Current Sustainment in Spherical Tokamaks

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The problem of current sustainment becomes critical for spherical tokamak fusion devices such as the Component Test Facility [1] or Power Plant [2]. In these devices the use of a central solenoid is not possible due to the high neutron loading to the central column so alternative methods of current drive should be investigated. Neutral Beam (NB) current drive, $I_{NBCD}$, bootstrap current, $I_{BS}$, and the so-called “$B_V$ ramp up” effect [3], are considered in this report. The latter effect can appear in an evolving plasma due to the movement of the magnetic surfaces (Shafranov shift) in the vertical magnetic field. If the poloidal beta, $\beta_p$, rises, this movement leads to an increase in total plasma current, $I_{pl}$. The contribution of these methods of current drive to $I_{pl}$ for the present MAST and for MAST with NB heating power upgraded to 7MW are analyzed in this report.

The contribution of $I_{NBCD}$ and $I_{BS}$ to $I_{pl}$ can be calculated in a straightforward way. The $B_V$ effect works when $\beta_p$ rises and ceases when $\beta_p = \text{const}(t)$ (the equilibrium does not change), so to estimate the contribution of the $B_V$ effect, the comparison of these two cases should be made. The electron temperature, $T_e$, should be the same for these cases (the same resistive losses) and the behavior of $\beta_p$ is provided by the plasma density, $<n>$.

We consider a MAST shot which has a significant fraction of $I_{NBCD}$ (up to 100kA) and a $B_V$ ramp up effect due to the density and poloidal beta increasing during the current flat top stage. A separate scenario for current ramp up and the steady state on current flat top is considered for the MAST with upgraded NBI power. The calculations are carried out using the ASTRA transport code [4]. The NBI power and current drive module, NBEAMS [5], is based on the diffuse beam approximation, and is fitted by the TRANSP calculations for MAST shots.

MAST shot analysis

The calculations are carried out for the MAST shot #8527 with electron temperature, $T_e$, and density taken from experiment. The loop voltage which is also taken from the experiment is used as a boundary condition for the poloidal magnetic flux equation. As a result of these calculations we obtain the evolution of $I_{pl}$ for different cases shown in Fig.1: (1) with all methods of current drive, (2) $I_{NBCD} = 0$, (3) $I_{BS} = 0$, (4) without $B_V$ effect ($\beta_p = \text{const}(t)$) and (5) $U_{\text{loop}} = 0$ (no solenoid). The evolution of $I_{pl}$ for cases when one of the mechanisms of the
current drive is switched off is shown in Fig.1. We consider the time period from 0.2 s to 0.3 s. During this time, values of $T_e(0) \sim 1.1\text{keV}$ and $I_{pl} \sim 0.78\text{MA}$ are approximately constant in time. $\langle n \rangle$, rises from 3.2 to $5.2 \times 10^{19} \text{m}^{-3}$ and $\beta_p$ rises from 0.42 to 0.78. We see that the $B_V$ effect is stronger than the $I_{BS}$ effect and can estimate it as $\sim 60\text{kA}$ which is based on the value of $I_{BS} \sim 40\text{kA}$ for this shot.

**MAST with upgraded NBI**

The benefits of adding off-axis NBI to MAST are considered. We investigate 2.5MW on-axis and 5MW off-axis (displaced 0.6m vertically). We consider the current drive from the point of volt-second consumption minimization. The plasma current ramp up rate and density evolution is prescribed and taken as similar to that of MAST shot #8527. A transport model for $T_e$ with a parabolic heat conductivity profile (the same for electrons and ions) is used with a prescribed H-factor which simulates L-mode ($H = 0.5$) and H-mode ($H = 1$) regimes. The heat conduction coefficient rises monotonically from the center to the edge by a factor 2-3. One of the possible scenarios is shown in Fig.2. The central NBI source (2MW absorbed power) is switched on at $t = 0.1\text{s}$ when $I_{pl} = 0.5\text{MA}$. The off-axis NBI source (4MW absorbed power) is switched on at $t = 0.2\text{s}$ when $T_e(0) \sim 1\text{keV}$. After that a strong increase of $E_p$ from 0.5 to 2 occurs which provides the $B_V$ effect and increase of $I_{BS}$ ($I_{BS} \sim 0.14\text{MA}$). On the current flat top we have 82% of non-inductive current, and a low loop voltage $U \sim 0.15\text{V}$. The volt-seconds consumption needed to increase from 0.3MA to 1MA is $\sim 0.4\text{Vs}$.

**The current drive effects contributions**

Evolution of $I_{pl}$ is shown in Fig.3 for the MAST NBI upgrade scenario with the same prescribed loop voltage for all cases ($U_{SOL} = 1.1\text{V}$ at $t > 0.1\text{s}$). These cases are: (1) using the resistive current only with $\beta_p$ held constant in time, (2) adding the $B_V$ effect (rise of $\beta_p$ from 0.67 to 1.1 during time period 0.2 - 0.3s), (3) adding $I_{BS}$, and (4) with all mechanisms of the current drive. The contribution to the current from each mechanism can be seen from the comparison of these cases. During the time period from 0.2s to 0.4s, the $B_V$ effect contributes approximately 200 kA, $I_{BS}$ adds 100kA and $I_{NBCD}$ adds 150kA to $I_{pl}$. An important point is
that $I_{\text{NBCD}}$ and $I_{\text{BS}}$ give the contribution to the $I_{\text{pl}}$ on the resistive time scale, whereas the $B_V$ effect works on equilibrium times (Alfven times) so is more effective for the current ramp up stage [3]. Note that the effect due to $I_{\text{NBCD}}$ (Fig. 3) is barely twice the effect due to $I_{\text{BS}}$, although the value of $I_{\text{NBCD}}$ is 5 times higher than that of $I_{\text{BS}}$. This is because the bootstrap current is driven nearer the edge of the plasma, lowering the internal inductance and hence (via the increased elongation of the lower $l_i$ plasma), the external inductance also. This overall reduction in inductance encourages the increase in total plasma current. In contrast, the NBI driven current is more central and raises the inductance, reducing the overall increase in plasma current. A similar effect will be discussed in the next paragraph.

Central and non central NBI heating

The off-axis current drive is more effective for the economy of the volt-seconds consumption which is confirmed by the calculations presented in Fig.4. The calculations are carried out with the prescribed scenario for $I_{\text{pl}}$ so the loop voltage and volt-second consumption are obtained as a result of calculations. The scenarios for the cases with 2MW/2MW on/off-axis ($Z = 0/Z = 0.6m$) and with 4MW off-axis heating power are shown in Fig.4. For these two scenarios we have the same values of $I_{\text{NBCD}}$ and $I_{\text{BS}}$. For the first scenario the value of $T_e(0)$ is twice that of the second scenario which means low resistive losses. But the external loop voltage needed from the solenoid for this scenario is lower which is shown in Fig.4a. So off-axis heating and current drive are more effective from the point of the minimization of volt-second consumption.

Conclusions

We have obtained the contribution of the $B_V$ effect to $I_{\text{pl}}$. It is visible under MAST conditions at the current flat top stage when $\beta_p$ rises due to the increase in $\langle n \rangle$, and it corresponds to 60kA of additional current in a typical MAST discharge. For MAST with upgraded NBI power, $\beta_p$ rises due to the increases in temperature and density, and the $B_V$ effect can contribute significantly to the current ramp up stage, typically providing 200kA of additional current. Calculations for this MAST NBI upgrade scenario have shown that off-axis NBI current drive during current ramp up is more effective in minimizing volt-second consumption.

This work was supported by the Russian Federal program on support of leading scientific school researches, Grant No. 2024.2003.2 and partly funded by EURATOM / EPSRC
Fig. 2 Plasma parameters evolution in current ramp up scenario for MAST with upgraded NBI

Fig. 3 Contributions of different mechanisms of current drive into the total current

Fig. 4. Evolution of plasma parameters during the combined on and off axis (black) and in the pure off axis (red) heating and current drive scenarios.

References
[1] H R Wilson et al, P4-196 This conference