Divergence of laser-generated hot electrons generated in a cone geometry

R.B. Stephens¹, K.U. Akli¹, T. Bartal², F.N. Beg², S. Chawla², C.D. Chen⁴, L. Divol⁴, R. Fedosejevs⁵, R.R. Freeman¹, H. Friesen⁵, E. Giraldez¹, D.S. Hey¹, D.P. Higginson³, C. Jarrot², G.E. Kemp⁴, M.H. Key¹, A. Krygier¹, D. Larson¹, S. Le Pape¹, A. Link¹, T.Y. Ma², A.J. MacKinnon⁹, H.S. MacLean⁵, A.G. MacPhee⁵, C. Murphy², V. Ovchinnikov³, P.K. Patel², Y. Ping³, H. Sawada², D. Schumacher³, Y. Tsui³, M.S. Wei², L.D. Van Woerkom³, B. Westover², S.C. Wilks⁴, T. Yabuuchi²

¹General Atomics, San Diego, California 92186, USA
²Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, University of California San Diego, La Jolla, California 92093, USA
³The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210, USA
⁴Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Livermore, California 94550, USA
⁵Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, University of Alberta, Alberta T6G 2R3, Canada

Email: rich.stephens@gat.com

Abstract. Short-pulse, ultra-intense lasers generate hot electrons at the cone tip in a Fast Ignition target. Core heating and cone-wire experiments find that about 20% of the incident laser energy is coupled into a target, but do not characterize electron propagation direction, a critical parameter for ignition. Previous studies using flat foils suggest they propagate forward, diverging by ~40°. Buried cone targets—conical cavities in multilayer metal foils—were developed to allow divergence measurements in an FI relevant geometry. Preliminary results show increased electron divergence in a 30 µm diameter cone tip which disappears for 90 µm diameter tips. Implications of the experiment are discussed.

1. Introduction
A defining feature of the fast ignition concept for inertial fusion energy is ignition of the fuel, during the short interval of maximum density, by energy injected using a separate short-pulse laser. [1] A reentrant cone was added to the originally proposed configuration to reduce the required energy transport distance. [2] The tip of that cone must be narrow to avoid interfering with the fuel compression. So the electrons must be launched from a confined volume. Forward-going electrons generated in this way have been extracted from a cone tip with attached Cu wire. [3] Laser to electron energy coupling has been shown to be ~15% for the largest diameter wire (40 µm). This is very similar to ~20% determined from integrated core-heating experiments. [4, 5] But in both cases, the spread of the electrons as they leave the cone tip, critical for the heating of a small ignition volume, could not be determined; the former because the electrons are artificially confined to the cone-wire assembly by electrostatic fields at its outside surfaces, and the latter because of lack of a spatially resolving electron diagnostic.

Divergence of laser generated electrons has been characterized using a flat interface, aluminum as the plasma, and the K-edge fluorescence from a buried Cu layer to determine their number and spread (Fig. 1a). [6] The typical electron divergence angle is 40°, apparently increasing with laser intensity. [7] In principle, this data should also apply to electrons generated inside a cone; a typical fwhm laser spot is ~10 µm diameter and, at the Titan laser where our experiments have been performed, anecdotal evidence suggests a pointing accuracy of ~5 µm; these dimensions are small enough to routinely land the laser energy on the 30 µm diameter flat cone tip. Recent measurements showing a reduction of
~5X in coupling from cone tip to wire as the cone wall thickness increases, [8] as well as PSC PIC modeling showing strong perturbations caused by cone wall plasma from only nominal prepulse energy, [9] strongly suggested that electron divergence from cones might be very different than from flats.

In this paper we test that thesis with new buried cone targets that allow electron propagation characterization while approximating fast ignition conditions—a plasma-free conical space embedded in the blow-off from a compressed shell.

![Targets used for measurement of electron divergence.](image)

**Figure 1**: Targets used for measurement of electron divergence. a) Flat Al foil containing a buried Cu layer, b) Conical cavity in an Al foil. The incident laser beam and resulting electron flux are overlain in yellow and red, respectively. The far side of the Al is first coated with a 25 µm thick Cu layer, and then a C block added. c) Top and side view of a buried cone target.

2. **Experiment**

The targets were 200 µm thick Al foils plated on one side with 25 µm thick Cu to which 1 mm thick C was glue, and a cone-shaped cavity cut into the other side (Fig. 1b). The cavity walls had a 15° half-angle opening and tip diameters of 30 µm (standard for cone experiments) and 90 µm. The cavities were cut either 100 µm or 190 µm deep so that their tips were 100 µm or 10 µm from the Cu layer. They were shot at the Titan laser facility at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) using ~0.7 ps, ~150 J pulses; the f/3 beam was focused to the flat tip of the cone. A water-filter-protected fast diode monitored the prepulse and an equivalent plane setup monitored the focus on every shot. [10]

3. **Results**

The Cu K fluorescence was measured using an HOPG spectrometer, [11] for total emission, a spherically bent Bragg mirror imaging 8.03 keV radiation on an x-ray ccd camera [12] with a spatial resolution ~10 µm. Only the Bragg imager data has been analyzed to date. The fluorescence images show a spot diameter very similar to those from flat foils for the cones with 90 µm diameter tips, and with larger divergence for those with 30 µm diameter [Fig. 2]. Analysis of the fluorescence partition between peak and diffuse background, between shallow and deeply buried fluor layers is underway.
4. Discussion

One can see from the data in Fig. 2 that the cone walls, for the standard 30 µm diameter cone tip, clearly increased the electron dispersion; the data from ~100 µm deep fluor is substantially outside the scatter of data from the flat foils. More surprisingly, they did not change the spot diameter for a shallowly buried fluor layer. Aside from one large diameter outlier caused by a bad laser focus (as determined by the equivalent plane imager), they are virtually identical to each other and to the earlier flat foil results, and all ~3X larger than the 30 µm cone tip diameter only 5 µm from the fluor layer. The ~100 µm fwhm spots had been previously justified as the result of combined temperature and density gradients generating quasi-static fields \[13\] allowing electrons to flow out along the surface. \[14, 15\] That image is hard to justify when the surface is only 30 µm diameter. The flat foil data was explained in Ref. 5 with a model (the open squares in Fig. 2) in which the electrons dispersed widely enough to cause a large spot in the shallow buried fluor layer are of such low energy that they do not reach a deeper fluor. Alternatively plasma build-up inside the cone could cause electrons to be generated some considerable distance up the cone away from the tip; the PSC PIC simulation in Ref. 9 shows that even for a nominal 7.5 mJ prepulse, electron may be generated as much as 50 µm up the cone away from its tip. Analysis of the relative strengths of these spots combined with detailed modeling will be necessary to evaluate these alternatives.

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