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Plasma electron acceleration driven by long-wave-infrared laser

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We report self-injecting LWFA driven by CPA-CO₂ laser pulses of wavelength ~10 micrometers at Brookhaven's Accelerator Test Facility [1]. Long-wave IR pulses open opportunities to drive large wakes in low-density plasma more efficiently than near-IR pulses, potentially enabling higher-quality accelerated bunches. In experiments, 0.5-TW, 4-ps laser pulses generated no electrons, but drove self-modulated wakes characterized by optical scattering in plasma of density down to $4 \times 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$, when peak power exceeded the critical power for relativistic self-focusing. 2-ps pulses with power up to 5-TW captured and accelerated electrons to relativistic energy in plasma of density as low as $3 \times 10^{16} \text{ cm}^{-3}$. The shortest, most powerful pulses generated up to 0.4 nC total charge, including a collimated quasi-monoenergetic peak at ~10-MeV, along with a low-energy background. This marked the onset of a transition from self-modulated to the bubble regime. 3D Particle-in-cell simulations accurately predicted the thresholds for wake excitation and for self-injection, and other key details. The results portend future accelerators in which yet shorter, more powerful CO₂ pulses drive plasma bubbles of ~300-micron radius, that can preserve the low emittance and energy spread of electron bunches injected externally from a synchronized low-energy linac.

[1] R. Zgadzaj et al., Nat. Commun. 15, 4307 (2024).

Working group

WG1 : Laser-driven plasma wakefield acceleration

Primary author: DOWNER, Mike (The University of Texas at Austin)

Co-authors: Dr ZGADZAJ, Rafal (The University of Texas at Austin); Dr WELCH, James (The University of Texas at Austin); Mr CAO, Yuxuan (The University of Texas at Austin); Dr AMORIM, L. D. (Stony Brook University); Mr GAIKWAD, A. (Stony Brook University); Mr IAPOZUTTO, P. (Stony Brook University); Dr KUMAR, Prabhat (Stony Brook University); Prof. LITVINENKO, V. N. (Stony Brook University); Dr PETRUSHINA, I. (Stony Brook University); Prof. SAMULYAK, R. (Stony Brook University); Prof. VAFAEI-NAJAFABADI, N. (Stony Brook University); Prof. JOSHI, C. (UCLA); Dr ZHANG, C. (UCLA); Dr BABZIEN, M (Brookhaven National Laboratory); Dr FEDURIN, M. (Brookhaven National Laboratory); Dr KUPFER, R. (Brookhaven National Laboratory); Dr KUSCHE, K. (Brookhaven National Laboratory); Dr PALMER, M. (Brookhaven National Laboratory); Dr POGORELSKY, I. V. (Brookhaven National Laboratory); Dr POLYANSKIY, M. N. (Brookhaven National Laboratory); Dr SWINSON, C. (Brookhaven National Laboratory)

Presenter: DOWNER, Mike (The University of Texas at Austin)

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