

## Progress towards Steady State on NSTX

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## Progress towards steady state on NSTX

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## Abstract

In order to reduce recirculating power fraction to acceptable levels, the spherical torus concept relies on the simultaneous achievement of high toroidal  $\beta$  and high bootstrap fraction in steady state. In the last year, as a result of plasma control system improvements, the achievable plasma elongation on NSTX has been raised from  $\kappa \sim 2.1$  to  $\kappa \sim 2.6$  - approximately a 25% increase. This increase in elongation has led to a substantial increase in the toroidal  $\beta$  for long pulse discharges. The increase in  $\beta$  is associated with an increase in plasma current at nearly fixed poloidal  $\beta$ , which enables higher  $\beta_t$  with nearly constant bootstrap fraction. As a result, for the first time in a spherical torus, a discharge with a plasma current of 1MA has been sustained for 1 second. Data is presented from NSTX correlating the increase in performance with increased plasma shaping capability. In addition to improved shaping, H-modes induced during the current ramp phase of the plasma discharge have been used to reduce flux consumption and to delay the onset of MHD instabilities. A modeled integrated scenario, which has 100% non-inductive current drive with very high toroidal  $\beta$ , will also be discussed. The NSTX poloidal field coils are currently being modified to produce the plasma shape which is re-

quired for this scenario, which requires high triangularity ( $\delta \sim 0.8$ ) at elevated elongation ( $\kappa \sim 2.5$ ). The other main requirement for steady state on NSTX is the ability to drive a fraction of the total plasma current with RF waves. The results of High Harmonic Fast Wave heating and current drive studies as well as electron Bernstein Wave emission studies will be presented.

## 1. Introduction

The Spherical Torus [1] concept is an extension of the same thought process that leads to the steady-state advanced tokamak concept. Using the bootstrap current and external non-inductive current drive to sustain a tokamak in steady state is an immediate precursor to the concept of changing the geometry of the torus to optimize bootstrap current and minimize the need for an ohmic transformer. The Spherical Torus takes the extreme step of eliminating the transformer and maximizing toroidal field utilization by reducing the physical size of the toroidal field coil to engineering limits. This extreme geometry leads to challenges. In particular, as the aspect ratio is reduced, the ability to shield the center column of the toroidal coil is reduced. In the low aspect ratio limit, it becomes impossible to use known superconducting materials to build the toroidal field coil for a reactor due to the nuclear heating. This lack of shielding then requires low aspect ratio devices to employ conventional conductors, which in turn forces the device to operate at very high toroidal  $\beta$  so as to minimize the recirculating power fraction. Fortunately nature cooperates since the achievable  $\beta$  is increased at low aspect ratio. In addition to the higher  $\beta$  limits, the achievable elongation is also higher at low aspect ratio. This is important since the bootstrap

fraction at fixed  $\beta_N$  and  $q^*$  scales like  $\sim \sqrt{1 + \kappa^2}$  [where  $\beta_N \equiv \beta_t * aB_t/I_p$ , with  $\beta_t \equiv 2\mu_0 P/B_t^2$ , and  $q^* \equiv \pi a^2 \sqrt{1 + \kappa^2} B_t / (\mu_0 R I_p)$ ].

The National Spherical Torus Experiment [2] is a low aspect ratio torus ( $A = R/a \sim 1.3$ , where  $A$  is the aspect ratio,  $R$  is the major radius of the torus and  $a$  is the minor radius of the torus). NSTX has previously achieved  $\beta_t \sim 35\%$  and non-inductive current fractions of  $\sim 60\%$  [3], albeit not simultaneously. Recently, the operating regime of the device has been expanded to help explore the high  $\kappa$  operating space that has been identified as most attractive for the ST concept. The consequence of this expanded operating regime was a substantial improvement in the achievable  $\beta_t$  in long pulse discharges, as expected by MHD stability theory and neoclassical theory. The details of the observed improvement will be discussed in Section 2. In addition to the improved shaping capability, H-modes were triggered during the current ramp. The improvements to the flux consumption due to this early transition are described in Section 3. Integrated scenario modeling indicates that scenarios exist which have 100% non-inductive current drive at  $\beta_t \sim 40\%$ . Results from these calculations as well as machine modifications in support of developing this scenario will be presented in Section 4. NSTX also is investigating external non-inductive current drive options. In partic-

ular, NSTX has successfully driven current using the High Harmonic Fast Waves (HHFW). Results from both heating and current drive experiments will be discussed in Section 5. Future plans include using Electron Bernstein Waves (EBW) for external current drive and electron heating. Results from EBW emission experiments will also be discussed in Section 5.

## 2. Widened operating regime

The improvement in operating regime for NSTX was achieved primarily by improving plasma control capabilities. In particular, the digital control system on NSTX was improved to reduce the control latency. The control latency (defined as the propagation time of a perturbation through the control system) is an important parameter for determining the maximum gain in a control loop. The average latency in the NSTX control system was reduced by a factor of 4 to  $\sim 0.75ms$ , primarily through hardware upgrades. This led to an increase in the sustainable plasma elongation from a previous high of  $\kappa \sim 2.1$  to a new high  $\kappa \sim 2.6$ . Shown in Figure 1 is a plot of the achieved plasma elongation as determined by the EFIT equilibrium reconstruction code [4, 5] versus the normalized internal inductance  $l_i$ , also determined by EFIT. As can be seen in Figure 1 the increase in  $\kappa$  is  $\sim 20\%$  at fixed  $l_i$ . In

addition to the improvements in the control latency, an analog measurement of the vertical voltage difference was added to improve the fidelity of the derivative term in the vertical position control loop.

The improvement in  $\kappa$  has led to a corresponding increase in the  $\beta_t$  attainable for long pulse discharges. Time histories of the plasma current and  $\beta_t$  for a best case example discharge is shown in Figure 2. As can be seen from the Figure, the plasma current is increased by 25%, the toroidal field current is decreased by  $\sim 10\%$  and the pulse length is nominally increased. Accordingly the peak  $\beta_t$  is increased by  $\sim 50\%$ . Additionally, the plasma stored energy does not drop until the end of the discharge which further increases the pulse averaged  $\beta_t$ . The change in plasma cross-section for the plasma discharges shown in Figure 2 are shown in Figure 3. The green boundary in the Figure is the lower  $\kappa$ , lower  $\beta_t$  discharge.

To help quantify the connection between the increase in plasma elongation and the observed improvement in performance, we plot the pulse averaged  $\beta_t$  versus the pulse length over which the averaging was performed for the entire NSTX database 4. In the first frame of the plot the data is color sorted by year, whereas in the second frame, the color sorting is by elongation. As is apparent in the plot, the improvement in pulse average  $\beta_t$  is clearly

correlated with the increase in plasma elongation that came along with the control system improvements for 2004.

In order to understand the role of bootstrap current in increasing the pulse averaged  $\beta$ , a new parameter is defined which is particularly relevant to the spherical torus concept. The parameter which will be referred to as the sustained  $\beta$  fraction is defined as  $\beta_{sus} \equiv 0.5\sqrt{\varepsilon}\beta_p \times \beta_t \sim f_{bs} \times \beta_t$ , where  $\varepsilon \equiv a/R$ ,  $\beta_p \equiv 2\mu_0\langle P \rangle / \bar{B}_p^2$  (where  $\bar{B}_p$  is the poloidal magnetic field averaged over the plasma minor circumference), and  $f_{bs} \equiv I_{bs}/I_p$  is the bootstrap current fraction. There is an intrinsic trade off between plasma current and bootstrap fraction and hence, since the ideal  $\beta$  limit is proportional to plasma current, there is also a trade off between  $\beta_t$  and the bootstrap fraction. This  $\beta_{sus}$  parameter balances this trade-off and therefore more directly defines high performance in plasmas that depend on both bootstrap fraction and high  $\beta_t$  for viability as fusion devices. The advanced tokamak concept, which also relies upon the bootstrap current for sustainment and high  $\beta_t$ , could also make use of this parameter in defining progress.

Figure 5 shows the pulse averaged value of the sustained  $\beta$  for the NSTX database plotted versus the quantity  $1 + \kappa^2$  (one can simply show that  $f_{bs} \times \beta_t \sim \beta_N^2(1 + \kappa^2)$  assuming a plasma of elliptical cross-section). If the upper

bound of the sustained  $\beta$  parameter is determined by the ideal MHD  $\beta$ -limit, then to the degree that the elliptical approximation is adequate, plasma elongation is the only controlling variable remaining. In principle, it should also be possible to optimize the sustained  $\beta$  by raising the limiting  $\beta_N$  through various other control techniques, but that is not the focus of this paper. It is interesting to note that the data seems to improve more rapidly with increasing elongation than is predicted by the simple model. The cause for this is apparent in Figure 2. There is a partial  $\beta$  collapse in the lower current, lower  $\beta_t$  plasma before the end of the plasma current flattop, whereas the high  $\beta$  phase persists until the end of the higher elongation plasma. A possible explanation for the delayed onset of instability in recent discharges is the lower plasma inductance which was in turn due to the inducement of H-mode during the current ramp of the higher elongation discharge.

### **3. Early H-mode**

The technique of inducing H-mode during the current ramp by use of a small pause or “flat-spot” in the current ramp, which has been used on many different devices (see, e.g., Reference [6]), has recently been applied on NSTX [7]. Shown in Figure 6 is a comparison between two plasma discharges, one

with an induced early H-mode transition and one without. As is apparent in the Figure, the flux consumption is noticeably reduced during the current ramp phase of the discharge with the early H-mode transition. (The flux consumption is proportional to the change in flux in the ohmic heating coil). The reason for the reduced flux consumption is three-fold: The electron temperature profile broadens thereby reducing the plasma resistance, the pressure profile broadens increasing the bootstrap current, and the broader pressure profile actually permits the achievement of higher  $\beta$  due to increased MHD stability with broad pressure profiles.

The broader profiles delay the onset of deleterious MHD, which still is the primary cause of plasma termination. The limiting MHD is believed to be due to the relaxation of the residual inductively driven current into the core of the discharge. Work is ongoing to analyze the MHD stability of these discharges using the recently commissioned Motional Stark Effect polarimetry diagnostic to verify understanding of the behavior of these long pulse discharges.

#### 4. Integrated scenario modeling

Recent modeling efforts using the modeling codes TSC [8] and TRANSP [9] have identified an attractive scenario that is fully non-inductively sustained with  $\beta_t \sim 40\%$  [10]. This scenario incorporated calculations of EBW and beam driven current as well as bootstrap current. The modeled plasma is calculated to be stable to  $n = 1$  ideal MHD modes in the presence of an ideal conducting wall. The scenario identified requires strong plasma shaping with the simultaneous achievement of high elongation ( $\kappa \sim 2.5$ ) and high triangularity ( $\delta \sim 0.8$ ). Equilibrium calculations indicated that this was not possible with the original NSTX poloidal field coil set. As a result, the PF1A coils (indicated in Figure 7) have been modified, in order to produce the plasma identified through modeling. Also shown in Figure 7 is a comparison between a typical double-null, high-elongation shot from 2004 and a calculated equilibrium using the same plasma profiles but the modified PF1A coil set. The modified poloidal field coils will be used to investigate the long pulse behavior of these highly shaped plasma discharges in the coming year. The modeled scenario requires a functional non-inductive current drive mechanism (e.g. those described in the next section) to provide  $\sim 10\%$  of the plasma current.

## 5. HHFW and EBW heating and current drive

High Harmonic Fast Wave (HHFW) heating has been proposed as an attractive means for heating and driving current in an ST. The NSTX HHFW heating system consists of a twelve strap antenna connected to 6 independent RF sources [11]. The total power available from the system is 6MW. Experiments have been performed which demonstrate that significant heating power can be deposited on the electrons and that current can be driven with directed waves. The surface voltage from two plasma discharges, one with co-phasing and one with counter, are shown in Figure 8. Because the heating efficiency is observed to vary substantially between the different phasings, the total power was adjusted so that the electron temperatures match. Four different electron temperature profiles, two from each shot, are overlaid in Figure 9 indicating the quality of the temperature match. The difference in loop voltage is calculated to correspond to a total difference in HHFW driven current of 180kA between the two cases. The plasma current in these discharges is 500kA.

High Harmonic Fast Waves (HHFW) have also been observed to damp on both edge thermal ions and fast particles injected by neutral beam heating. This ion damping behavior is an important feature of High Harmonic

Fast Wave heating that must be more fully understood so as to avoid undesired diversion of current drive power into bulk ion heating, thereby effectively reducing the current drive efficiency. Work is ongoing to develop better understanding of the physics that controls HHFW ion damping, but initial indications are that the fast ion heating is due to direct wave damping [12], whereas the edge bulk heating is due to parametric decay into an ion Bernstein mode and an ion quasi-mode [13].

Theoretical calculations have indicated that Electron Bernstein Waves (EBW) may be an efficient method for heating electrons and driving current in NSTX, particularly at high  $\beta$  [14]. Since NSTX operates well into the overdense regime (where  $\omega_{pe} \gg \omega_{ce}$ , where  $\omega_{pe}$  is the electron plasma frequency and  $\omega_{ce}$  the electron cyclotron frequency) conventional electron cyclotron heating is not viable. However, EBWs can propagate in such plasmas and are strongly absorbed at harmonics of the cyclotron frequency. Detailed numerical modeling has also indicated that these waves can be used to efficiently drive off-axis current, in keeping with the requirement indicated by integrated scenario modeling .

In order for the heating scheme to work, a conversion scheme is needed to couple power from the electromagnetic wave launched by a microwave

antenna to the electrostatic wave that is capable of propagating inside the plasma boundary. A scheme has been proposed which couples the O-mode electromagnetic wave to the Bernstein wave. Recent measurements of EBW emission support the viability of this coupling mechanism [15]. Radiometer measurements of the emitted EBW have confirmed that there is indeed efficient emission of waves in the EBW range of frequencies at the viewing angle where the coupling condition is satisfied.

## 6. Summary

NSTX is developing and incorporating numerous tools to simultaneously achieve high bootstrap fraction and high toroidal  $\beta$ . Improved control capability has already broadened the long pulse operating regime substantially. Induced early H-mode transitions have reduced plasma internal inductance which in turn has delayed the onset of pulse limiting MHD. Progress has been made on both HHFW heating and current drive and EBW emission studies. Integrated scenario modeling has identified a steady state scenario that is stable at  $\beta_t \sim 40\%$ . The NSTX poloidal field coil set has been modified to enable the achievement of this scenario. The advances to date on NSTX represent significant progress towards demonstrating the viability of the ST

concept for magnetic fusion.

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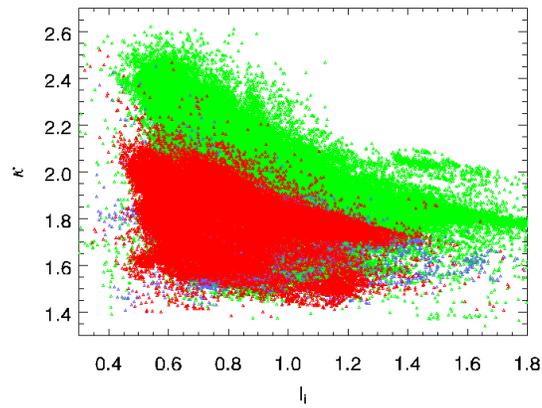


Figure 1: Plot of the vertical stability space of the entire NSTX database, plotting plasma elongation ( $\kappa$ ) vs. normalized internal inductance ( $l_i$ ). Each point represents a single timeslice of an NSTX plasma discharge. Values are calculated using the EFIT ideal MHD equilibrium reconstruction code.

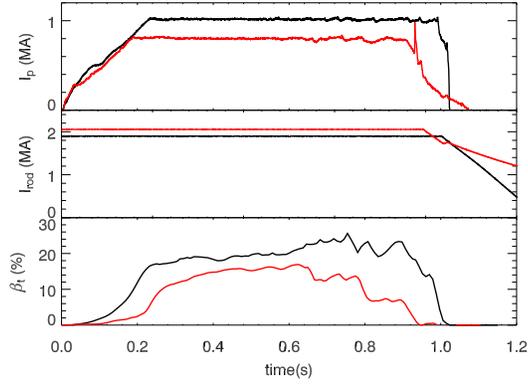


Figure 2: Comparison of the “best” shots from 2004 (after control improvements, black) and from 2002 (before control improvements, red). Shown in each panel are a) plasma current (MA), b) total current in the toroidal field central rod (MA), and c)  $\beta_t$  (from EFIT) all vs. time. Plasma current is increased by 25%, TF current is reduced by 10%, and  $\beta_t$  is correspondingly increased by a factor of two (pulse averaged).

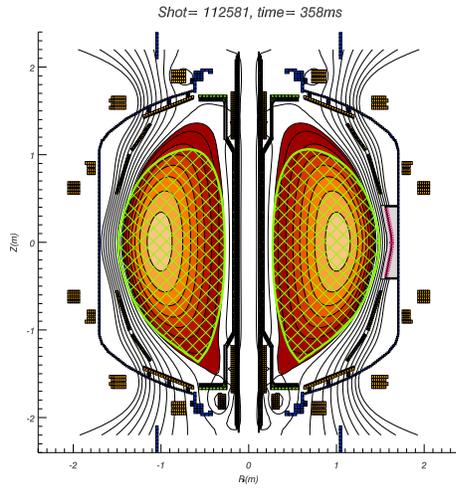


Figure 3: Overlay of the boundaries of the plasma discharges show in Figure 2. Plasma elongation is  $\kappa \sim 2.1$  for shot 109063 (green) and  $\kappa \sim 2.5$  for shot 112581 (red)

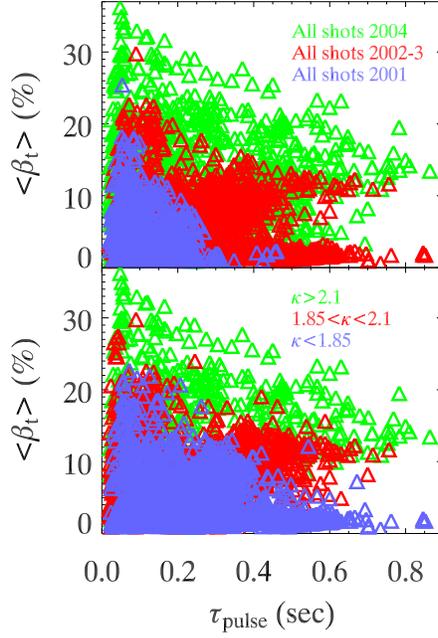


Figure 4: Plot of the pulse average  $\beta_t$  versus the pulse length over which  $\beta_t$  was averaged. The pulse length is determined from the plasma current flattop. Each point represents one plasma in the NSTX database, with the entire database plotted. In the first frame the shots are sorted by year as indicated. In the second frame, the shots are sorted by elongation, indicating the correlation between the increase in achievable plasma elongation and the increase in  $\beta_t$ .

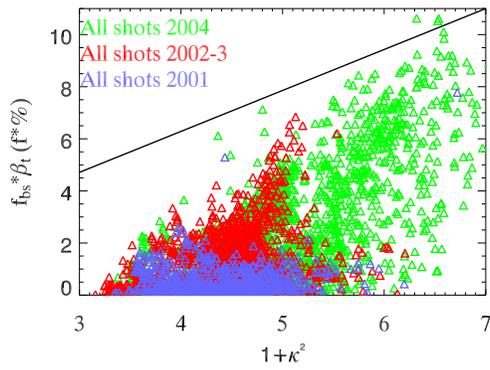


Figure 5: The parameter  $0.5\sqrt{\varepsilon}\beta_p \times \beta_t$  plotted vs.  $1 + \kappa^2$ . Each point represents the pulse average of one NSTX plasma discharge, with every discharge in the NSTX database plotted.

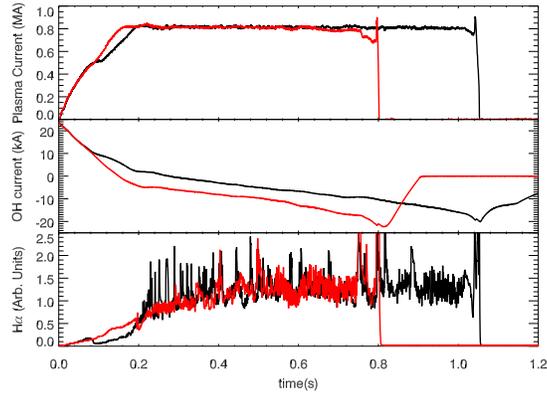


Figure 6: Figure showing the effect of the early H-mode transition on flux consumption a) Plasma current trace showing the programmed “flat-spot” in  $I_p$  which is used to trigger the transition b) the current in the Ohmic heating coil (proportional to the flux consumed) and c) the measured  $D_\alpha$  emission showing the early H-mode (black, Shot 112546) occurs at the time of the “flat spot”, whereas the normal H-mode transition (red, SHot 111964) is at the start of the  $I_p$  flat-top

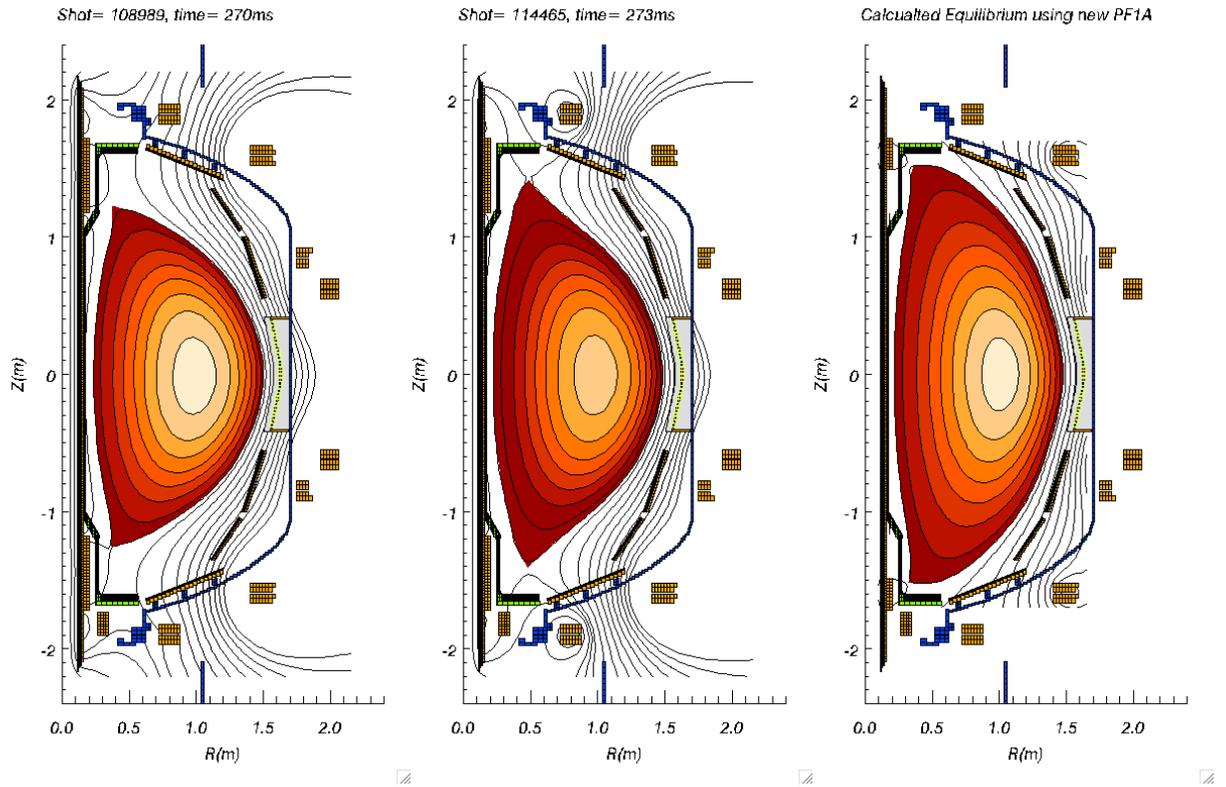


Figure 7: Evolution of the NSTX plasma shape from year to year a) high triangularity double null plasma from 2002 b) moderate triangularity high elongation double null from 2004, and c) a calculated high triangularity high elongation plasma which should be possible in 2005 as a result of the modification the PF1A coil

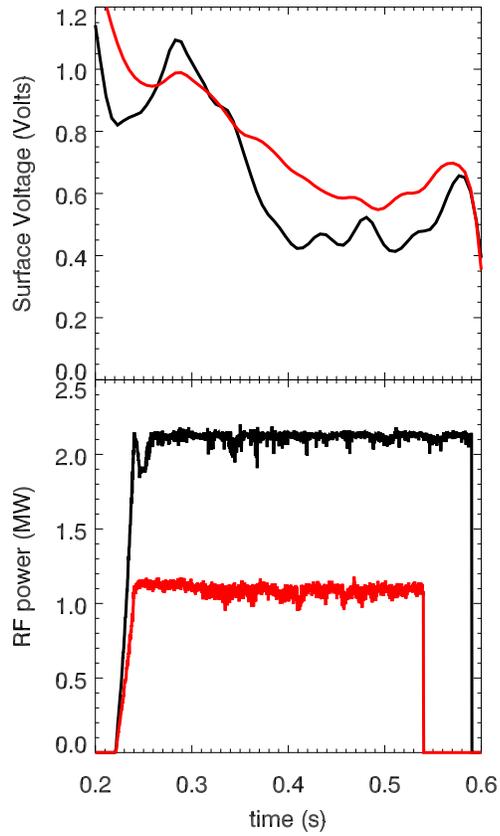


Figure 8: Results from an experiment deigned to demonstrate current drive using HHFW on NSTX. The first frame shows the measured loop voltage for two otherwise identical discharges for which the direction of the launched wavefront was reversed. The co-current phasing is Since the efficiency of heating varies substantially between co- and counter-phasing, the heating power (shown in the second frame) was adjusted until the mesured electron temperatures matched.

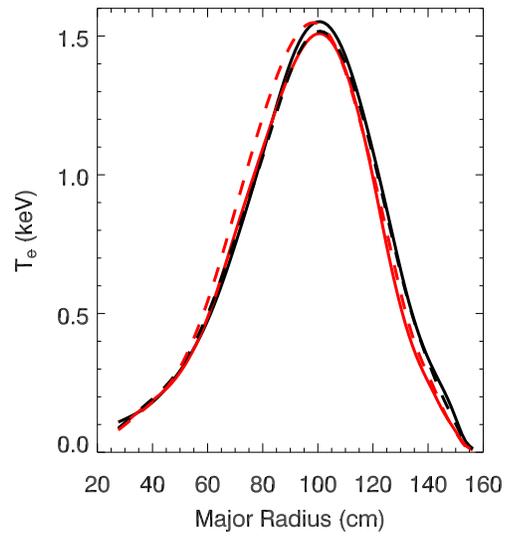


Figure 9: Comparison of the measured electron temperature profiles for 2 times for each discharge shown in Figure 8

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