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Hydrogen-Atom Direct-Entry Mechanism into Metal Membranes

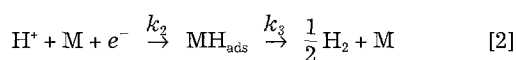
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ABSTRACT

The hydrogen-atom direct-entry mechanism is used to explain why the steady-state hydrogen permeation current density through a metal membrane is directly proportional to the cathodic current density, i_c , and is independent of the membrane thickness when i_c is small.

Bagotskaya¹ and later Frumkin² postulated that hydrogen atoms enter directly into a metal membrane and do not go through an intermediate adsorbed state. The mechanism they proposed is



where k_1 , k_{-1} , k_2 , and k_3 are rate constants.

Bockris *et al.*³ checked this mechanism by considering the following equations

$$j_\infty = F \left[k_1 \left(1 - \frac{C_o}{C_s} \right) e^{-\alpha_1 a \eta} - k_{-1} C_o e^{(1-\alpha_1) a \eta} \right] \quad [3]$$

$$i_c = i_o e^{-\alpha_2 a \eta} \quad [4]$$

$$j_\infty = \frac{DF}{L} C_o \quad [5]$$

where j_∞ is the steady-state permeation current density, η is the overpotential, $a = F/RT$, C_o is the hydrogen concentration directly beneath the cathode surface, C_s is the saturation value of C_o , α_1 is the transfer coefficient of reaction 1, α_2 is the transfer coefficient of reaction 2, i_c is the cathodic current density, D is the hydrogen diffusion coefficient, and L is the membrane thickness. Bockris *et al.*³ used Eq. 3 to 5 to claim that the hydrogen permeation current density is proportional to the cathodic current density squared

$$j_\infty \propto i_c^2 \quad [6]$$

Since no experimental evidence exists in literature to support Eq. 6, Bockris *et al.*³ concluded that the direct entry mechanism does not predict the observed results and is unable to explain the hydrogen permeation through a membrane.

The hydrogen atom direct mechanism^{1,2} is used here to explain why the steady-state hydrogen permeation current density (j_∞) is directly proportional to the cathodic current density (i_c) and is independent of the membrane thickness when i_c is small. Assuming that the metal is far from saturation, then $1 - C_o/C_s \approx 1$, and if in reaction 1, k_{-1} is negligible to k_1 , Eq. 3 becomes

$$j_\infty = Fk_1 e^{-\alpha_1 a \eta} \quad [7]$$

The ratio of Eq. 7 to 4 is

$$\frac{j_\infty}{i_c} = \frac{Fk_1 e^{-\alpha_1 a \eta}}{i_o e^{-\alpha_2 a \eta}} \quad [8]$$

and assuming that the overpotential for the electrode (η) applies to both reactions 1 and 2

$$j_\infty = i_c \frac{Fk_1}{i_o} e^{-(\alpha_2 - \alpha_1) a \eta} \quad [9]$$

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If $\alpha_1 = \alpha_2$, Eq. 9 shows that j_∞ is directly proportional to i_c , which is in agreement with previous experiment work⁴⁻⁹ that was done under conditions consistent with the development of Eq. 9. For example, Early⁴ reported that j_∞ through palladium membranes is directly proportional to i_c when i_c is less than 200 $\mu\text{A}/\text{cm}^2$. Heath⁵ reported the same for i_c less than 22 mA/cm^2 . Raczynski⁶ and Zaczczynski *et al.*⁷ demonstrated that $j_\infty \propto i_c$ for low values of i_c for hydrogen permeation through iron. Also Evseev⁸ reported that $j_\infty \propto i_c$ for iron for values of i_c between 5 and 80 mA/cm^2 .

Note that Eq. 9 shows that j_∞ does not depend on the thickness of the metal membrane (L). This is consistent with results presented by Hoare and Schuldiner^{9,10} and Bowker and Piercy¹¹ for Pd membranes.

Experimental

The Devanathan-Stachurski permeation technique¹² was used to investigate the rate of hydrogen permeation through a HY-130 steel and through palladium membranes with an area of approximately 4 cm^2 with thicknesses of 0.15 and 0.025 mm, respectively. The permeation experiments were carried out in a system with two compartments, separated by a bipolar membrane made of HY-130 steel or palladium.

The electrolyte on the cathodic side of the cell for the HY-130 steel membranes was 1M Na_2SO_4 , 0.4M NaCl , and 1M H_3BO_3 and for the palladium membrane was 1N H_2SO_4 . Atomic hydrogen permeation transients through a HY-130 steel membrane for different applied cathodic potentials were recorded continuously as a function of time. At the beginning of each experiment, the cathodic side of the steel membrane was held at a constant potential of -0.58 V vs. SCE. Next, the potential was stepped to a more negative value after the hydrogen permeation current density reached a steady-state value. After the permeation stabilized at an applied potential of about -0.87 V vs. SCE, the potential was switched off, and a decay curve was recorded. The palladium alloy membrane on the cathodic side of the cell was polarized galvanostatically using a low cathodic current density in the range of 59.4 to 594.3 $\mu\text{A}/\text{cm}^2$.

The electrolyte on the anodic side of the cell for a HY-130 steel membrane was 0.2M NaOH while for the palladium membrane it was 1N H_2SO_4 . To avoid passivation or dissolution, the anodic side of the HY-130 membrane was electroplated with a thin layer (0.15 to 0.20 μm) of palladium. The electrodeposition of palladium was carried out in an electrolyte containing 2×10^{-5} M $\text{Na}_2\text{Pd}(\text{NO}_2)_4$ using a current density of 100 $\mu\text{A}/\text{cm}^2$ for 2 h. After the electrolyte was drained off, the compartment was washed with deionized water and filled with the anodic solution.

The potential on the anodic side for HY-130 steel membranes (the side from which the hydrogen emerges) was set at -0.3 V vs. a Hg/HgO reference electrode placed in the solution in the cell. The permeation rate through a palladium membrane was measured by setting the potential at a fixed value of 0.3 V vs. a SCE. These values of the set potentials correspond to a practically zero concentration of adsorbed atomic hydrogen on the anodic surface of the mem-

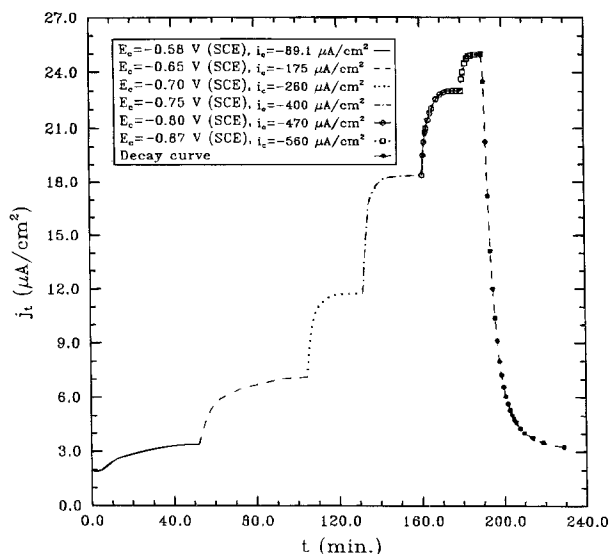


Fig. 1. Atomic hydrogen permeation transients through a HY-130 steel membrane as a function of time for different applied cathodic potentials in a catholyte containing 1M Na₂SO₄, 0.4M NaCl, and 1M H₃BO₃. The thickness of the membrane was $L = 0.15$ mm.

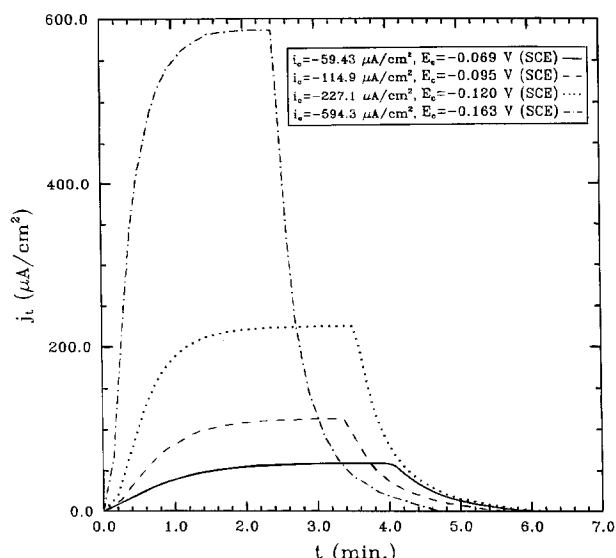


Fig. 3. Hydrogen permeation transients through a Pd membrane obtained at constant cathodic current densities. The thickness of the palladium membrane was $L = 25$ μm . The catholyte was 1N H₂SO₄.

brane. Prepurified nitrogen was bubbled through both compartments in order to keep them free from oxygen contamination.

Results and Discussion

Atomic hydrogen permeation transients through a HY-130 steel membrane as a function of time for different applied potentials are shown in Fig. 1. The plateaux in Fig. 1 represent the j_{∞} values for different values of E_c . The corresponding cathodic current density, i_c , was recorded for each value of E_c . As expected, the permeation current densities increased as the applied cathodic potentials and the resulting cathodic current densities were increased. Figure 2, a plot of j_{∞} vs. i_c , is clearly linear.

Permeation transients through a palladium membrane were obtained as a function of applied cathodic current densities, as shown in Fig. 3. The plateaux in Fig. 3 represent j_{∞} values for the associated set of i_c values. The permeation current density, j_{∞} , for palladium also increases linearly with the cathodic current density, as shown in Fig. 4.

Conclusion

The direct hydrogen entry mechanism^{1,2} was shown to be correct for HY-130 steel and Pd for small values of j_{∞} . A simple expression (Eq. 9) was developed that showed that the hydrogen permeation current density, j_{∞} , is directly proportional to the applied cathodic current density, i_c , and is independent of the thickness of the metal membrane. This expression was shown to be consistent with experimental data presented here and with data from previous workers.

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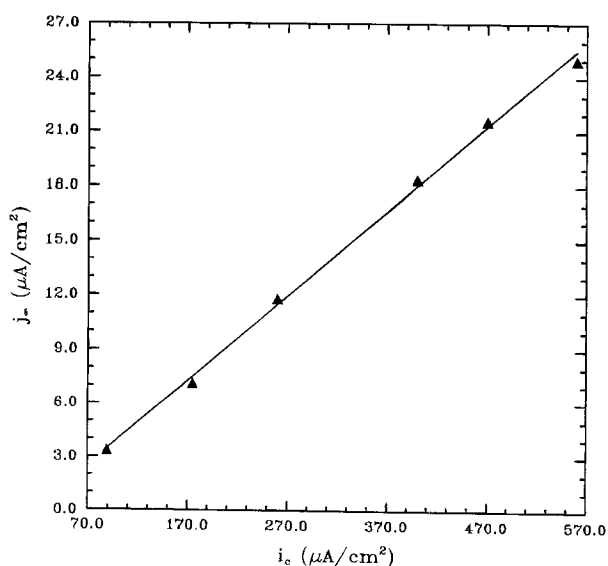


Fig. 2. The steady-state hydrogen permeation current density (j_{∞}) as a function of the cathodic current density (i_c) through the HY-130 steel membrane.

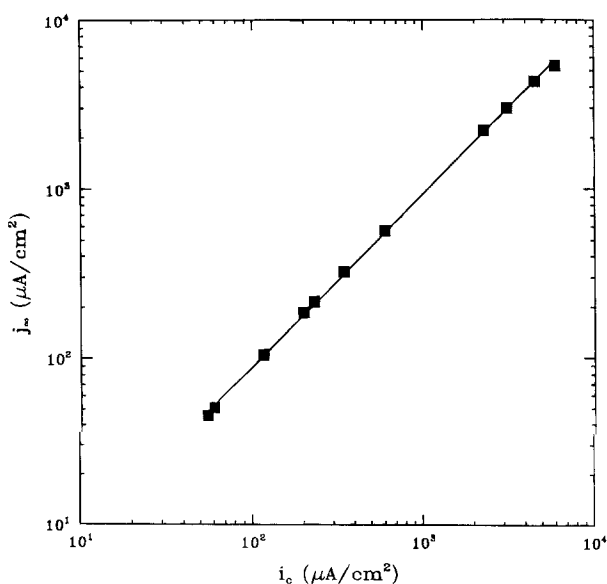


Fig. 4. The steady-state hydrogen permeation current density (j_{∞}) as a function of the cathodic current density (i_c) through a palladium membrane ($L = 25$ μm).

LIST OF SYMBOLS

a	F/RT , V^{-1}
C_o	hydrogen concentration directly beneath the cathode surface, mol cm^{-3}
C_s	saturation value of C_o , mol cm^{-3}
D	hydrogen diffusivity, $\text{cm}^2 \text{s}^{-1}$
E_c	cathodic potential, V
F	Faraday's constant, $96,487 \text{ C (eq)}^{-1}$
i_c	cathodic current density, A cm^{-2}
i_o	exchange current density, A cm^{-2}
j_∞	steady-state hydrogen permeation current density, A cm^{-2}
k_1	absorption constant, $\text{mol (cm}^2 \text{ s)}^{-1}$
k_{-1}	desorption constant, cm s^{-1}
k_3	hydrogen recombination rate constant, $\text{mol (cm}^2 \text{ s)}^{-1}$
L	membrane thickness, cm
R	gas constant, $8.3143 \text{ J(mol K)}^{-1}$
T	temperature, K
Greek	
α_1, α_2	transfer coefficients, dimensionless
η	overpotential, V

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