the response either:
 - * contains an Expires header field (see [Section 3.3](#)), or
 - * contains a max-age response cache directive (see [Section 3.2.2](#)), or
 - * contains a s-maxage response cache directive and the cache is shared, or
 - * contains a Cache Control Extension (see [Section 3.2.3](#)) that allows it to be cached, or
 - * has a status code that can be served with heuristic freshness (see [Section 2.3.1.1](#)).

In this context, a cache has "understood" a request method or a response status code if it recognises it and implements any cache-specific behaviour. In particular, 206 Partial Content responses cannot be cached by an implementation that does not handle partial content (see [Section 2.1.1](#)).

Note that in normal operation, most caches will not store a response that has neither a cache validator nor an explicit expiration time, as such responses are not usually useful to store. However, caches are not prohibited from storing such responses.

[2.1.1](#). Storing Partial and Incomplete Responses

A cache that receives an incomplete response (for example, with fewer bytes of data than specified in a Content-Length header field) can store the response, but MUST treat it as a partial response [\[Part5\]](#). Partial responses can be combined as described in Section 4 of [\[Part5\]](#); the result might be a full response or might still be partial. A cache MUST NOT return a partial response to a client without explicitly marking it as such using the 206 (Partial Content)

status code.

A cache that does not support the Range and Content-Range header fields MUST NOT store incomplete or partial responses.

[2.2](#). Constructing Responses from Caches

For a presented request, a cache MUST NOT return a stored response, unless:

- o The presented effective request URI (Section 4.3 of [[Part1](#)]) and that of the stored response match, and
- o the request method associated with the stored response allows it to be used for the presented request, and
- o selecting request-header fields nominated by the stored response (if any) match those presented (see [Section 2.7](#)), and
- o the presented request and stored response are free from directives that would prevent its use (see [Section 3.2](#) and [Section 3.4](#)), and
- o the stored response is either:
 - * fresh (see [Section 2.3](#)), or
 - * allowed to be served stale (see [Section 2.3.3](#)), or
 - * successfully validated (see [Section 2.4](#)).

When a stored response is used to satisfy a request without validation, caches MUST include a single Age header field ([Section 3.1](#)) in the response with a value equal to the stored response's current_age; see [Section 2.3.2](#).

Requests with methods that are unsafe (Section 7.1.1 of [[Part2](#)]) MUST be written through the cache to the origin server; i.e., a cache must not reply to such a request before having forwarded the request and having received a corresponding response.

Also, note that unsafe requests might invalidate already stored responses; see [Section 2.5](#).

Caches MUST use the most recent response (as determined by the Date header field) when more than one suitable response is stored. They can also forward a request with "Cache-Control: max-age=0" or "Cache-

Control: no-cache" to disambiguate which response to use.

An HTTP implementation without a clock MUST NOT use stored responses without revalidating them on every use. An HTTP cache, especially a shared cache, SHOULD use a mechanism, such as NTP [[RFC1305](#)], to synchronize its clock with a reliable external standard.

[2.3.](#) Freshness Model

When a response is "fresh" in the cache, it can be used to satisfy subsequent requests without contacting the origin server, thereby improving efficiency.

The primary mechanism for determining freshness is for an origin server to provide an explicit expiration time in the future, using either the Expires header field ([Section 3.3](#)) or the max-age response cache directive ([Section 3.2.2](#)). Generally, origin servers will assign future explicit expiration times to responses in the belief that the representation is not likely to change in a semantically significant way before the expiration time is reached.

If an origin server wishes to force a cache to validate every request, it can assign an explicit expiration time in the past to indicate that the response is already stale. Compliant caches will validate the cached response before reusing it for subsequent requests.

Since origin servers do not always provide explicit expiration times, HTTP caches MAY assign heuristic expiration times when explicit times are not specified, employing algorithms that use other header field values (such as the Last-Modified time) to estimate a plausible expiration time. The HTTP/1.1 specification does not provide specific algorithms, but does impose worst-case constraints on their results.

The calculation to determine if a response is fresh is:

```
response_is_fresh = (freshness_lifetime > current_age)
```

The `freshness_lifetime` is defined in [Section 2.3.1](#); the `current_age` is defined in [Section 2.3.2](#).

Additionally, clients might need to influence freshness calculation. They can do this using several request cache directives, with the effect of either increasing or loosening constraints on freshness. See [Section 3.2.1](#).

[[ISSUE-no-req-for-directives: there are not requirements directly applying to cache-request-directives and freshness.]]

Note that freshness applies only to cache operation; it cannot be used to force a user agent to refresh its display or reload a resource. See [Section 4](#) for an explanation of the difference between caches and history mechanisms.

[2.3.1](#). Calculating Freshness Lifetime

A cache can calculate the freshness lifetime (denoted as `freshness_lifetime`) of a response by using the first match of:

- o If the cache is shared and the `s-maxage` response cache directive ([Section 3.2.2](#)) is present, use its value, or
- o If the `max-age` response cache directive ([Section 3.2.2](#)) is present, use its value, or
- o If the `Expires` response header field ([Section 3.3](#)) is present, use its value minus the value of the `Date` response header field, or
- o Otherwise, no explicit expiration time is present in the response. A heuristic freshness lifetime might be applicable; see [Section 2.3.1.1](#).

Note that this calculation is not vulnerable to clock skew, since all of the information comes from the origin server.

[2.3.1.1](#). Calculating Heuristic Freshness

If no explicit expiration time is present in a stored response that has a status code whose definition allows heuristic freshness to be used (including the following in Section 8 of [\[Part2\]](#): 200, 203, 206, 300, 301 and 410), a heuristic expiration time MAY be calculated.

Heuristics MUST NOT be used for response status codes that do not explicitly allow it.

When a heuristic is used to calculate freshness lifetime, the cache SHOULD attach a Warning header field with a 113 warn-code to the response if its current_age is more than 24 hours and such a warning is not already present.

Also, if the response has a Last-Modified header field (Section 6.6 of [Part4]), the heuristic expiration value SHOULD be no more than some fraction of the interval since that time. A typical setting of this fraction might be 10%.

Note: [RFC 2616](#) ([\[RFC2616\]](#), [Section 13.9](#)) required that caches do not calculate heuristic freshness for URLs with query components (i.e., those containing '?'). In practice, this has not been

widely implemented. Therefore, servers are encouraged to send explicit directives (e.g., Cache-Control: no-cache) if they wish to preclude caching.

[2.3.2.](#) Calculating Age

HTTP/1.1 uses the Age response-header field to convey the estimated age of the response message when obtained from a cache. The Age field value is the cache's estimate of the amount of time since the response was generated or validated by the origin server. In essence, the Age value is the sum of the time that the response has been resident in each of the caches along the path from the origin server, plus the amount of time it has been in transit along network paths.

The following data is used for the age calculation:

age_value

The term "age_value" denotes the value of the Age header field ([Section 3.1](#)), in a form appropriate for arithmetic operation; or 0, if not available.

date_value

HTTP/1.1 requires origin servers to send a Date header field, if possible, with every response, giving the time at which the response was generated. The term "date_value" denotes the value of the Date header field, in a form appropriate for arithmetic operations. See Section 9.3 of [\[Part1\]](#) for the definition of the Date header field, and for requirements regarding responses without it.

now

The term "now" means "the current value of the clock at the host performing the calculation". Hosts that use HTTP, but especially hosts running origin servers and caches, SHOULD use NTP ([\[RFC1305\]](#)) or some similar protocol to synchronize their clocks to a globally accurate time standard.

request_time

The current value of the clock at the host at the time the request resulting in the stored response was made.

response_time

The current value of the clock at the host at the time the response was received.

A response's age can be calculated in two entirely independent ways:

1. the "apparent_age": response_time minus date_value, if the local clock is reasonably well synchronized to the origin server's clock. If the result is negative, the result is replaced by zero.
2. the "corrected_age_value", if all of the caches along the response path implement HTTP/1.1; note this value MUST be interpreted relative to the time the request was initiated, not the time that the response was received.

```
apparent_age = max(0, response_time - date_value);

response_delay = response_time - request_time;
corrected_age_value = age_value + response_delay;
```

These are combined as

```
corrected_initial_age = max(apparent_age, corrected_age_value);
```

The `current_age` of a stored response can then be calculated by adding the amount of time (in seconds) since the stored response was last validated by the origin server to the `corrected_initial_age`.

```
resident_time = now - response_time;
current_age = corrected_initial_age + resident_time;
```

[2.3.3](#). Serving Stale Responses

A "stale" response is one that either has explicit expiry information or is allowed to have heuristic expiry calculated, but is not fresh according to the calculations in [Section 2.3](#).

Caches **MUST NOT** return a stale response if it is prohibited by an explicit in-protocol directive (e.g., by a "no-store" or "no-cache" cache directive, a "must-revalidate" cache-response-directive, or an applicable "s-maxage" or "proxy-revalidate" cache-response-directive; see [Section 3.2.2](#)).

Caches **SHOULD NOT** return stale responses unless they are disconnected (i.e., it cannot contact the origin server or otherwise find a

forward path) or otherwise explicitly allowed (e.g., the max-stale request directive; see [Section 3.2.1](#)).

Stale responses **SHOULD** have a Warning header field with the 110 warn-code (see [Section 3.6](#)). Likewise, the 112 warn-code **SHOULD** be sent on stale responses if the cache is disconnected.

If a cache receives a first-hand response (either an entire response, or a 304 (Not Modified) response) that it would normally forward to the requesting client, and the received response is no longer fresh, the cache **SHOULD** forward it to the requesting client without adding a

new Warning (but without removing any existing Warning header fields). A cache SHOULD NOT attempt to validate a response simply because that response became stale in transit.

[2.4.](#) Validation Model

When a cache has one or more stored responses for a requested URI, but cannot serve any of them (e.g., because they are not fresh, or one cannot be selected; see [Section 2.7](#)), it can use the conditional request mechanism [[Part4](#)] in the forwarded request to give the origin server an opportunity to both select a valid stored response to be used, and to update it. This process is known as "validating" or "revalidating" the stored response.

When sending such a conditional request, the cache SHOULD add an If-Modified-Since header field whose value is that of the Last-Modified header field from the selected (see [Section 2.7](#)) stored response, if available.

Additionally, the cache SHOULD add an If-None-Match header field whose value is that of the ETag header field(s) from all responses stored for the requested URI, if present. However, if any of the stored responses contains only partial content, its entity-tag SHOULD NOT be included in the If-None-Match header field unless the request is for a range that would be fully satisfied by that stored response.

A 304 (Not Modified) response status code indicates that the stored response can be updated and reused; see [Section 2.8](#).

A full response (i.e., one with a response body) indicates that none of the stored responses nominated in the conditional request is suitable. Instead, the full response SHOULD be used to satisfy the request and MAY replace the stored response.

If a cache receives a 5xx response while attempting to validate a response, it MAY either forward this response to the requesting client, or act as if the server failed to respond. In the latter

case, it MAY return a previously stored response (see [Section 2.3.3](#)).

[2.5.](#) Request Methods that Invalidate

Because unsafe methods (Section 7.1.1 of [\[Part2\]](#)) have the potential for changing state on the origin server, intervening caches can use them to keep their contents up-to-date.

The following HTTP methods MUST cause a cache to invalidate the effective Request URI (Section 4.3 of [\[Part1\]](#)) as well as the URI(s) in the Location and Content-Location header fields (if present):

- o PUT
- o DELETE
- o POST

An invalidation based on a URI from a Location or Content-Location header field MUST NOT be performed if the host part of that URI differs from the host part in the effective request URI (Section 4.3 of [\[Part1\]](#)). This helps prevent denial of service attacks.

A cache that passes through requests for methods it does not understand SHOULD invalidate the effective request URI (Section 4.3 of [\[Part1\]](#)).

Here, "invalidate" means that the cache will either remove all stored responses related to the effective request URI, or will mark these as "invalid" and in need of a mandatory validation before they can be returned in response to a subsequent request.

Note that this does not guarantee that all appropriate responses are invalidated. For example, the request that caused the change at the origin server might not have gone through the cache where a response is stored.

[2.6.](#) Shared Caching of Authenticated Responses

Shared caches MUST NOT use a cached response to a request with an Authorization header field (Section 4.1 of [\[Part7\]](#)) to satisfy any subsequent request unless a cache directive that allows such responses to be stored is present in the response.

In this specification, the following Cache-Control response directives ([Section 3.2.2](#)) have such an effect: must-revalidate, public, s-maxage.

Note that cached responses that contain the "must-revalidate" and/or "s-maxage" response directives are not allowed to be served stale ([Section 2.3.3](#)) by shared caches. In particular, a response with either "max-age=0, must-revalidate" or "s-maxage=0" cannot be used to satisfy a subsequent request without revalidating it on the origin server.

[2.7.](#) Caching Negotiated Responses

When a cache receives a request that can be satisfied by a stored response that has a Vary header field ([Section 3.5](#)), it MUST NOT use that response unless all of the selecting request-header fields nominated by the Vary header field match in both the original request (i.e., that associated with the stored response), and the presented request.

The selecting request-header fields from two requests are defined to match if and only if those in the first request can be transformed to those in the second request by applying any of the following:

- o adding or removing whitespace, where allowed in the header field's syntax
- o combining multiple message-header fields with the same field name (see Section 3.2 of [[Part1](#)])
- o normalizing both header field values in a way that is known to have identical semantics, according to the header field's specification (e.g., re-ordering field values when order is not significant; case-normalization, where values are defined to be case-insensitive)

If (after any normalization that might take place) a header field is absent from a request, it can only match another request if it is also absent there.

A Vary header field-value of "*" always fails to match, and subsequent requests to that resource can only be properly interpreted by the origin server.

The stored response with matching selecting request-header fields is known as the selected response.

If no selected response is available, the cache MAY forward the presented request to the origin server in a conditional request; see [Section 2.4](#).

[2.8.](#) Combining Responses

When a cache receives a 304 (Not Modified) response or a 206 (Partial Content) response (in this section, the "new" response"), it needs to create an updated response by combining the stored response with the new one, so that the updated response can be used to satisfy the request, and potentially update the cached response.

If the new response contains an ETag, it identifies the stored response to use. [[TODO-mention-CL: might need language about Content-Location here]][[TODO-select-for-combine: Shouldn't this be the selected response?]]

If the new response's status code is 206 (partial content), both the stored and new responses MUST have validators, and those validators MUST match using the strong comparison function (see Section 4 of [\[Part4\]](#)). Otherwise, the responses MUST NOT be combined.

The stored response header fields are used as those of the updated response, except that

- o any stored Warning header fields with warn-code 1xx (see [Section 3.6](#)) MUST be deleted.
- o any stored Warning header fields with warn-code 2xx MUST be retained.
- o any other header fields provided in the new response MUST replace all instances of the corresponding header fields from the stored response.

The updated response header fields MUST be used to replace those of the stored response in cache (unless the stored response is removed from cache). In the case of a 206 response, the combined representation MAY be stored.

[3.](#) Header Field Definitions

This section defines the syntax and semantics of HTTP/1.1 header fields related to caching.

[3.1.](#) Age

The "Age" response-header field conveys the sender's estimate of the amount of time since the response was generated or successfully validated at the origin server. Age values are calculated as specified in [Section 2.3.2](#).

Age = "Age" ":" OWS Age-v
Age-v = delta-seconds

Age field-values are non-negative integers, representing time in seconds.

delta-seconds = 1*DIGIT

If a cache receives a value larger than the largest positive integer it can represent, or if any of its age calculations overflows, it MUST transmit an Age header field with a field-value of 2147483648 (2^{31}). Caches SHOULD use an arithmetic type of at least 31 bits of range.

The presence of an Age header field in a response implies that a response is not first-hand. However, the converse is not true, since HTTP/1.0 caches might not implement the Age header field.

[3.2.](#) Cache-Control

The "Cache-Control" general-header field is used to specify directives for caches along the request/response chain. Such cache directives are unidirectional in that the presence of a directive in a request does not imply that the same directive is to be given in the response.

HTTP/1.1 caches MUST obey the requirements of the Cache-Control directives defined in this section. See [Section 3.2.3](#) for information about how Cache-Control directives defined elsewhere are handled.

Note: HTTP/1.0 caches might not implement Cache-Control and might only implement Pragma: no-cache (see [Section 3.4](#)).

Cache directives MUST be passed through by a proxy or gateway application, regardless of their significance to that application, since the directives might be applicable to all recipients along the request/response chain. It is not possible to target a directive to a specific cache.

```
Cache-Control    = "Cache-Control" ":" OWS Cache-Control-v
Cache-Control-v  = 1#cache-directive
```

```
cache-directive = cache-request-directive
                  / cache-response-directive
```

```
cache-extension = token [ "=" ( token / quoted-string ) ]
```

[3.2.1.](#) Request Cache-Control Directives

```
cache-request-directive =
    "no-cache"
    / "no-store"
    / "max-age" "=" delta-seconds
    / "max-stale" [ "=" delta-seconds ]
    / "min-fresh" "=" delta-seconds
    / "no-transform"
    / "only-if-cached"
    / cache-extension
```

no-cache

The no-cache request directive indicates that a stored response MUST NOT be used to satisfy the request without successful validation on the origin server.

no-store

The no-store request directive indicates that a cache MUST NOT store any part of either this request or any response to it. This directive applies to both non-shared and shared caches. "MUST NOT store" in this context means that the cache MUST NOT intentionally store the information in non-volatile storage, and MUST make a best-effort attempt to remove the information from volatile

storage as promptly as possible after forwarding it.

This directive is NOT a reliable or sufficient mechanism for ensuring privacy. In particular, malicious or compromised caches might not recognize or obey this directive, and communications networks might be vulnerable to eavesdropping.

max-age

The max-age request directive indicates that the client is willing to accept a response whose age is no greater than the specified time in seconds. Unless the max-stale request directive is also present, the client is not willing to accept a stale response.

max-stale

The max-stale request directive indicates that the client is willing to accept a response that has exceeded its expiration time. If max-stale is assigned a value, then the client is willing to accept a response that has exceeded its expiration time by no more than the specified number of seconds. If no value is assigned to max-stale, then the client is willing to accept a

stale response of any age.

min-fresh

The min-fresh request directive indicates that the client is willing to accept a response whose freshness lifetime is no less than its current age plus the specified time in seconds. That is, the client wants a response that will still be fresh for at least the specified number of seconds.

no-transform

The no-transform request directive indicates that an intermediate cache or proxy MUST NOT change the Content-Encoding, Content-Range or Content-Type request header fields, nor the request representation.

only-if-cached

The only-if-cached request directive indicates that the client only wishes to return a stored response. If it receives this directive, a cache SHOULD either respond using a stored response that is consistent with the other constraints of the request, or respond with a 504 (Gateway Timeout) status code. If a group of caches is being operated as a unified system with good internal connectivity, such a request MAY be forwarded within that group of caches.

[3.2.2.](#) Response Cache-Control Directives

```
cache-response-directive =  
    "public"  
    / "private" [ "=" DQUOTE 1#field-name DQUOTE ]  
    / "no-cache" [ "=" DQUOTE 1#field-name DQUOTE ]  
    / "no-store"  
    / "no-transform"  
    / "must-revalidate"  
    / "proxy-revalidate"  
    / "max-age" "=" delta-seconds  
    / "s-maxage" "=" delta-seconds  
    / cache-extension
```

public

The public response directive indicates that the response MAY be cached, even if it would normally be non-cacheable or cacheable only within a non-shared cache. (See also Authorization, [Section 4.1](#) of [\[Part7\]](#), for additional details.)

private

The private response directive indicates that the response message is intended for a single user and MUST NOT be stored by a shared cache. A private (non-shared) cache MAY store the response.

If the private response directive specifies one or more field-names, this requirement is limited to the field-values associated with the listed response header fields. That is, the specified field-names(s) MUST NOT be stored by a shared cache, whereas the remainder of the response message MAY be.

Note: This usage of the word private only controls where the response can be stored; it cannot ensure the privacy of the message content. Also, private response directives with field-names are often handled by implementations as if an unqualified private directive was received; i.e., the special handling for the qualified form is not widely implemented.

no-cache

The no-cache response directive indicates that the response MUST NOT be used to satisfy a subsequent request without successful validation on the origin server. This allows an origin server to prevent a cache from using it to satisfy a request without contacting it, even by caches that have been configured to return stale responses.

If the no-cache response directive specifies one or more field-names, this requirement is limited to the field-values associated with the listed response header fields. That is, the specified field-name(s) MUST NOT be sent in the response to a subsequent request without successful validation on the origin server. This allows an origin server to prevent the re-use of certain header fields in a response, while still allowing caching of the rest of the response.

Note: Most HTTP/1.0 caches will not recognize or obey this directive. Also, no-cache response directives with field-names are often handled by implementations as if an unqualified no-cache directive was received; i.e., the special handling for the qualified form is not widely implemented.

no-store

The no-store response directive indicates that a cache MUST NOT store any part of either the immediate request or response. This directive applies to both non-shared and shared caches. "MUST NOT

store" in this context means that the cache MUST NOT intentionally store the information in non-volatile storage, and MUST make a best-effort attempt to remove the information from volatile storage as promptly as possible after forwarding it.

This directive is NOT a reliable or sufficient mechanism for ensuring privacy. In particular, malicious or compromised caches might not recognize or obey this directive, and communications networks might be vulnerable to eavesdropping.

must-revalidate

The must-revalidate response directive indicates that once it has become stale, the response MUST NOT be used to satisfy subsequent requests without successful validation on the origin server.

The must-revalidate directive is necessary to support reliable operation for certain protocol features. In all circumstances an HTTP/1.1 cache MUST obey the must-revalidate directive; in particular, if the cache cannot reach the origin server for any reason, it MUST generate a 504 (Gateway Timeout) response.

Servers SHOULD send the must-revalidate directive if and only if failure to validate a request on the representation could result in incorrect operation, such as a silently unexecuted financial transaction.

proxy-revalidate

The proxy-revalidate response directive has the same meaning as the must-revalidate response directive, except that it does not apply to non-shared caches.

max-age

The max-age response directive indicates that response is to be considered stale after its age is greater than the specified number of seconds.

s-maxage

The s-maxage response directive indicates that, in shared caches, the maximum age specified by this directive overrides the maximum age specified by either the max-age directive or the Expires header field. The s-maxage directive also implies the semantics of the proxy-revalidate response directive.

no-transform

The no-transform response directive indicates that an intermediate cache or proxy MUST NOT change the Content-Encoding, Content-Range or Content-Type response header fields, nor the response representation.

[3.2.3.](#) Cache Control Extensions

The Cache-Control header field can be extended through the use of one or more cache-extension tokens, each with an optional value. Informational extensions (those that do not require a change in cache behavior) can be added without changing the semantics of other directives. Behavioral extensions are designed to work by acting as modifiers to the existing base of cache directives. Both the new directive and the standard directive are supplied, such that applications that do not understand the new directive will default to the behavior specified by the standard directive, and those that understand the new directive will recognize it as modifying the requirements associated with the standard directive. In this way, extensions to the cache-control directives can be made without requiring changes to the base protocol.

This extension mechanism depends on an HTTP cache obeying all of the cache-control directives defined for its native HTTP-version, obeying certain extensions, and ignoring all directives that it does not understand.

For example, consider a hypothetical new response directive called "community" that acts as a modifier to the private directive. We define this new directive to mean that, in addition to any non-shared cache, any cache that is shared only by members of the community named within its value may cache the response. An origin server wishing to allow the UCI community to use an otherwise private response in their shared cache(s) could do so by including

```
Cache-Control: private, community="UCI"
```

A cache seeing this header field will act correctly even if the cache does not understand the community cache-extension, since it will also see and understand the private directive and thus default to the safe behavior.

Unrecognized cache directives MUST be ignored; it is assumed that any cache directive likely to be unrecognized by an HTTP/1.1 cache will be combined with standard directives (or the response's default cacheability) such that the cache behavior will remain minimally correct even if the cache does not understand the extension(s).

The HTTP Cache Directive Registry defines the name space for the cache directives.

Registrations MUST include the following fields:

- o Cache Directive Name
- o Pointer to specification text

Values to be added to this name space are subject to IETF review ([\[RFC5226\]](#), [Section 4.1](#)).

The registry itself is maintained at
<<http://www.iana.org/assignments/http-cache-directives>>.

[3.3](#). Expires

The "Expires" header field gives the date/time after which the response is considered stale. See [Section 2.3](#) for further discussion of the freshness model.

The presence of an Expires field does not imply that the original resource will change or cease to exist at, before, or after that time.

The field-value is an absolute date and time as defined by HTTP-date in Section 6.1 of [\[Part1\]](#); it MUST be sent in [rfc1123](#)-date format.

```
Expires    = "Expires" ":" OWS Expires-v
Expires-v  = HTTP-date
```

For example

```
Expires: Thu, 01 Dec 1994 16:00:00 GMT
```

Note: If a response includes a Cache-Control field with the max-age directive (see [Section 3.2.2](#)), that directive overrides the Expires field. Likewise, the s-maxage directive overrides Expires in shared caches.

HTTP/1.1 servers SHOULD NOT send Expires dates more than one year in the future.

HTTP/1.1 clients and caches MUST treat other invalid date formats, especially including the value "0", as in the past (i.e., "already expired").

[3.4.](#) Pragma

The "Pragma" general-header field is used to include implementation-specific directives that might apply to any recipient along the request/response chain. All pragma directives specify optional behavior from the viewpoint of the protocol; however, some systems MAY require that behavior be consistent with the directives.

```
Pragma           = "Pragma" ":" OWS Pragma-v
Pragma-v         = 1#pragma-directive
pragma-directive = "no-cache" / extension-pragma
extension-pragma = token [ "=" ( token / quoted-string ) ]
```

When the no-cache directive is present in a request message, an application SHOULD forward the request toward the origin server even if it has a cached copy of what is being requested. This pragma directive has the same semantics as the no-cache response directive (see [Section 3.2.2](#)) and is defined here for backward compatibility with HTTP/1.0. Clients SHOULD include both header fields when a no-cache request is sent to a server not known to be HTTP/1.1 compliant. HTTP/1.1 caches SHOULD treat "Pragma: no-cache" as if the client had sent "Cache-Control: no-cache".

Note: Because the meaning of "Pragma: no-cache" as a response-header field is not actually specified, it does not provide a reliable replacement for "Cache-Control: no-cache" in a response.

This mechanism is deprecated; no new Pragma directives will be defined in HTTP.

[3.5.](#) Vary

The "Vary" response-header field conveys the set of request-header fields that were used to select the representation.

Caches use this information, in part, to determine whether a stored response can be used to satisfy a given request; see [Section 2.7](#). determines, while the response is fresh, whether a cache is permitted to use the response to reply to a subsequent request without validation; see [Section 2.7](#).

In uncacheable or stale responses, the Vary field value advises the user agent about the criteria that were used to select the representation.

```
Vary    = "Vary" ":" OWS Vary-v
Vary-v  = "*" / 1#field-name
```

The set of header fields named by the Vary field value is known as the selecting request-header fields.

Servers SHOULD include a Vary header field with any cacheable response that is subject to server-driven negotiation. Doing so allows a cache to properly interpret future requests on that resource and informs the user agent about the presence of negotiation on that resource. A server MAY include a Vary header field with a non-cacheable response that is subject to server-driven negotiation, since this might provide the user agent with useful information about the dimensions over which the response varies at the time of the response.

A Vary field value of "*" signals that unspecified parameters not limited to the request-header fields (e.g., the network address of the client), play a role in the selection of the response representation; therefore, a cache cannot determine whether this response is appropriate. The "*" value MUST NOT be generated by a proxy server.

The field-names given are not limited to the set of standard request-header fields defined by this specification. Field names are case-insensitive.

[3.6](#). Warning

The "Warning" general-header field is used to carry additional information about the status or transformation of a message that

might not be reflected in the message. This information is typically used to warn about possible incorrectness introduced by caching operations or transformations applied to the payload of the message.

Warnings can be used for other purposes, both cache-related and otherwise. The use of a warning, rather than an error status code, distinguishes these responses from true failures.

Warning header fields can in general be applied to any message, however some warn-codes are specific to caches and can only be applied to response messages.

Warning = "Warning" ":" OWS Warning-v

Warning-v = 1#warning-value

warning-value = warn-code SP warn-agent SP warn-text
[SP warn-date]

warn-code = 3DIGIT

warn-agent = (uri-host [":" port]) / pseudonym
; the name or pseudonym of the server adding
; the Warning header field, for use in debugging

warn-text = quoted-string

warn-date = DQUOTE HTTP-date DQUOTE

Multiple warnings can be attached to a response (either by the origin server or by a cache), including multiple warnings with the same code number, only differing in warn-text.

When this occurs, the user agent SHOULD inform the user of as many of them as possible, in the order that they appear in the response.

Systems that generate multiple Warning header fields SHOULD order

them with this user agent behavior in mind. New Warning header fields SHOULD be added after any existing Warning header fields.

Warnings are assigned three digit warn-codes. The first digit indicates whether the Warning is required to be deleted from a stored response after validation:

- o 1xx Warnings describe the freshness or validation status of the response, and so MUST be deleted by caches after validation. They can only be generated by a cache when validating a cached entry, and MUST NOT be generated in any other situation.
- o 2xx Warnings describe some aspect of the representation that is not rectified by a validation (for example, a lossy compression of the representation) and MUST NOT be deleted by caches after validation, unless a full response is returned, in which case they MUST be.

If an implementation sends a message with one or more Warning header fields to a receiver whose version is HTTP/1.0 or lower, then the sender MUST include in each warning-value a warn-date that matches the Date header field in the message.

If an implementation receives a message with a warning-value that includes a warn-date, and that warn-date is different from the Date value in the response, then that warning-value MUST be deleted from the message before storing, forwarding, or using it. (preventing the

consequences of naive caching of Warning header fields.) If all of the warning-values are deleted for this reason, the Warning header field MUST be deleted as well.

The following warn-codes are defined by this specification, each with a recommended warn-text in English, and a description of its meaning.

110 Response is stale

SHOULD be included whenever the returned response is stale.

111 Revalidation failed

SHOULD be included if a cache returns a stale response because an

attempt to validate the response failed, due to an inability to reach the server.

112 Disconnected operation

SHOULD be included if the cache is intentionally disconnected from the rest of the network for a period of time.

113 Heuristic expiration

SHOULD be included if the cache heuristically chose a freshness lifetime greater than 24 hours and the response's age is greater than 24 hours.

199 Miscellaneous warning

The warning text can include arbitrary information to be presented to a human user, or logged. A system receiving this warning MUST NOT take any automated action, besides presenting the warning to the user.

214 Transformation applied

MUST be added by an intermediate proxy if it applies any transformation to the representation, such as changing the content-coding, media-type, or modifying the representation data, unless this Warning code already appears in the response.

299 Miscellaneous persistent warning

The warning text can include arbitrary information to be presented to a human user, or logged. A system receiving this warning MUST NOT take any automated action.

[4.](#) History Lists

User agents often have history mechanisms, such as "Back" buttons and history lists, that can be used to redisplay a representation retrieved earlier in a session.

The freshness model ([Section 2.3](#)) does not necessarily apply to

history mechanisms. I.e., a history mechanism can display a previous representation even if it has expired.

This does not prohibit the history mechanism from telling the user that a view might be stale, or from honoring cache directives (e.g., Cache-Control: no-store).

[5.](#) IANA Considerations

[5.1.](#) Cache Directive Registry

The registration procedure for HTTP Cache Directives is defined by [Section 3.2.3](#) of this document.

The HTTP Cache Directive Registry shall be created at [<http://www.iana.org/assignments/http-cache-directives>](http://www.iana.org/assignments/http-cache-directives) and be populated with the registrations below:

Cache Directive	Reference
max-age	Section 3.2.1 , Section 3.2.2
max-stale	Section 3.2.1
min-fresh	Section 3.2.1
must-revalidate	Section 3.2.2
no-cache	Section 3.2.1 , Section 3.2.2
no-store	Section 3.2.1 , Section 3.2.2
no-transform	Section 3.2.1 , Section 3.2.2
only-if-cached	Section 3.2.1
private	Section 3.2.2
proxy-revalidate	Section 3.2.2
public	Section 3.2.2
s-maxage	Section 3.2.2
stale-if-error	[RFC5861] , Section 4
stale-while-revalidate	[RFC5861] , Section 3

[5.2.](#) Header Field Registration

The Message Header Field Registry located at <<http://www.iana.org/assignments/message-headers/message-header-index.html>> shall be updated with the permanent registrations below (see [[RFC3864](#)]):

Header Field Name	Protocol	Status	Reference
Age	http	standard	Section 3.1
Cache-Control	http	standard	Section 3.2
Expires	http	standard	Section 3.3
Pragma	http	standard	Section 3.4
Vary	http	standard	Section 3.5
Warning	http	standard	Section 3.6

The change controller is: "IETF (iesg@ietf.org) - Internet Engineering Task Force".

[6.](#) Security Considerations

Caches expose additional potential vulnerabilities, since the contents of the cache represent an attractive target for malicious exploitation. Because cache contents persist after an HTTP request is complete, an attack on the cache can reveal information long after a user believes that the information has been removed from the network. Therefore, cache contents need to be protected as sensitive information.

[7.](#) Acknowledgments

Much of the content and presentation of the caching design is due to suggestions and comments from individuals including: Shel Kaphan, Paul Leach, Koen Holtman, David Morris, and Larry Masinter.

[8.](#) References

[8.1.](#) Normative References

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[8.2.](#) Informative References

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[Appendix A](#). Changes from [RFC 2616](#)

Make the specified age calculation algorithm less conservative.
([Section 2.3.2](#))

Remove requirement to consider Content-Location in successful responses in order to determine the appropriate response to use.
([Section 2.4](#))

Clarify denial of service attack avoidance requirement.
([Section 2.5](#))

Do not mention [RFC 2047](#) encoding and multiple languages in Warning header fields anymore, as these aspects never were implemented.
([Section 3.6](#))

[Appendix B](#). Collected ABNF

Age = "Age:" OWS Age-v
Age-v = delta-seconds

Cache-Control = "Cache-Control:" OWS Cache-Control-v
Cache-Control-v = *("," OWS) cache-directive *(OWS "," [OWS
cache-directive])

Expires = "Expires:" OWS Expires-v
Expires-v = HTTP-date

HTTP-date = <HTTP-date, defined in [\[Part1\]](#), Section 6.1>

OWS = <OWS, defined in [\[Part1\]](#), Section 1.2.2>

Pragma = "Pragma:" OWS Pragma-v
Pragma-v = *("," OWS) pragma-directive *(OWS "," [OWS
pragma-directive])

```

Vary = "Vary:" OWS Vary-v
Vary-v = "*" / ( *( "," OWS ) field-name *( OWS "," [ OWS field-name ] ) )

Warning = "Warning:" OWS Warning-v
Warning-v = *( "," OWS ) warning-value *( OWS "," [ OWS warning-value ] )

cache-directive = cache-request-directive / cache-response-directive
cache-extension = token [ "=" ( token / quoted-string ) ]

```

```

cache-request-directive = "no-cache" / "no-store" / ( "max-age="
  delta-seconds ) / ( "max-stale" [ "=" delta-seconds ] ) / (
  "min-fresh=" delta-seconds ) / "no-transform" / "only-if-cached" /
  cache-extension
cache-response-directive = "public" / ( "private" [ "=" DQUOTE *( ","
  OWS ) field-name *( OWS "," [ OWS field-name ] ) DQUOTE ] ) / (
  "no-cache" [ "=" DQUOTE *( "," OWS ) field-name *( OWS "," [ OWS
  field-name ] ) DQUOTE ] ) / "no-store" / "no-transform" /
  "must-revalidate" / "proxy-revalidate" / ( "max-age=" delta-seconds
  ) / ( "s-maxage=" delta-seconds ) / cache-extension

delta-seconds = 1*DIGIT

extension-pragma = token [ "=" ( token / quoted-string ) ]

field-name = <field-name, defined in \[Part1\], Section 3.2>

port = <port, defined in \[Part1\], Section 2.6>
pragma-directive = "no-cache" / extension-pragma
pseudonym = <pseudonym, defined in \[Part1\], Section 9.9>

quoted-string = <quoted-string, defined in \[Part1\], Section 1.2.2>

token = <token, defined in \[Part1\], Section 1.2.2>

uri-host = <uri-host, defined in \[Part1\], Section 2.6>

warn-agent = ( uri-host [ ":" port ] ) / pseudonym
warn-code = 3DIGIT

```

```
warn-date = DQUOTE HTTP-date DQUOTE
warn-text = quoted-string
warning-value = warn-code SP warn-agent SP warn-text [ SP warn-date
]
```

ABNF diagnostics:

```
; Age defined but not used
; Cache-Control defined but not used
; Expires defined but not used
; Pragma defined but not used
; Vary defined but not used
; Warning defined but not used
```

[Appendix C](#). Change Log (to be removed by RFC Editor before publication)

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[C.1](#). Since [RFC 2616](#)

Extracted relevant partitions from [[RFC2616](#)].

[C.2](#). Since [draft-ietf-httpbis-p6-cache-00](#)

Closed issues:

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/9>>: "Trailer"
(<<http://purl.org/NET/http-errata#trailer-hop>>)
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/12>>: "Invalidation
after Update or Delete"
(<<http://purl.org/NET/http-errata#invalidupd>>)
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/35>>: "Normative and
Informative references"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/48>>: "Date reference
typo"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/49>>: "Connection

header text"

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/65>>: "Informative references"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/66>>: "ISO-8859-1 Reference"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/86>>: "Normative up-to-date references"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/87>>: "typo in 13.2.2"

Other changes:

- o Use names of [RFC4234](#) core rules DQUOTE and HTAB (work in progress on <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/36>>)

C.3. Since [draft-ietf-httpbis-p6-cache-01](#)

Closed issues:

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/82>>: "rel_path not used"

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Other changes:

- o Get rid of duplicate BNF rule names ("host" -> "uri-host") (work in progress on <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/36>>)
- o Add explicit references to BNF syntax and rules imported from other parts of the specification.

C.4. Since [draft-ietf-httpbis-p6-cache-02](#)

Ongoing work on IANA Message Header Field Registration (<<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/40>>):

- o Reference [RFC 3984](#), and update header field registrations for header fields defined in this document.

C.5. Since [draft-ietf-httpbis-p6-cache-03](#)

Closed issues:

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/106>>: "Vary header classification"

C.6. Since [draft-ietf-httpbis-p6-cache-04](#)

Ongoing work on ABNF conversion

(<<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/36>>):

- o Use "/" instead of "|" for alternatives.
- o Introduce new ABNF rules for "bad" whitespace ("BWS"), optional whitespace ("OWS") and required whitespace ("RWS").
- o Rewrite ABNFs to spell out whitespace rules, factor out header field value format definitions.

C.7. Since [draft-ietf-httpbis-p6-cache-05](#)

This is a total rewrite of this part of the specification.

Affected issues:

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/54>>: "Definition of 1xx Warn-Codes"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/60>>: "Placement of 13.5.1 and 13.5.2"

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/138>>: "The role of Warning and Semantic Transparency in Caching"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/139>>: "Methods and Caching"

In addition: Final work on ABNF conversion

(<<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/36>>):

- o Add appendix containing collected and expanded ABNF, reorganize ABNF introduction.

C.8. Since [draft-ietf-httpbis-p6-cache-06](#)

Closed issues:

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/161>>: "base for numeric protocol elements"

Affected issues:

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/37>>: "WVary and non-existent headers"

C.9. Since [draft-ietf-httpbis-p6-cache-07](#)

Closed issues:

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/54>>: "Definition of 1xx Warn-Codes"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/167>>: "Content-Location on 304 responses"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/169>>: "private and no-cache CC directives with headers"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/187>>: "[RFC2047](#) and warn-text"

C.10. Since [draft-ietf-httpbis-p6-cache-08](#)

Closed issues:

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/147>>: "serving negotiated responses from cache: header-specific canonicalization"

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/197>>: "Effect of CC

directives on history lists"

Affected issues:

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/199>>: Status codes and caching

Partly resolved issues:

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/60>>: "Placement of 13.5.1 and 13.5.2"

C.11. Since [draft-ietf-httpbis-p6-cache-09](#)

Closed issues:

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/29>>: "Age calculation"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/168>>: "Clarify differences between / requirements for request and response CC directives"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/174>>: "Caching authenticated responses"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/208>>: "IANA registry for cache-control directives"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/211>>: "Heuristic caching of URLs with query components"

Partly resolved issues:

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/196>>: "Term for the requested resource's URI"

C.12. Since [draft-ietf-httpbis-p6-cache-10](#)

Closed issues:

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/109>>: "Clarify entity / representation / variant terminology"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/220>>: "consider removing the 'changes from 2068' sections"

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/223>>: "Allowing heuristic caching for new status codes"
- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/223>>: "Allowing heuristic caching for new status codes"
- o Clean up TODOs and prose in "Combining Responses."

C.13. Since [draft-ietf-httpbis-p6-cache-11](#)

Closed issues:

- o <<http://tools.ietf.org/wg/httpbis/trac/ticket/204>>: "Text about clock requirement for caches belongs in p6"

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