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Exergy Efficiency of Interplanetary Transfer Vehicles

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Abstract

In order to optimize systems, systems engineers require some sort of measure with which to compare vastly different system components. One such measure is system exergy, or the usable system work. Exergy balance analysis models provide a comparison of different system configurations, allowing systems engineers to compare different systems configuration options. This paper presents the exergy efficiency of several Mars transportation system configurations, using data on the interplanetary trajectory, engine performance, and vehicle mass. The importance of the starting and final parking orbits is addressed in the analysis, as well as intermediate hyperbolic low-enriched uranium (LEU) nuclear thermal propulsion (NTP), high-enriched uranium (HEU) NTP, LEU methane (CH₄) NTP, and liquid oxygen (LOX)/liquid hydrogen (LH₂) chemical propulsion.

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1. Introduction

Several space agencies, including NASA, are planning manned exploration of Mars in the upcoming decades. Many different mission architectures have been proposed for accomplishing this. It is the role of systems engineers to compare and optimize different space transportation systems and components, up to and including full mission architectures. To do this, some measure is needed that applies to all systems being compared, even though those systems may have considerable differences. Exergy efficiency, or how well a given system can use the work available to it, provides a measure to compare different interplanetary transfer systems.

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Nomenclature

a	=	semimajor axis
F	=	thrust
f	=	final index
G	=	universal gravitational constant
	=	$g \ h \ U \ b \ X \ U \ f \ X \ ' \ U \ W \ W \ Y \ ' \ Y \ f \ U \ h \] \ c \ b \ ' \ X \ i \ Y \ ' \ h \ c \ ' \ [\ f \ U \ j \] \ h \ m \ ' \ U \ h \ ' \ 9 \ U \ f \ h \ \backslash \ \text{D} \ g$
h_{prop}	=	enthalpy of the propellant
I_{sp}	=	specific impulse
i	=	initial index
KE	=	kinetic energy
m	=	mass
M_E	=	mass of the Earth
M_{planet}	=	mass of the planet
M_{sun}	=	mass of the sun
	=	initial mass
	=	mass flow rate
$M_{vehicle, initial}$	=	mass of the vehicle on the pad
$M_{vehicle, final}$	=	injected mass
PE	=	potential energy
r	=	distance, position, radius
S	=	positive/negative sign
t	=	time
T_{engine}	=	engine thrust
V	=	velocity
	=	acceleration
V_e	=	exhaust velocity
X	=	system exergy
X_{des}	=	exergy destroyed
X_{exp}	=	exergy expended
exg	=	exergy efficiency
	=	true anomaly
μ	=	gravitational parameter
	=	horizon-relative flight angle

2. Exergy Balance Relationship

Planetary transfer vehicles (i.e., satellites, planetary landers, and human and cargo transports as illustrated in Fig. 1) are integrated by system exergy. This includes their propulsion stages, electrical power systems (e.g., nuclear electric or solar electric), and crew volumes for transporting the crew. During propulsive trajectory changes, the exergy balance equation can be written for a spacecraft system as,

$$\dot{E}_{in} - \dot{E}_{out} = \frac{dE_{system}}{dt} + \dot{E}_{des} + \dot{E}_{exp} \quad (1)$$

The propulsion engine (e.g., chemical, electric, nuclear thermal) characteristics (mass flow, enthalpy, exhaust velocity, and electrical power for electric propulsion) are all included on the left of the equation.

For coast phases of the flight trajectory, the exergy balance equation simplifies to the basic orbital energy relationship for a balanced system. In this case the spacecraft energy (and exergy) is constant and the kinetic and potential energies increase and decrease in opposite directions.



Fig. 1. Mars Transfer Vehicle

(2)

This creates an oscillatory relationship between the vehicle kinetic and potential energies with respect to the dominate body (typically the sun in interplanetary space).ⁱ

Planetary and solar masses have a large effect on spacecraft exergy in interplanetary space. It is important to ensure an appropriate reference is used. A heliocentric reference is generally best for space travel within the solar system. When operating within a planetary V c X m D g ' g d \ Y f Y ' c Z '] b Z ' \ Y b WY ' d G O b X h U h mY [g U] Y h U h] b b U \] Wb Z ' i Y b solar influence can usually be ignored. In this case a planetary centric (geospatial reference system for the Earth) can be used. Equation (3), gives the general relationship for the planetary SOI.ⁱⁱ

(3)

Planetary transfer uses a Hohmann transfer from Earth to Mars and a Hohmann transfer back to Earth. The planetary stay is also important in calculating the possible trajectories. An 11-month stay on the planet is assumed with a total mission length on the order of two to three years. This trajectory contains four main burns: trans-Mars injection (TMI), Mars orbit insertion (MOI), trans-Earth injection (TEI), and Earth orbit insertion (EOI). Four different propulsion systems were analyzed using this basic course: Low enriched uranium (LEU) liquid hydrogen (LH2) nuclear thermal propulsion (NTP), high enriched uranium (HEU) LH2 NTP, LEU CH4 (methane) NTP, and a chemical liquid oxygen (LO2)/LH2 system.

For the LEU CH4 NTP and CHM LOX-LH2 cases, the mass flow rate for the main engine can be calculated from by using Equation (4).

(4)

The mass flow rate of the reaction control system (RCS) thrusters is an important parameter in the maneuvers for the trajectory burns. For the calculations in this section, the mass flow rate for a typical RCS thruster of 7 kg/s with an of 291 s will be used.

Fig. 2 shows the exergy efficiency of the LEU LH2 NTP case during the first 500 seconds of TMI, and shows the decline in the efficiency during the RCS burn. Also visible in this plot is an efficiency drop just after the RCS burn; this corresponds to dropping an empty propellant tank. Exergy that was expended to accelerate the tank is lost when the tank is discarded, so dropping the tank registers as a decrease in efficiency.

Exergy calculations are sensitive to changes in position and velocity with respect to the departure and arrival planets, requiring a complete orbital trajectory to calculate exergy efficiency. A patched-conics trajectory is necessary to show the complete system and planetary environments within each d ' U b Y h g ' G C = ' U b X '] b '] b h Y f d ' U b Y h U f m ' g d U WY ' c i h

3. Orbital Mechanics

: c f ' Y U W \ ' ' Y [' c Z ' h \ Y ' a] g g] c b z ' h \ Y ' X Y d U f h i f Y ' d ' U b Y h U f m ' G C = d g z ' h \ Y ' G i b '] g ' h f Y spacecraft is within the planets SOI.ⁱⁱⁱ C i h g] X Y ' h \ Y ' d ' U b Y h U f m ' G C = d g z ' h \ Y ' G i b '] g ' h f Y

and planets orbital paths during the mission.

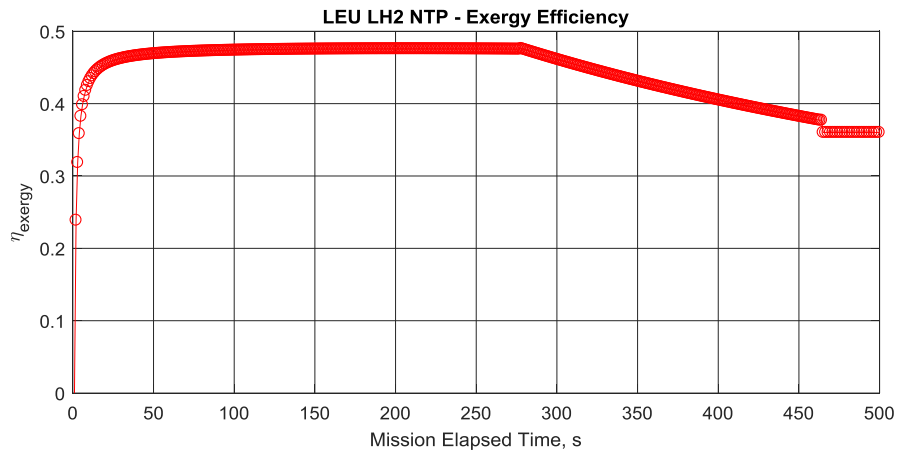


Fig. 2. Exergy efficiency during TMI

distance, speed, and flight angle from the horizon are calculated for the days following the departure burns and leading up to the arrival burns using Equations (5) – (7).

(5)

(6)

(7)

Equation (8). The two points in time used for the interpolation are those just before and after crossing the SOI boundary, the radius of r_{SOI} defined in Equation (3).

(8)

planet-relative velocity and flight angle from the horizon at that moment are similarly interpolated using Equations (9) and (10).

(9)

(10)

Additionally, a new reference frame is created based on the spacecraft $U Z h \theta g \cdot d c g] h] c b \cdot U b X \cdot j Y \cdot c W] h m \cdot k$ using Equations (11) – (13). Planet-centric orbits within the SOI will be plotted in a 2D plane, and this reference frame will track the orientation of the plane relative to the solar ecliptic.

(11)

(12)

(13)

$$\frac{d}{dt} \left(\frac{\partial L}{\partial \dot{x}} \right) = \frac{\partial L}{\partial x}, \quad (21)$$
$$\frac{d}{dt} \left(\frac{1}{\rho} \right) = - \frac{1}{\rho^2} \frac{d\rho}{dt} \quad (22)$$

to meet mission objectives. Once the apoapsis and periapsis are established, the parking orbit periapsis is kept as the periapsis of the hyperbolic transfer orbit. This results in an extremely elliptical parking orbit with a very long period (particularly if it extends to the planetary SOI boundary). Equations (4.61) & (4.66) can be solved iteratively starting with an initial periapsis estimate and stepping in small increments (e.g., 100 mi periapsis altitude increases) until a reasonable apoapsis is found.

The eccentricity of the hyperbol] $W^h f U b g Z Y f^c f V] h \ddot{z}^h \backslash Y^g d U W Y W f U Z h \mathfrak{D} g^h f i Y^U b$ can be calculated using Equations (17), (18), and (23).

$$\dot{S} \approx \frac{1}{\tau} \quad (23)$$

6 m [U d d ` m] b [` h \ Y ` `] g h Y X ` -thrust burn, the shape of the parking orbit around the planet can be approximated using Equations (19) & (21). It is only an approximation because it assumes a point-thrust burn connects the transfer and parking orbit. As long as the chosen propulsion system is sufficiently high-thrust, the actual parking orbits will be quite close to the listed values here, as a sufficiently short burn time (on a timescale of minutes) will be negligible compared to the period of the parking orbit.

The parking orbits are only an approximation based on point-thrust burns. In order to properly calculate the exergy efficiency, plots of \dot{W}_{net} vs. \dot{W}_{ex} are required. To do this, Equations (24) and (25) can be used to track the spacecraft forwards or backwards in time from periapsis to establish its trajectory. Another acceleration vector from the space engine is added, aimed directly opposite its velocity vector $\mathbf{a}_{\text{engine}} = -\frac{\mathbf{v}}{v} \frac{v}{a_{\text{engine}}}$. The resulting acceleration vector is then added to the gravitational acceleration vector $\mathbf{a}_{\text{gravity}} = -\frac{\mu}{r^3} \mathbf{r}$ to get the total acceleration vector $\mathbf{a}_{\text{total}} = \mathbf{a}_{\text{gravity}} + \mathbf{a}_{\text{engine}}$. The resulting trajectory is then used to calculate the exergy efficiency.

[illegible]
$$\frac{d}{dt} \left(\frac{\partial L}{\partial \dot{x}} \right) = \frac{\partial L}{\partial x} \quad (25)$$

At this point, a complete set of equations can be derived for the motion of the particle in the reference frame. Equations (26) and (27) are the same as those derived in [1] for the case of a free particle.

SOL

[illegible]
$$= \frac{1}{\sqrt{\pi}} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} d\alpha \exp(-\alpha^2) \left(\frac{1}{2} + i\alpha \right) \exp(i\alpha x) \quad (27)$$

4. Interplanetary Exergy Efficiency

With the modified mass data and orbital data in hand, the actual exergy calculations can begin. During each burn of the mission, changes in expended exergy are calculated using Equation (28) which is taken from Equation (1), with mass drops for each time step being calculated from the tank drops and consumable use schedules. These step changes are then summed to produce a plot of expended exergy that rises during burns but otherwise stays constant.

$$= \quad (28)$$

In order to calculate destroyed exergy, changes in kinetic and potential energy must be tracked across the entire mission. To determine whether the change in kinetic or potential energy should be positive or negative during a given time step, the ruleset described

below in Table 1 is applied, based on Equations (29) ab X ' fl ' \$ Ł " ' 7 \ U b [Y g '] b ' h \ Y ' g d U WY Wf U Z h Ð g body during that time step are taken into consideration when determining the sign. It should be noted that the values X, Y, and Z in the table are all greater than or equal to one.

$$\dots \quad \times \quad (29)$$

[illegible]

Table 1. Sign convention for changes in kinetic and potential energy

Mass	Velocity	? $\frac{9}{\text{step}}$	Distance	D $\frac{9}{\text{step}}$
				..
				..
		..		
		..		
		..		
	
				..

Change in kinetic and potential energy during a given time step is then calculated using Equations (31) and (32), where S is the sign taken from the previous table, either 1 or -1.

[illegible]

$$- \quad - \quad (32)$$

These step changes in kinetic and potential energy are summed over time to create a running total of energy changes. These sums are subtracted from the expended exergy using Equation (33) to calculate the exergy destroyed, which then directly leads to the exergy efficiency, defined in Equation (34), at that point in time.

[illegible]

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial \tau} \left(\frac{1}{\tau} \right) = -\frac{1}{\tau^2}$$
(34)

planetary gravity influences as the vehicle and planet both move along their respective trajectories. This is avoided by using a patched-conics model for the orbital modifications, where exergy calculations are applied to each SOI independently, not using the heliocentric portion of the trajectory. Whenever the spacecraft crosses into or out of a SOI, the most recent value for the total change in kinetic and potential energy is carried over to the next series of calculations. This ensures that exergy efficiency stays constant whenever the $q d U W Y W f U Z h \Delta q y$ are constant, even across SOIs. $c W] h$

The final exergy efficiency plots over the whole mission for each propulsion system are given below in Fig. 4 and 5.

different system options. This concept has been demonstrated for interplanetary transfer vehicles comparing 4 different system configurations. The result allows a balanced comparison between the options, informing system engineers of the best balanced system to select for the given application. The analysis of interplanetary transfer vehicles shows that NTP options are more efficient than chemical propulsion options, and NTP with liquid hydrogen as a fuel is more efficient than methane as a fuel. This also shows only very small difference between LEU NTP and HEU NTP. This provides key system characterization to support the selection of configuration for interplanetary transfer missions.

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