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Monte Carlo simulation and Boltzmann equation analysis of non-conservative positron transport in H_2

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ABSTRACT

This work reports on a new series of calculations of positron transport properties in molecular hydrogen under the influence of spatially homogeneous electric field. Calculations are performed using a Monte Carlo simulation technique and multi term theory for solving the Boltzmann equation. Values and general trends of the mean energy, drift velocity and diffusion coefficients as a function of the reduced electric field E/n_0 are reported here. Emphasis is placed on the explicit and implicit effects of positronium (Ps) formation on the drift velocity and diffusion coefficients. Two important phenomena arise; first, for certain regions of E/n_0 the bulk and flux components of the drift velocity and longitudinal diffusion coefficient are markedly different, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Second, and contrary to previous experience in electron swarm physics, there is negative differential conductivity (NDC) effect in the bulk drift velocity component with no indication of any NDC for the flux component. In order to understand this atypical manifestation of the drift and diffusion of positrons in H_2 under the influence of electric field, the spatially dependent positron transport properties such as number of positrons, average energy and velocity and spatially resolved rate for Ps formation are calculated using a Monte Carlo simulation technique. The spatial variation of the positron average energy and extreme skewing of the spatial profile of positron swarm are shown to play a central role in understanding the phenomena.

1. Introduction

Positron interactions with matter play important role in many physical processes of interest. Some examples include the origin of astrophysical sources of annihilation radiation [1], the use of positrons in medicine (e.g., positron emission tomography (PET)) [2], the characterization of materials [3], production and detection of cold antihydrogen (the first step in the creation and study of stable, neutral antimatter) [4], antimatter plasmas [5], production of molecular positronium [6] and many others.

From the fundamental point of view positrons are interesting since the details of antimatter–matter interactions are still not completely understood. Among many important differences between electron and positron interactions with matter the following are particularly important [7]. First, the absence of the resonances for positrons leaves a very small non-resonant vibrational excitation [8,9]. Second, the absence of the exchange interactions leads to a smaller number of electronic states that can be excited by positron impact. Finally, the Ps formation channel, a non-conservative process unique to positrons, often has a significant cross section [10,11].

One of the main goals of positron physics today is determination of accurate cross sections for positron scattering on many different targets, both experimentally and theoretically. Recently, much effort has been invested in material studies using positron beams [12]. Although it is not in the primary focus of the scientific community, there is an increasing need for positron transport studies. The first reason is fundamental: new accurate cross sections open a possibility to apply well developed electron transport theory to positrons and to learn more about positron kinetics. A huge cross section for Ps formation, a non-conservative process unique to positrons, strongly affects positron transport inducing new interesting kinetic phenomena [13–16]. In addition to fundamental issues, the knowledge of positron transport is essential for modeling of positron traps [17] and for biomedical applications [2].

In this paper we present transport properties for positrons in H_2 under the influence of electric field. The emphasis is placed upon the effects of non-conservative nature of Ps formation on the drift and diffusion. In our previous paper [16] the applicability of the well established conditions for NDC for electron swarms was tested and new criteria for positrons were identified. This work

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can be seen as an extension of [16] for positron swarm in H_2. In order to get better insight into the nature of NDC phenomenon in the bulk drift velocity and also to understand the existence of a huge difference between the flux and bulk components of drift velocity and longitudinal diffusion coefficient, the spatially resolved properties of the swarm have been sampled. The well tested Monte Carlo simulation code [13,14] is used together with the multi term theory for solving the Boltzmann equation [18]. The agreement between results obtained with these two essentially different techniques is excellent but for the reason of clarity, both sets of results are not shown in all figures.

2. Results and discussion

In calculations of transport coefficients it is important to have a complete set of cross sections in order to ensure energy, momentum and particle balance in the swarm. In Fig. 1 the compilation of the best experimental [8,9,19] and theoretical [20–22] cross sections for positrons in hydrogen available from the literature is given. The energy dependence of all cross sections is reflected in the E/n_0 profiles of various transport properties shown below.

2.1. Drift velocity, NDC and diffusion coefficients

In Fig. 2 the drift velocity of positron swarm in H_2 is shown as a function of reduced electric field, E/n_0. We observe a huge difference between the flux and bulk drift velocity components. The flux drift velocity is the average velocity of all particles in the swarm, while the bulk drift velocity represents the velocity of the center of the mass of the swarm and quantitative differences between the two is a result of the explicit action of non-conservative collisions. More interesting is the qualitative difference: while the flux drift velocity is an increasing function of E/n_0 in the whole range of electric fields considered, the bulk drift velocity shows very pronounced negative differential conductivity (NDC). NDC is a kinetic phenomenon which represents the decrease of the drift speed with increasing driving field and it has been systematically investigated and explained for electron swarms during the last three decades [23–26]. In brief, NDC for electrons arise from a certain combination of inelastic–elastic cross sections and is present both in flux and bulk drift velocity [26]. For positrons, there is however no sign of NDC in the flux drift velocity component and the huge difference between flux and bulk components has never been observed for electrons. In our previous study of positron transport in argon [13,14] it is shown that the NDC effect for positrons originates from the non-conservative nature of

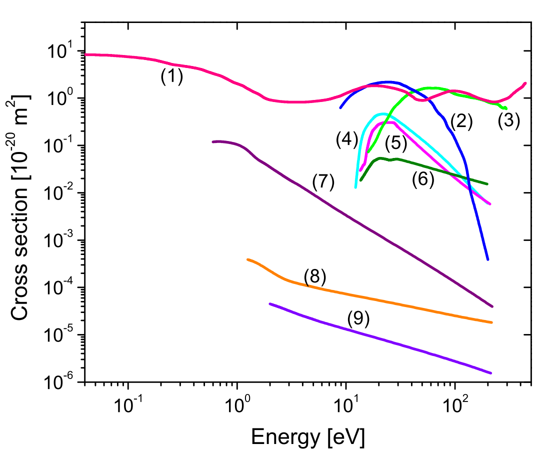

Fig. 1. Complete cross section set for positrons in H_2: (1) elastic = total [22] – all the others, (2) Ps formation [19], (3) ionization [19], electronic excitations: (4) B1Σ [9], (5) X-C [20], (6) X-E [20]; vibrational excitations: (7) v1 [8], (8) 02 [21] and (9) 03 [21].

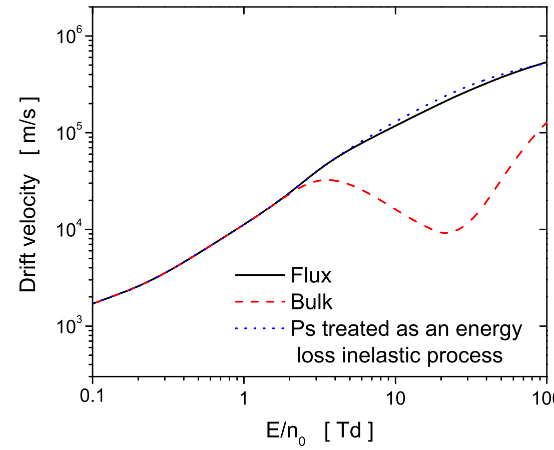

Fig. 2. Variation of the flux and bulk components of the drift velocity with E/n_0 when Ps formation is treated regularly and as an inelastic conservative process.

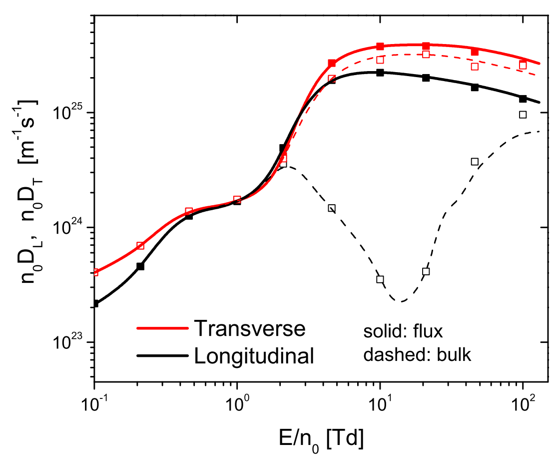

Fig. 3. Variation of the diffusion coefficients with E/n_0 for positrons in H_2.

Ps formation. When Ps formation was treated as a conservative inelastic process, the difference between two components was removed along with the NDC effect. We apply the same procedure for positrons in H_2 and results are shown in Fig. 2 (blue curve).[1] It is obvious that the significant differences between the flux and bulk components has disappeared. A small difference between the black and blue curves indicates the explicit influence of Ps formation on the velocity distribution function of positrons.

In Fig. 3 we display the flux and bulk components of the longitudinal and transverse diffusion coefficients as a function of E/n_0. The differences between the longitudinal and transverse diffusion coefficients is evidence of the anisotropic nature of diffusion which follows from the interplay of energy dependent collision frequency and spatial variation of average energy along the swarm. On the other hand, deviations of almost two orders of magnitude between the flux and bulk longitudinal diffusion components is another dramatic manifestation of the explicit non-conservative effects of the Ps formation processes.

2.2. The gradient energy vector

What is happening inside the swarm under the action of non-conservative collisions? For electron swarms, the spatial variation

[1] For interpretation of the references to color in Fig. 2, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.