Friction control in wheel-rail contacts

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01.12.2025

MATISA Matériel Industriel SA

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Crissier SUISSE

On Track Machines (OTM) development and construction

Website: https://www.matisa.ch/fr/index.php

Videos
P95 - Renewal train (7min) Videos/P 95 MATISA GCF.mp4
B66UC - Tamping machine (4min) Videos/B 66 UC MATISA MONTI.mp4

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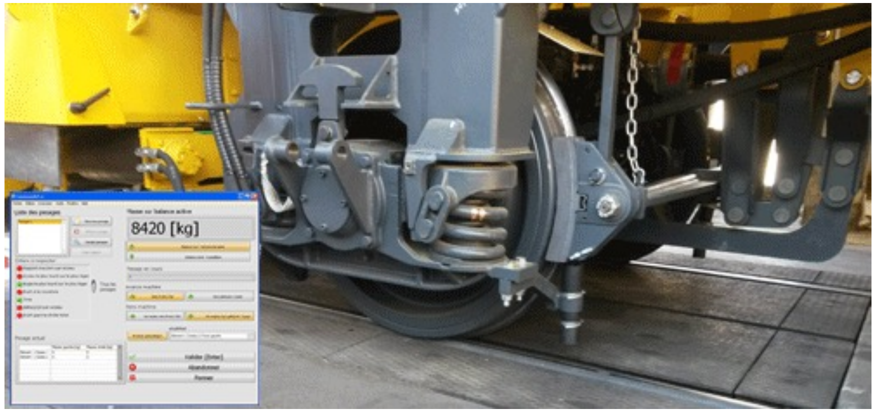
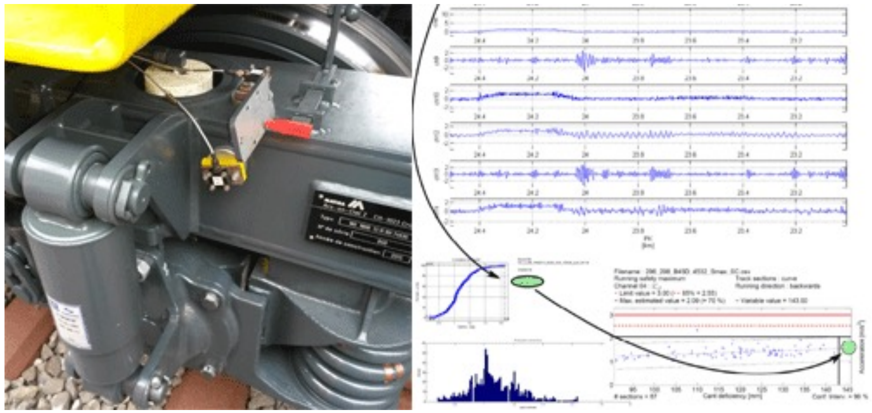
Website: https://www.matisa.ch/en/matisa-testing_laboratory%20.php

Weighing wheel by wheel
EN 15654-2



Running behaviour
EN 14363 §7



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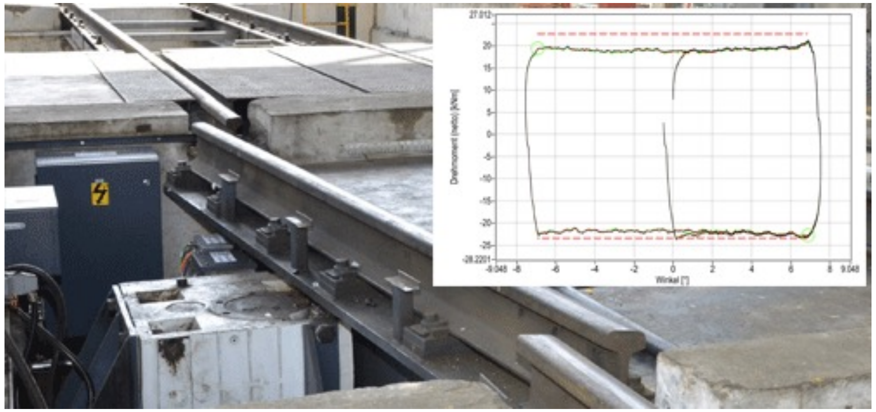
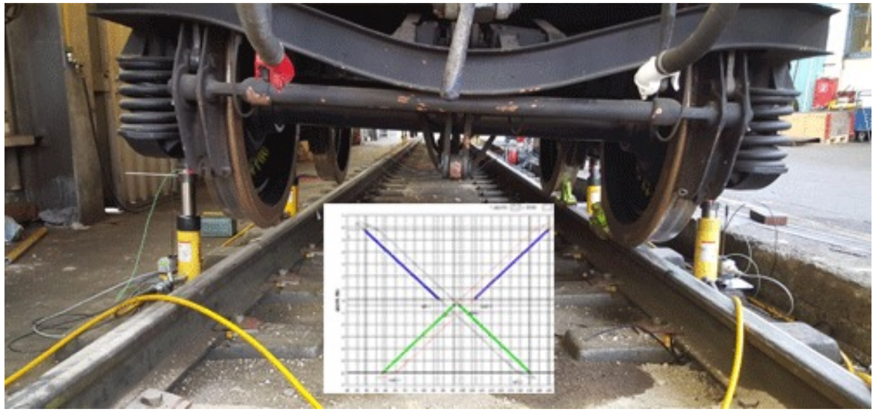
Resistance against bogie rotation
EN 14363 §6

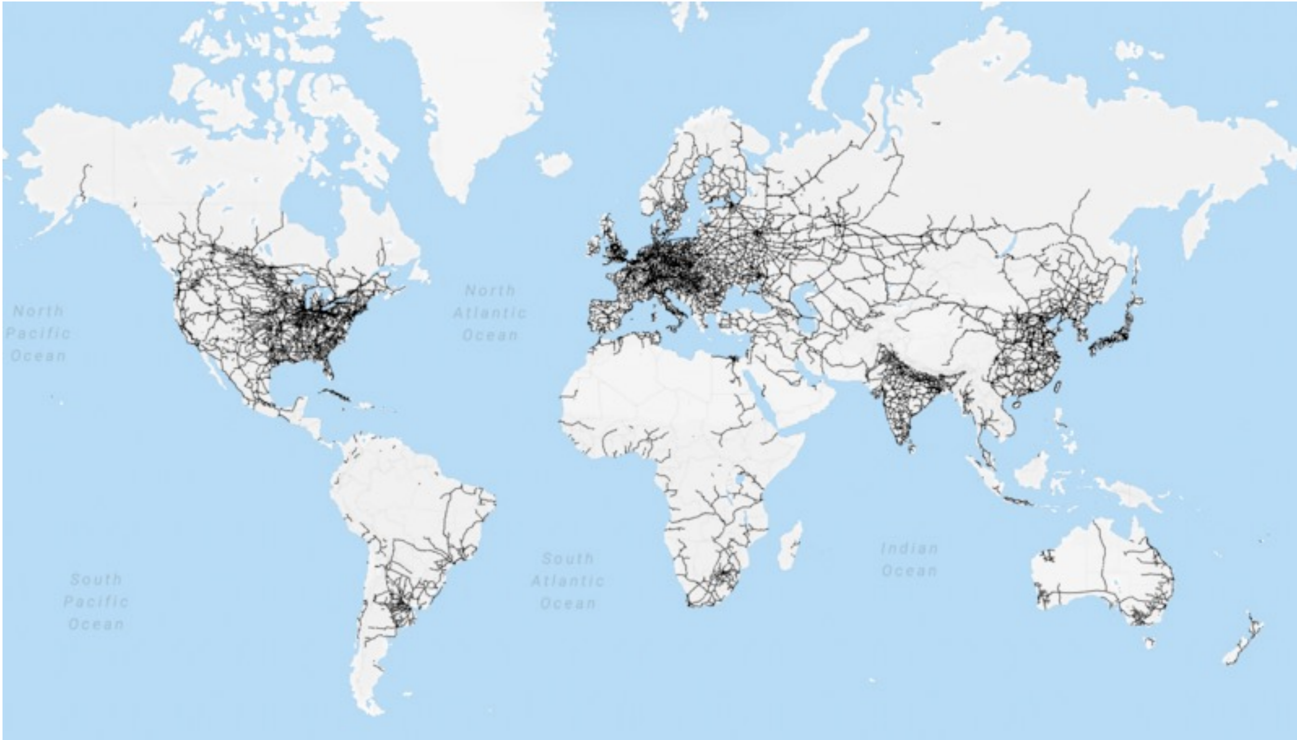


Safety against derailment on
twisted track - EN 14363 §6



Railway transport network

Country / Area	km
World	1,374,000
USA	220,000
China	159,000
EU-28	211,400
Switzerland	5,300



Modal transport volume

Passenger transport volume
EU-28 (2015)

Mode	Billion p-km	%
Sea	22	0.3
Road	5 388	81.6
Rail	544	8.2
Air	649	9.8
Total	**6 603**	**100.0**

eea.europa.eu

Freight transport volume
Worldwide (2015)

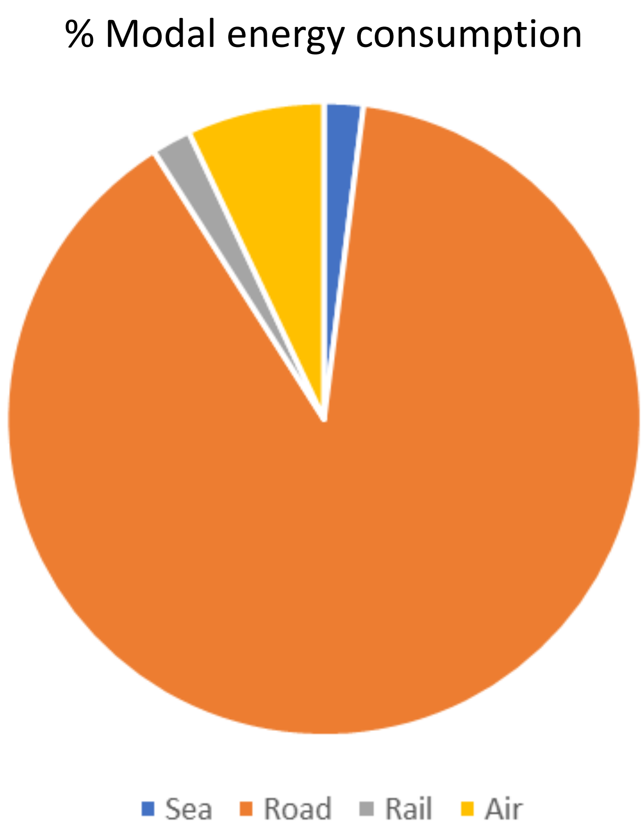
Mode	Trillion t-km	%
Sea	78.0	72.2
Road	19.8	18.3
Rail	10.0	9.3
Air	0.2	0.2
Total	**108.0**	**100.0**

"Global Freight Demand to Triple by 2050". The Maritime Executive. May 27, 2019

Modal transport energy consumption

Energy consumption in transport
IEA countries (2018)

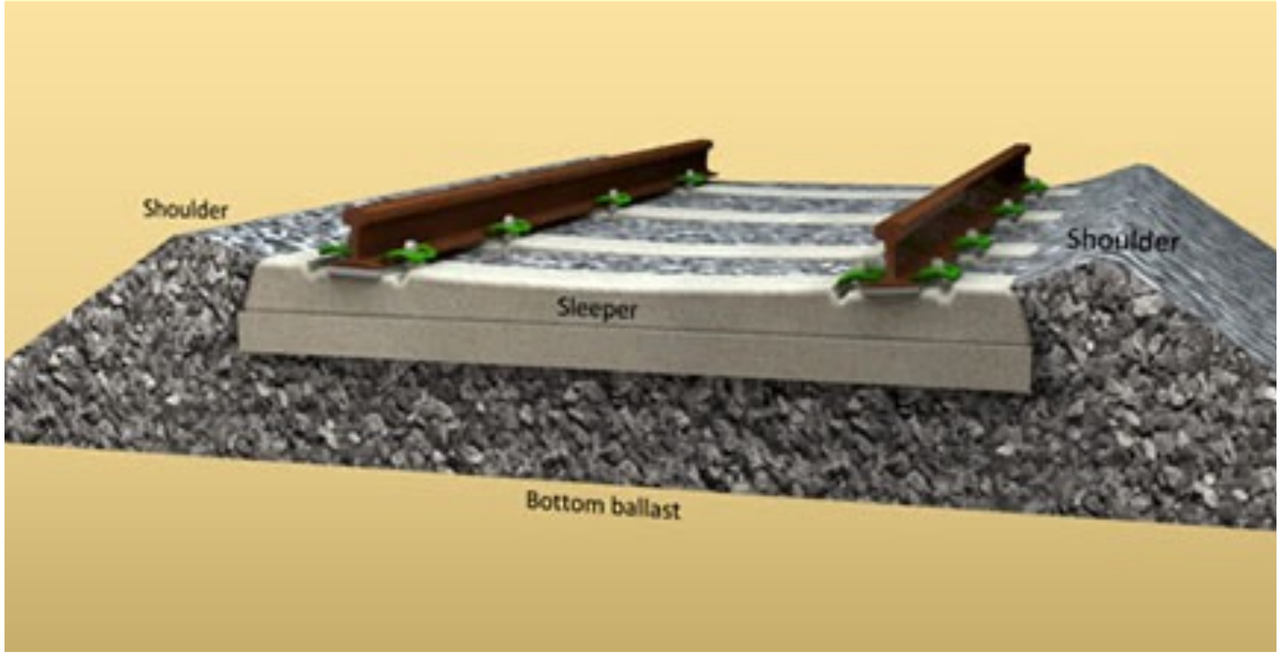
Mode	Trillion MJ	%	% MJ/p-km	% MJ/t-km
Sea	2.1	2.0	74.6	0.1
Road	93.9	89.0	13.6	11.3
Rail	2.1	2.0	3.0	0.5
Air	7.4	7.0	8.8	88.1
Total	**105.5**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

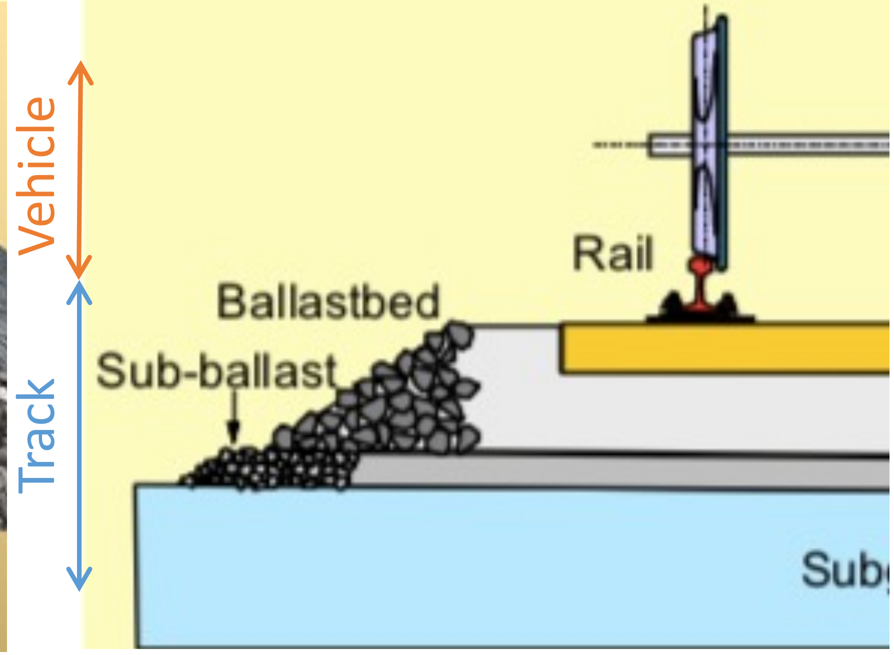


Why using the rail transport system?

Let’s have a look in the wheel-rail contact

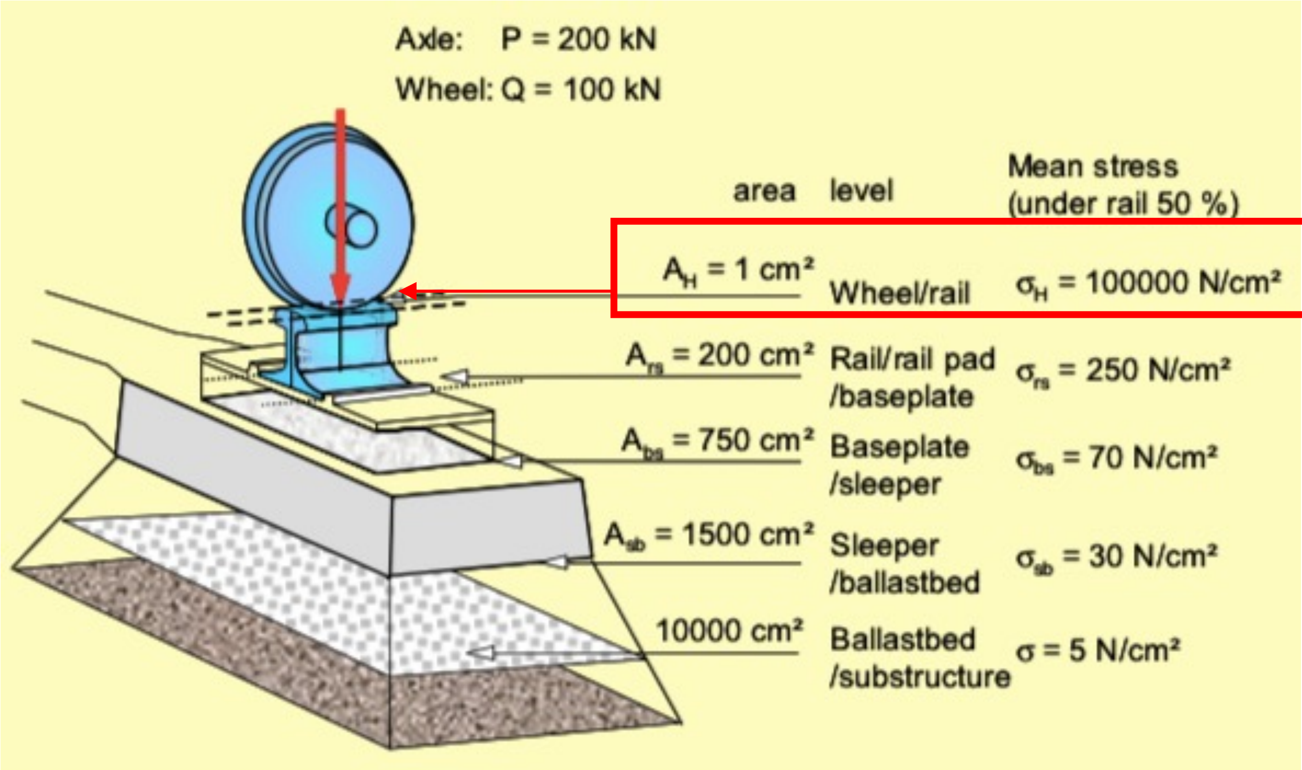
Railway (conventional) track structure and wheelset





Esveld, C. (2001) Modern Railway Track.
2nd Edition, MRT-Productions

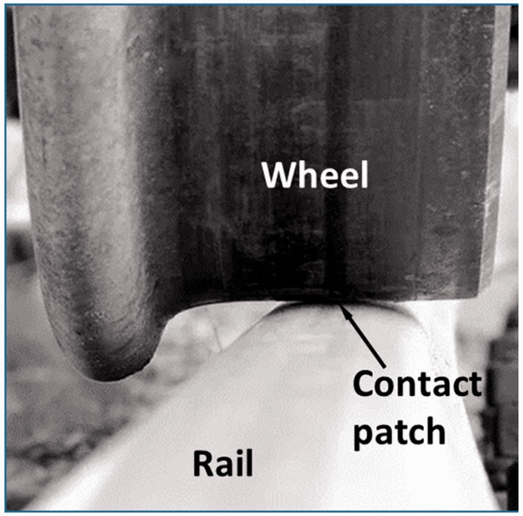
Load bearing function of the track (conventional)



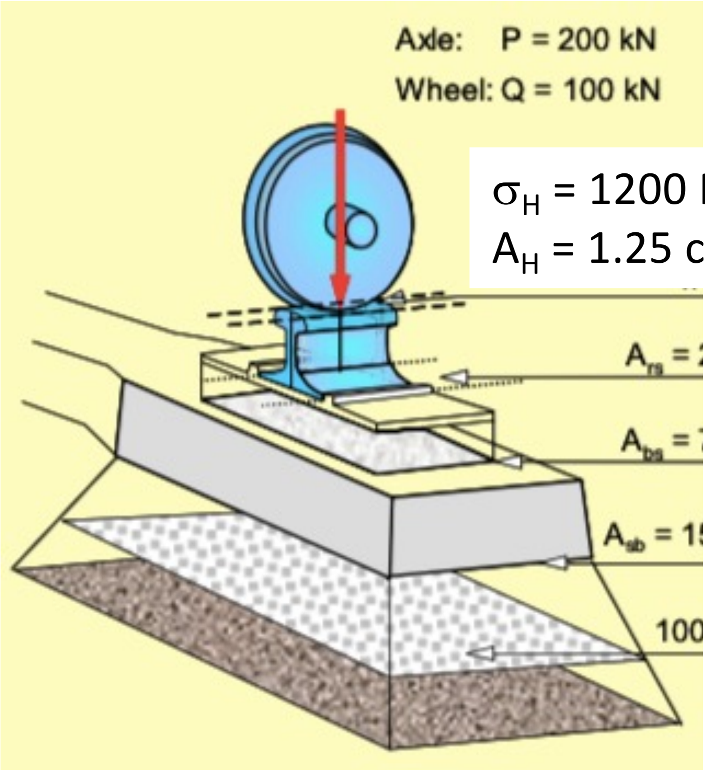
Esveld, C. (2001) Modern Railway Track.
2nd Edition, MRT-Productions

Rail transport advantages

- High Loads σ_H = 1000 MPa
- Low rolling friction (~0.0004)



Load bearing function of the track (conventional)



σ_H = 1200 MPa
A_H = 1.25 cm^2

Esveld, C. (2001) Modern Railway Track.
2nd Edition, MRT-Productions

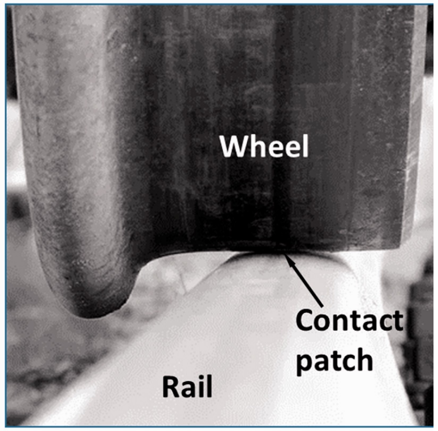
Wheel rail contact

Non-conformal contact

R_w = 500 mm (y) R_r = 300 mm (x)

Steel on steel E = 210 GPa ν = 0.3

Normal load F_n = 100 kN



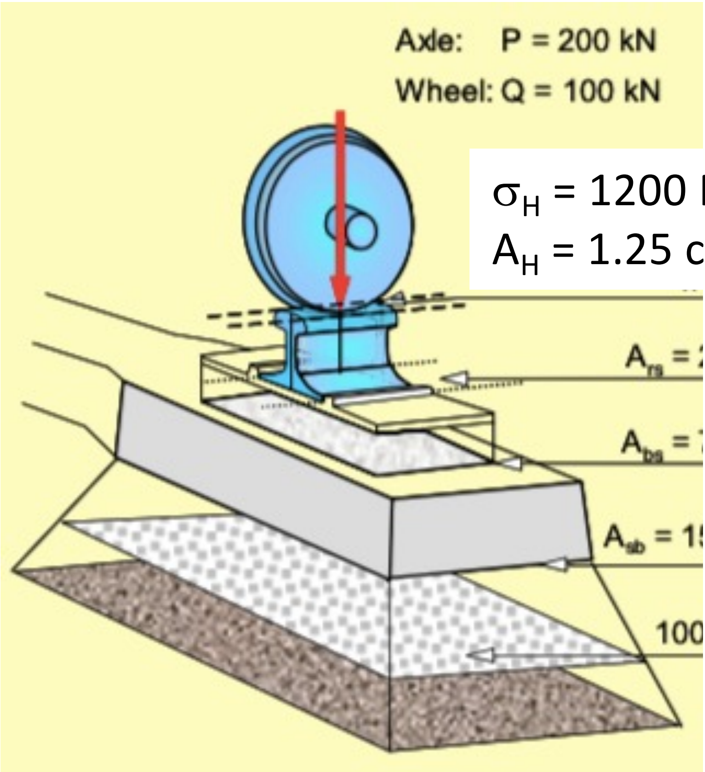
Hertz theory

E^* = 230.77 GPa R^* = 187.43 mm

Contact ellipse a / b = 7.557 / 5.282 mm

$\boxed{P_{avg} = 798 \text{ MPa} \ / \ P_{max} = 1200 \text{ MPa}}$

Load bearing function of the track (conventional)



Esveld, C. (2001) Modern Railway Track.
2nd Edition, MRT-Productions

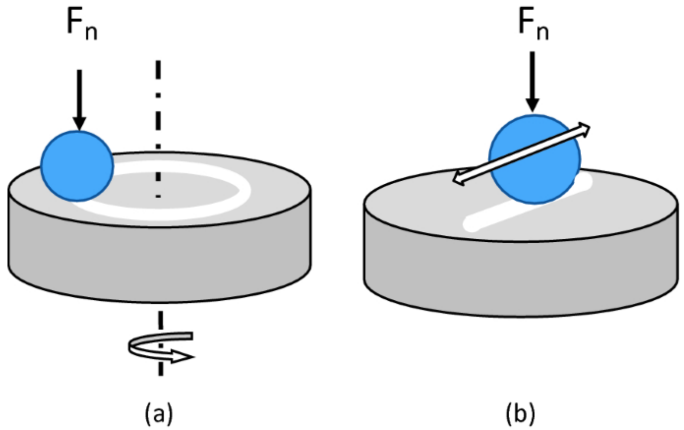
Laboratory setups

Ball on flat contact

Alumina ball $\phi = 3$ mm

Steel sample

Normal load $F_n = 5$ N

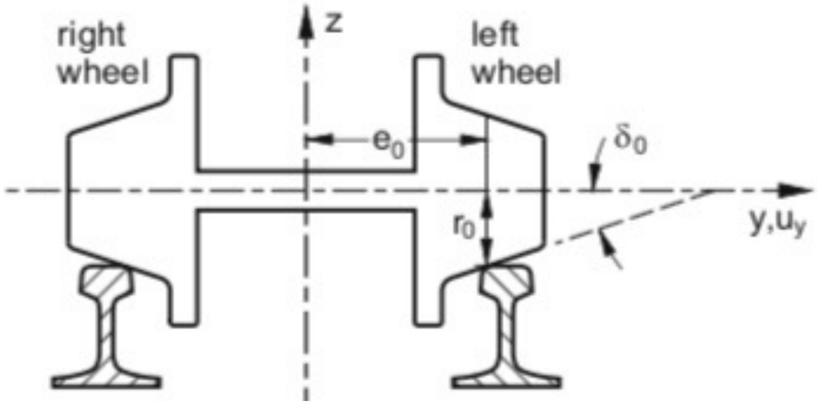


Hertz theory

Contact ellipse a,b = 0.0442 mm Area = 0.0061 mm2

$\boxed{P_{avg} = 816 \text{ MPa} \;\; / \;\; P_{max} = 1225 \text{ MPa}}$

Guiding function: Hunting motion

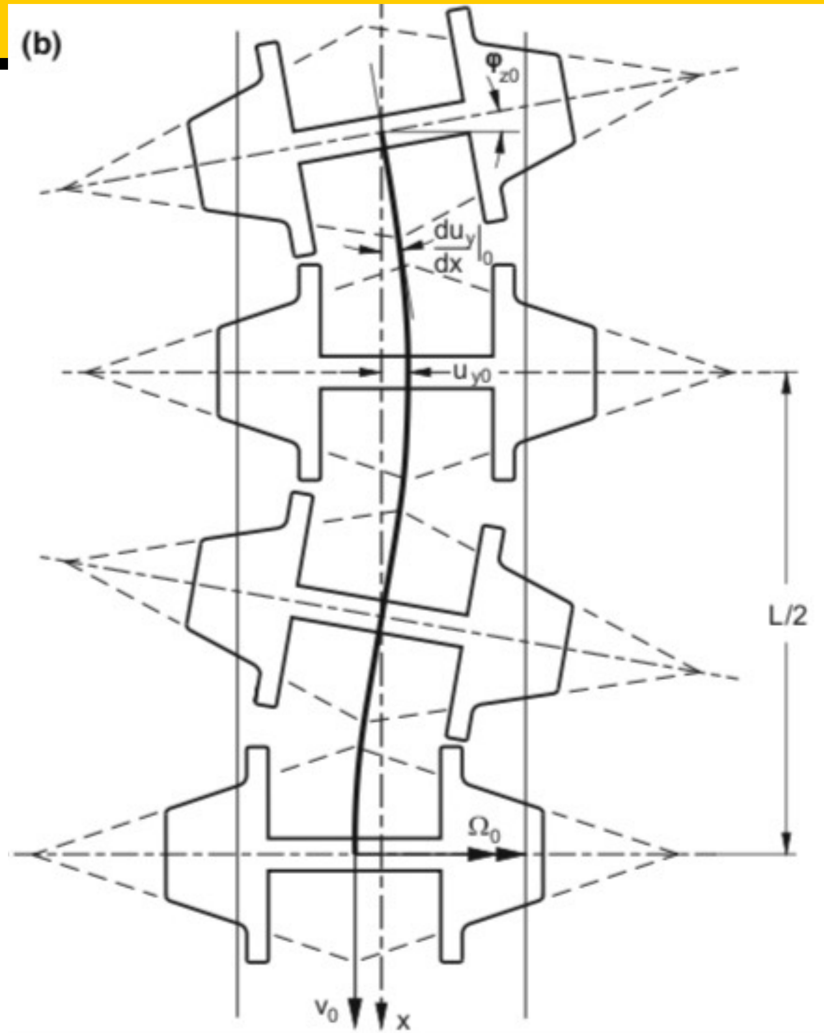


r_0 : rolling radius (nominal)
$2e_0$: contact points lateral distance
δ_0 : conicity (cone angle)

$$L = 2\pi \sqrt{\frac{e_0 r_0}{\delta_0}}$$ Hunting wavelength

v_0 : wheelset longitudinal speed
Ω_0 : wheelset rotational speed

$$v_0 = \Omega_0 r_0 \qquad f = v_0/L$$



Videos
Guidance (2min) Videos/Guidance By Railway Tracks.mp4

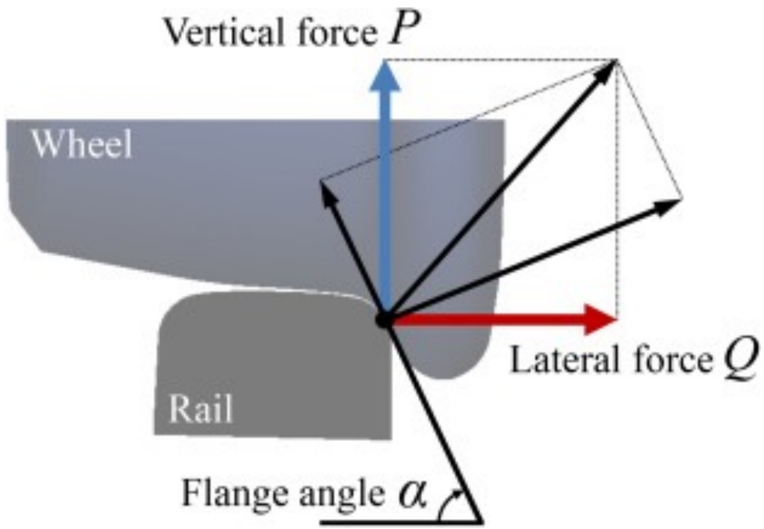
Knothe, K. (2017) "Rail Vehicle Dynamics"
Springer

Guiding function problems

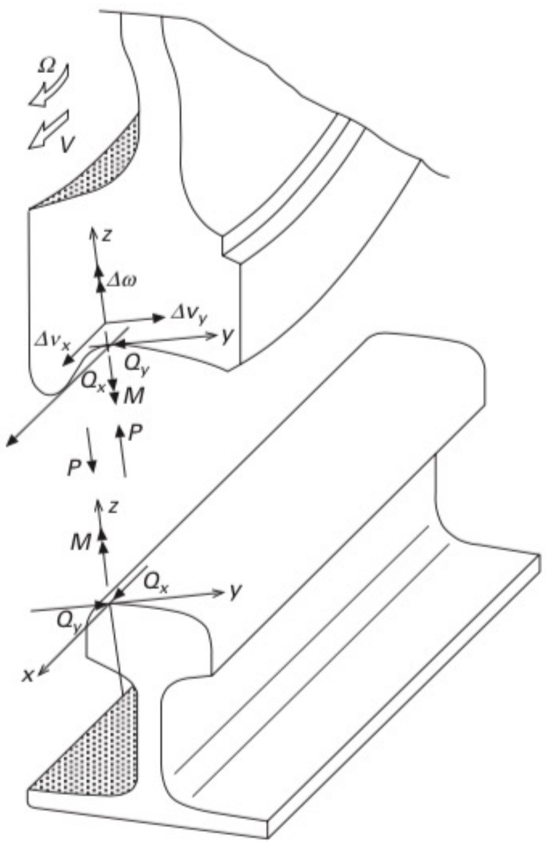
Instability

Track displacement after high-speed test of SNCF 1955

Flange-climb derailment



Wheel-rail contact parameters



Lewis, R. (2009) "Wheel-Rail Interaction Handbook" Elsevier

Running parameters

R = wheel rolling radius / rail radius
V = wheel travelling speed
Ω = wheel rotational speed
P = normal force

Contact forces

Q_x = longitudinal creep force T_ξ
Q_y = lateral creep force T_η
M = spin moment M_ζ

Δv_i = relative in-plane translation velocity between contacting bodies, $i \in \{x, y\}$
$\Delta \omega$ = relative rotation velocity between contacting bodies

Geometric and kinematic contact parameters

a = longitudinal contact ellipse semi-axis
b = lateral contact ellipse semi-axis
t = time
υ_x = longitudinal creep ratio ν_ξ
υ_y = lateral creep ratio ν_η
φ = spin ratio ν_ζ

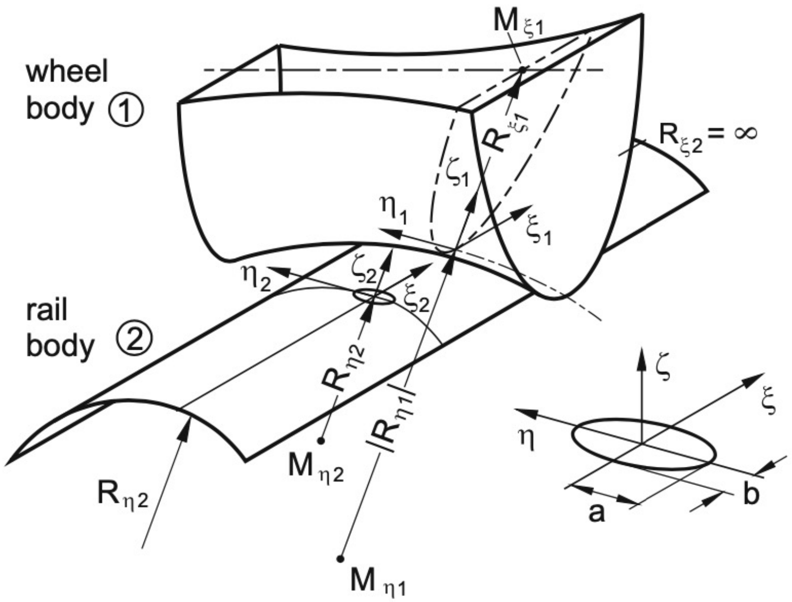
Contact pressure distributions

p = contact pressure
q_x = tangential stress component in longitudinal direction
q_y = tangential stress component in lateral direction

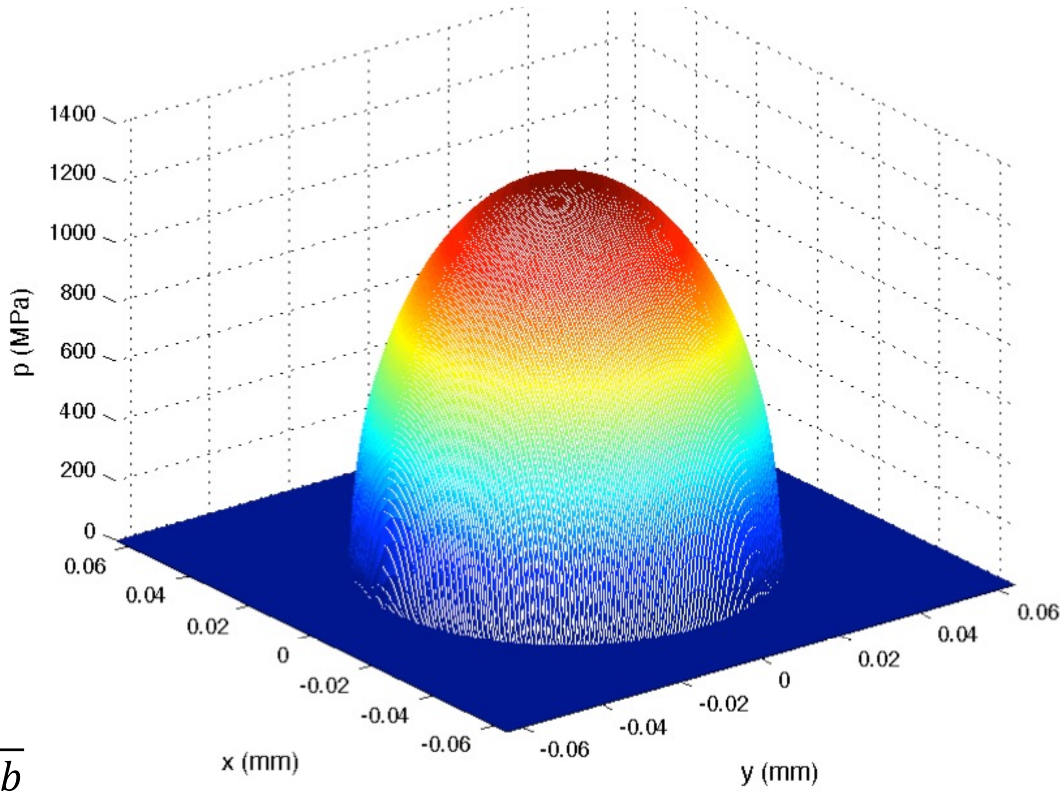
$\boxed{\mu = \text{coefficient of friction}}$

α = traction coefficient

Wheel-rail normal contact: Hetzian distribution



Contact pressure distribution p(x,y)

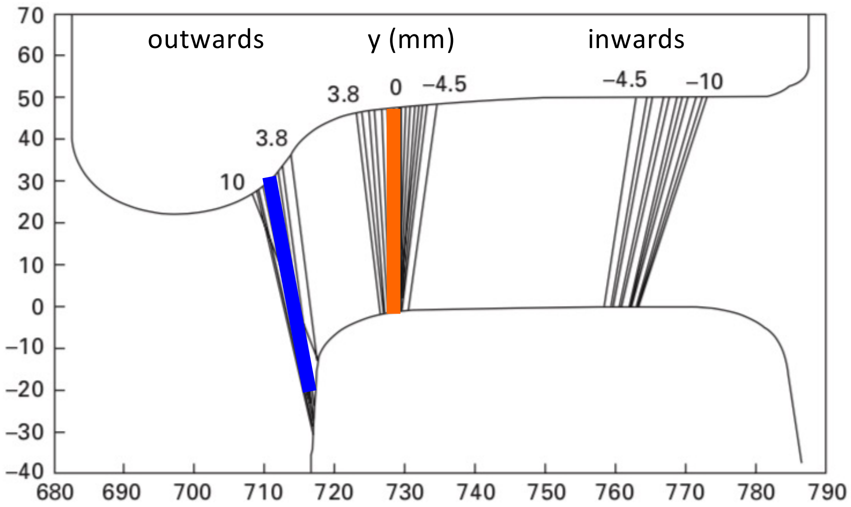


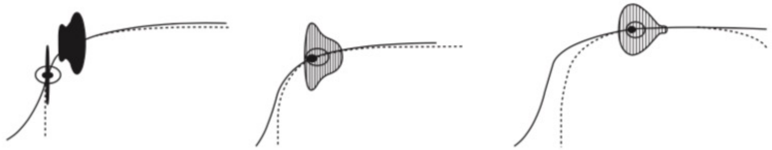
$$p_0 = \frac{3\,P}{2\,\pi\,a\,b}$$

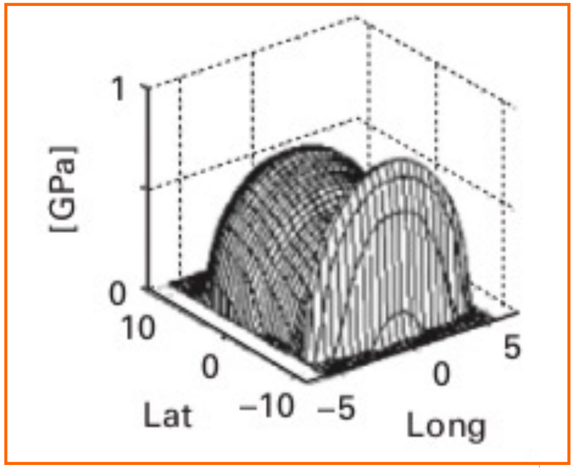
$$p(\xi,\eta) = p_0\sqrt{1-(\eta/a)^2-(\xi/b)^2}$$

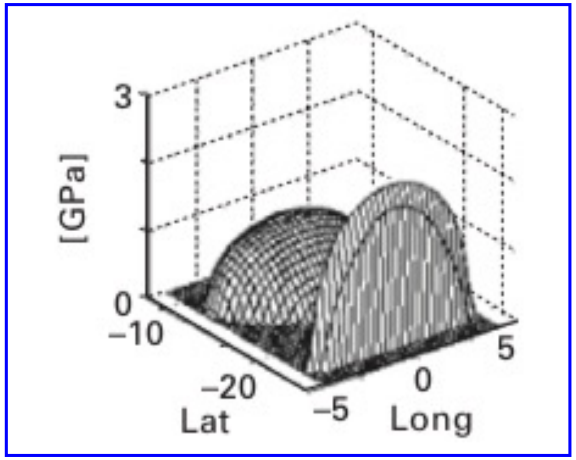
2D contact $$p(\xi) = p_0\sqrt{1-(\xi/b)^2}$$

Wheel-rail normal contact: non-Hertzian distributions

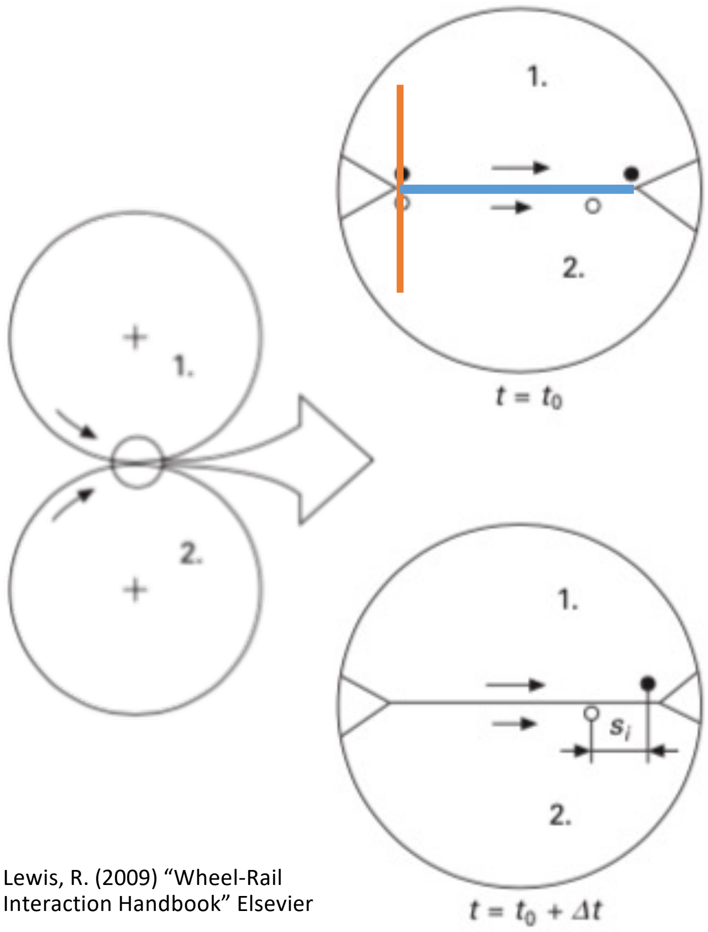








Lewis, R. (2009) "Wheel-Rail Interaction Handbook" Elsevier



Lewis, R. (2009) "Wheel-Rail Interaction Handbook" Elsevier

2D problem
Tangential distribution

$$q_1(\xi) = \frac{\mu\, p_0}{a}\sqrt{a^2 - \xi^2} = \mu\, p(\xi)$$

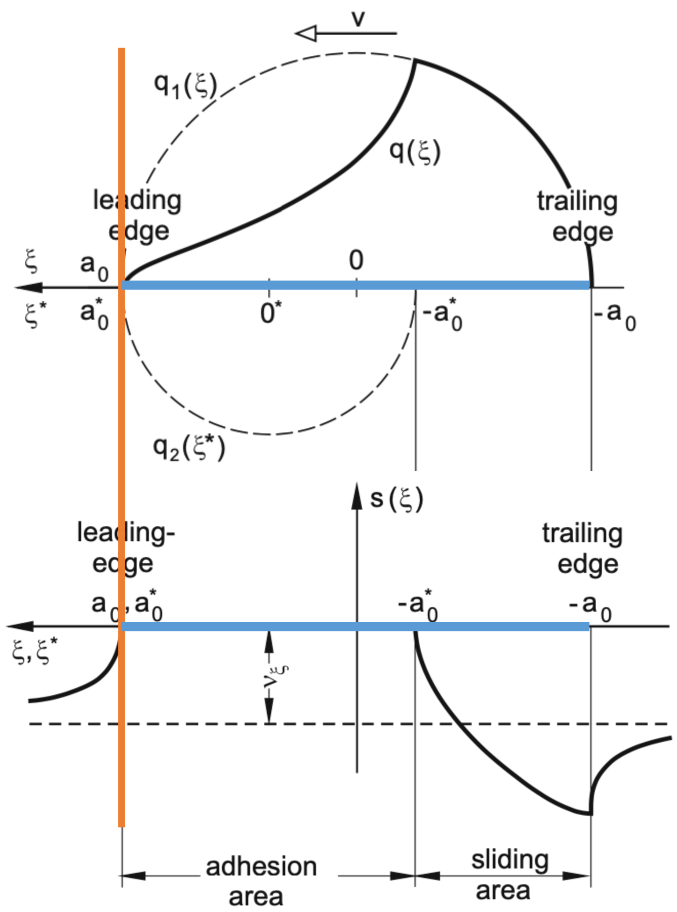
$$q_2(\xi^*) = -\frac{\mu\, p_0}{a^*}\sqrt{{a^*}^2 - {\xi^*}^2}$$

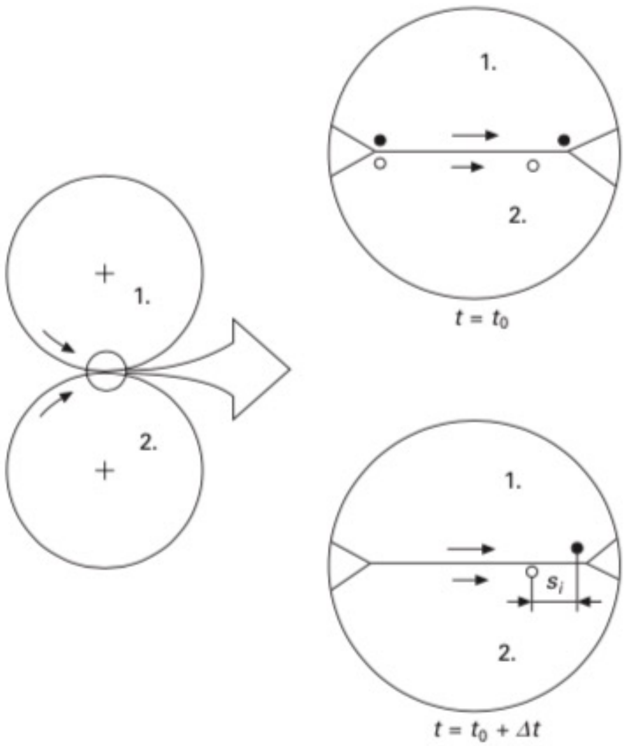
slip s

creep $v_x = (s/\Delta t)/V$

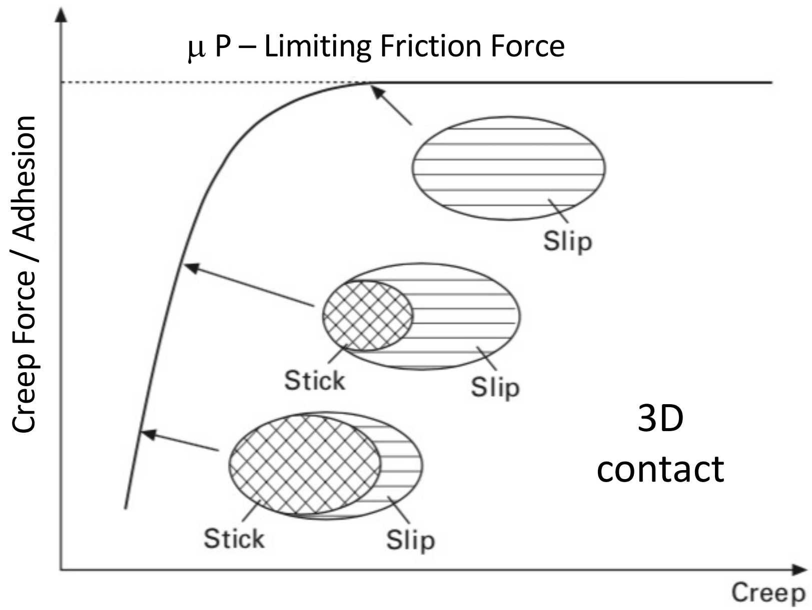
Local creepage

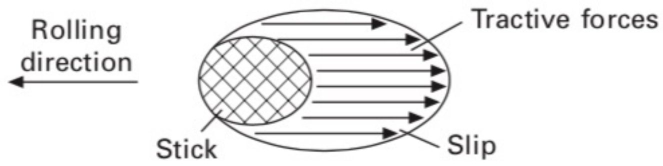
Carter (1926) Proc.R. Soc. L. A 112





Slip	s
Creep	$v_x = (s/\Delta t)/V$
Creep force	Q_x
Adhesion	$\alpha = Q_x/P$

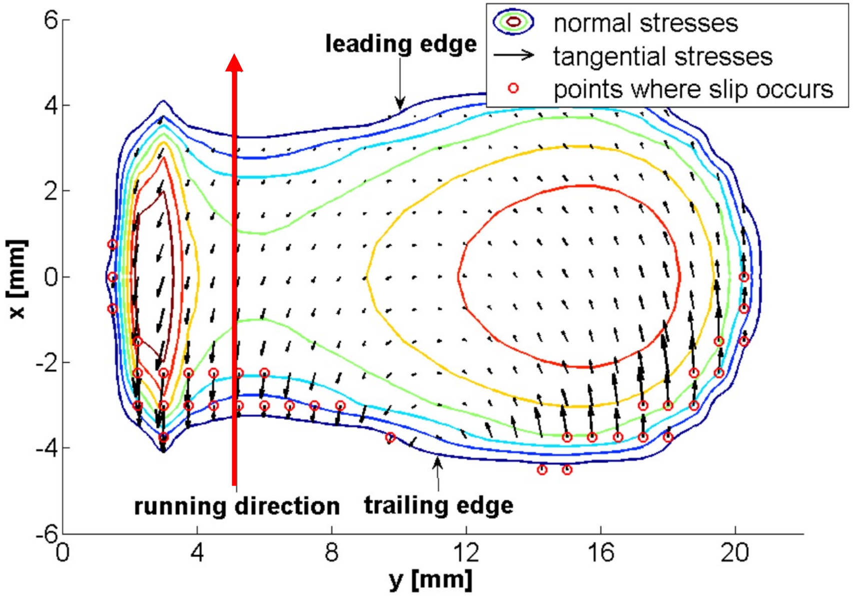




Creep influence in wheel-rail contact conditions

Types of creep:

1) Longitudinal creepage (v_ξ): spinning and skidding in running direction
2) Lateral creepage (v_η): the angle of attack or skew
3) Spin creepage (v_ζ): the contact plane inclination and steering



3D tangential contact

$$\left\{\begin{matrix} T_\xi \\ T_\eta \\ M_\zeta \end{matrix}\right\}_{\text{lin}} = Gab \begin{bmatrix} C_{11} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & C_{22} & \sqrt{ab}\, C_{23} \\ 0 & -\sqrt{ab}\, C_{23} & ab\, C_{33} \end{bmatrix} \left\{\begin{matrix} \nu_\xi \\ \nu_\eta \\ \nu_\zeta \end{matrix}\right\}.$$

$T_{\xi,\eta}, M_\zeta$: Creep forces
C_{ij} : Kalker's coefficients
$v_{\xi,\eta,\zeta}$: Creepages

Railway steel on steel contacts:

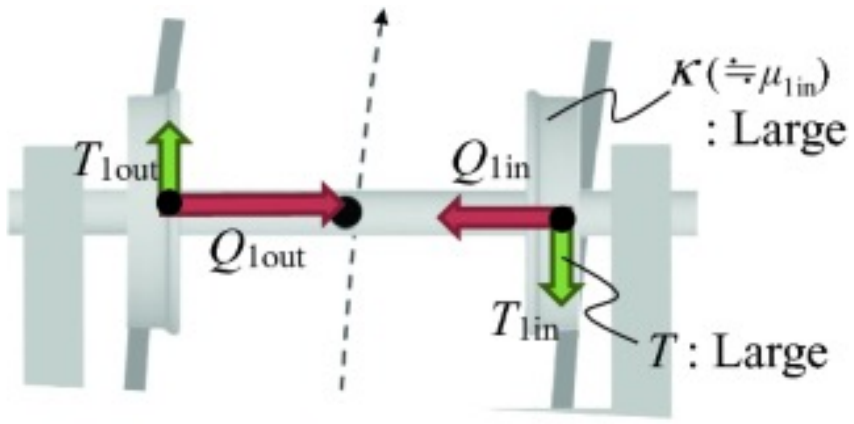
- Free running (no creep) → small rolling resistance
- Creep motion → higher friction

Key role of creep forces in vehicle-track interaction

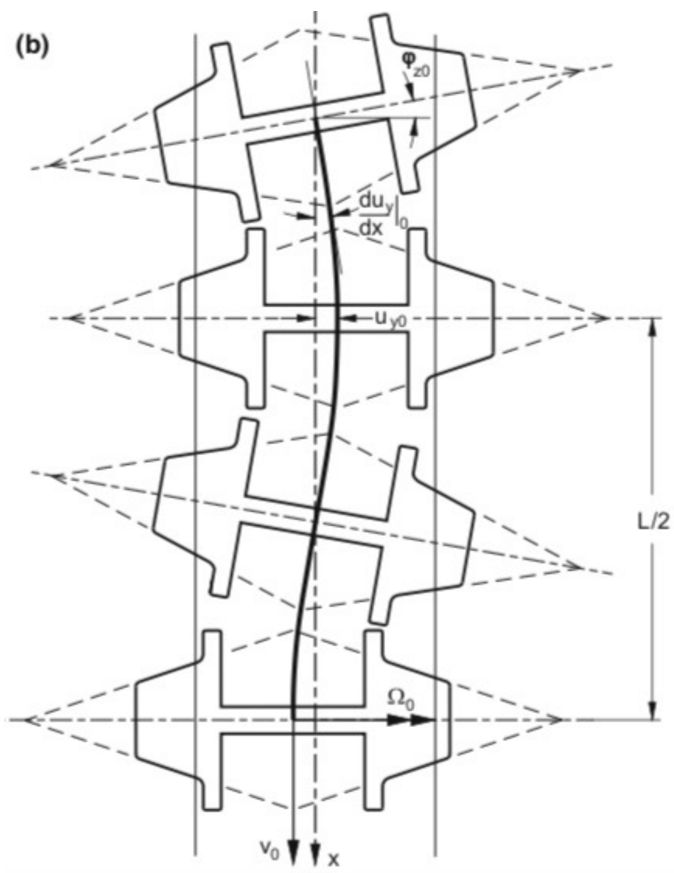
- Traction and braking
- Stability (hunting), oscillation behavior
- Safety against derailment, wheel-rail forces, track loading in curves
- Wear
- Rolling contact fatigue (RCF)
- Squeal noise

Key role of creep forces in vehicle-track interaction

- Stability (hunting), oscillation behavior



Pure rolling



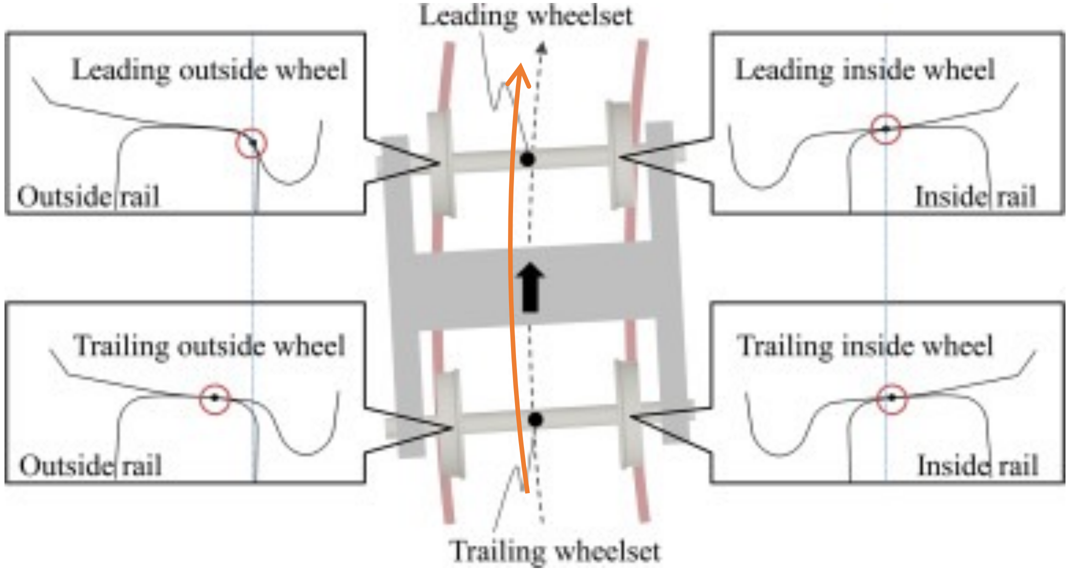
Creep forces

$T = T_\xi$
$Q = T_\eta$

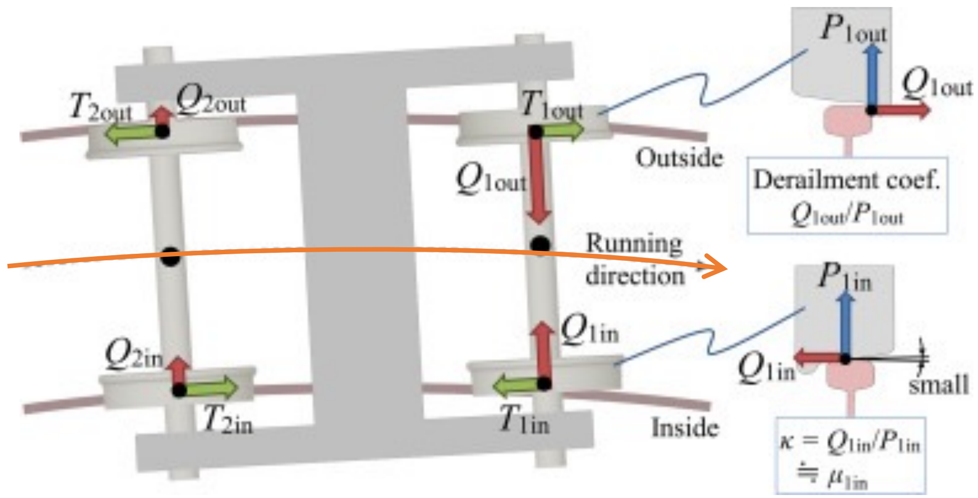
$$\begin{Bmatrix} T_\xi \\ T_\eta \\ M_\zeta \end{Bmatrix}_{\text{lin}} = Gab \begin{bmatrix} C_{11} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & C_{22} & \sqrt{ab}\, C_{23} \\ 0 & -\sqrt{ab}\, C_{23} & ab\, C_{33} \end{bmatrix} \begin{Bmatrix} \nu_\xi \\ \nu_\eta \\ \nu_\zeta \end{Bmatrix}.$$

Key role of creep forces in vehicle-track interaction

- Safety against derailment, wheel-rail forces, track loading in curves



Contact points



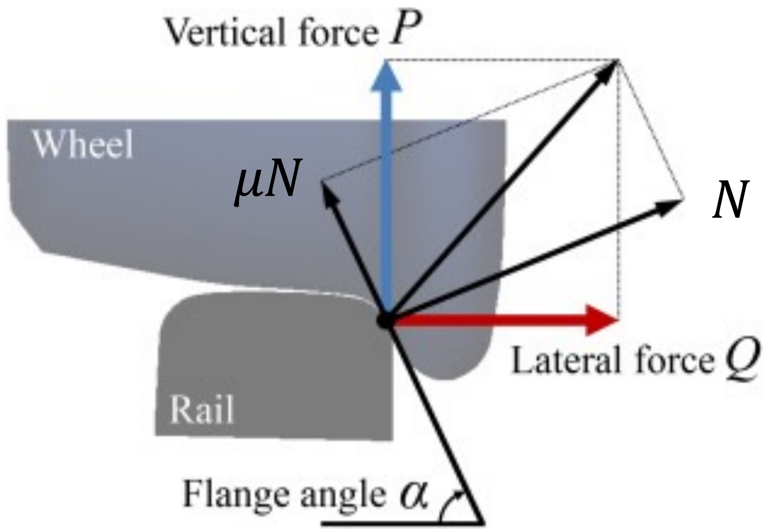
Creep forces

$T = T_\xi$
$Q = T_\eta$

$$\begin{Bmatrix} T_\xi \\ T_\eta \\ M_\zeta \end{Bmatrix}_{\mathrm{lin}} = Gab \begin{bmatrix} C_{11} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & C_{22} & \sqrt{ab}\, C_{23} \\ 0 & -\sqrt{ab}\, C_{23} & ab\, C_{33} \end{bmatrix} \begin{Bmatrix} \nu_\xi \\ \nu_\eta \\ \nu_\zeta \end{Bmatrix}.$$

Key role of creep forces in vehicle-track interaction

- Safety against derailment, wheel-rail forces, track loading in curves



μ coefficient of friction

Nadal's criteria

$$\frac{Q}{P} \leq \frac{\tan\alpha - \mu}{1 + \mu\tan\alpha}$$

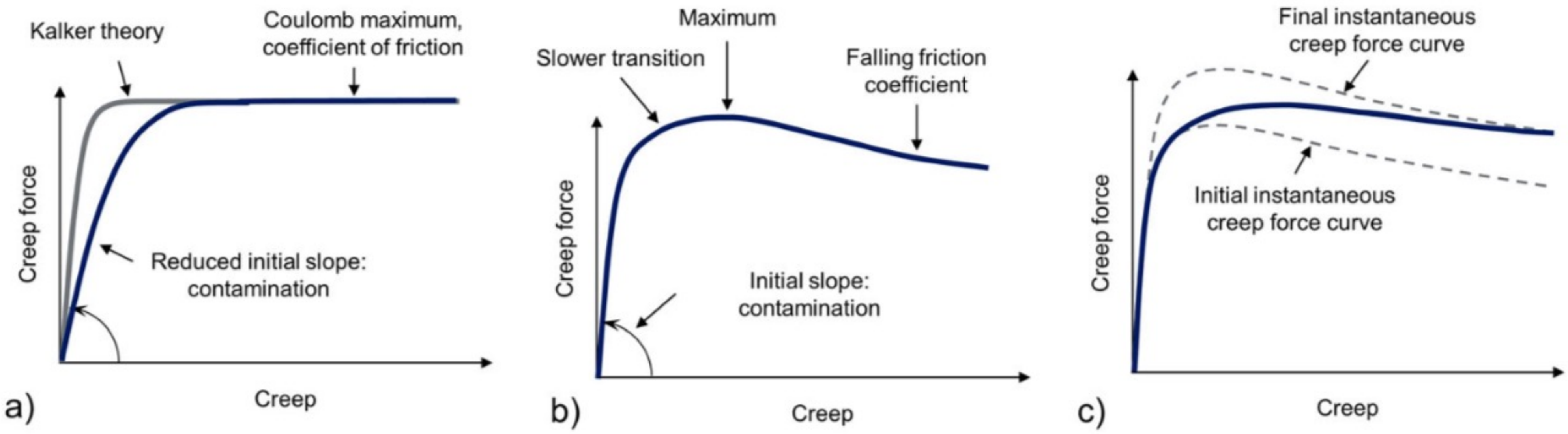
$\approx 1.64 \ (\alpha = 70° \ ; \ \mu = 0.20)$
$\approx 1.20 \ (\alpha = 70° \ ; \ \mu = 0.36)$
$\approx 0.95 \ (\alpha = 70° \ ; \ \mu = 0.50)$

$$Q = N\sin\alpha - \mu N\cos\alpha$$
$$P = N\cos\alpha + \mu N\sin\alpha$$

N : Normal contact load
μN : maximum Tangential contact load

Nadal, M.J. (1908)

Adhesion-creep behavior



Coulomb friction | Steady surface conditions | Transient surface conditions

Vollebregt, E. (2021) VSD 59 (7)

Coefficient of friction

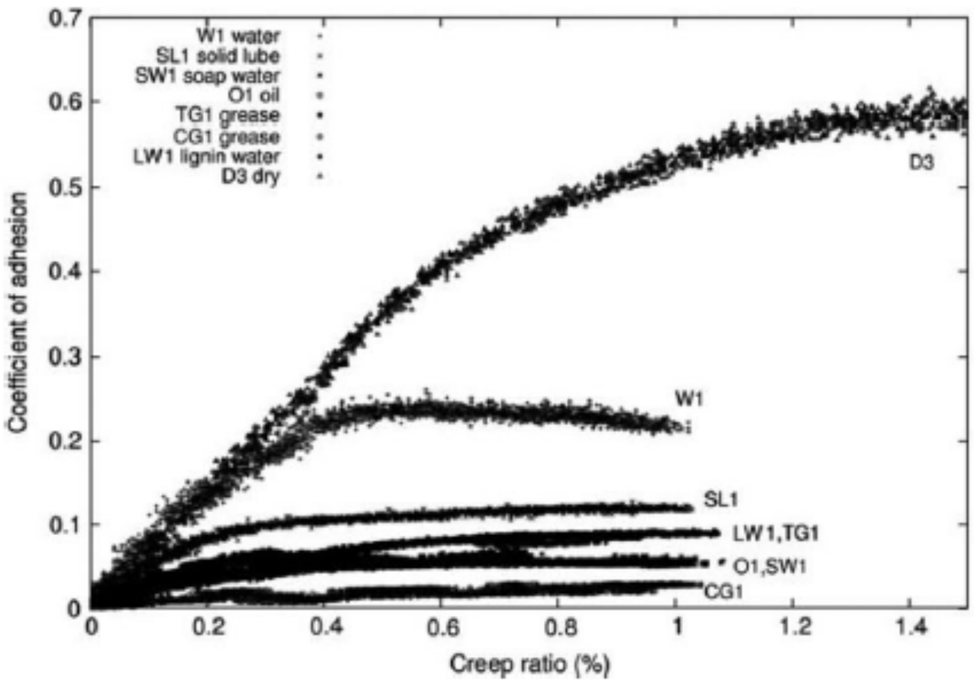
Environmental conditions

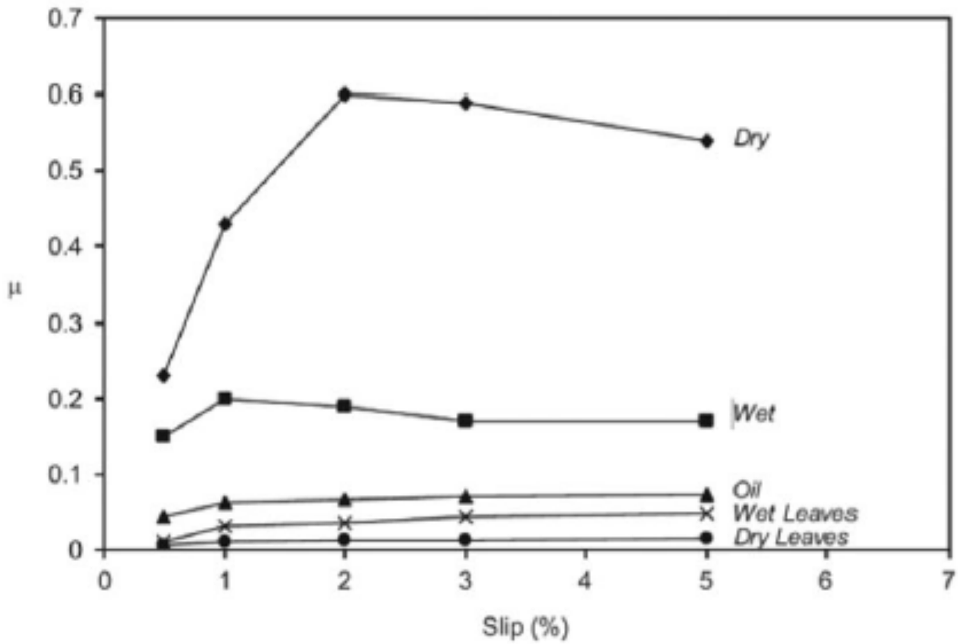
• Humidity	0.55 (10 %HR) - 0.3 (100 %HR)	Beagley, TM. et al. (1975) Wear 33
• Clean/Oil contamination	0.7 → 0.15	Beagley, TM. et al. (1975) Wear 31
• Temperature	0.5 (20°C) – 0.4 (30°C) – 0.25 (50°C)	Baek, K. et al. (2008) Wear 265

Standards

• EN 14363	0.36 (dynamic simulations)	0.49 (flange climbing)	
• USA	0.5 (flange climbing)		
• Japan	0.7 (accident measurement)		Matsumoto, A. et al. (2012) VSD 50

Creep forces and contamination

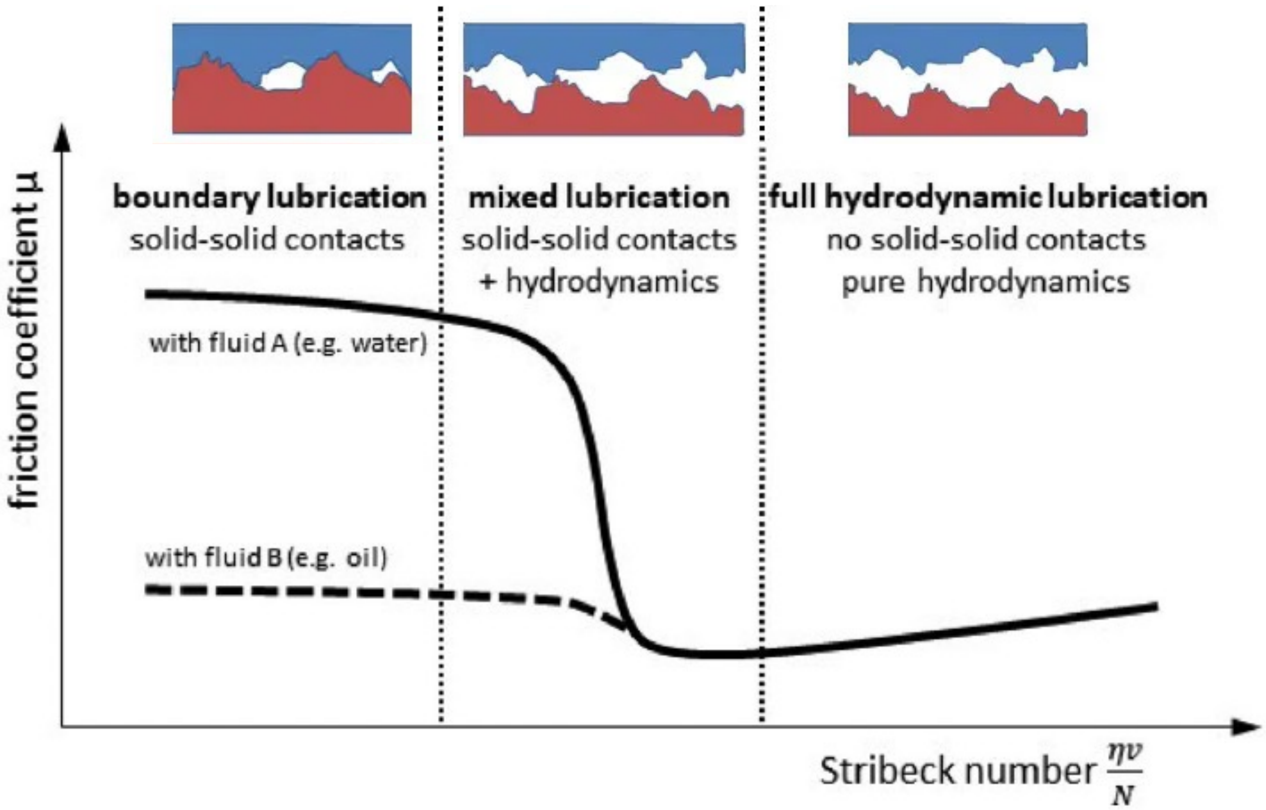




Vollebregt, E. (2021) VSD 59 (7) 1026

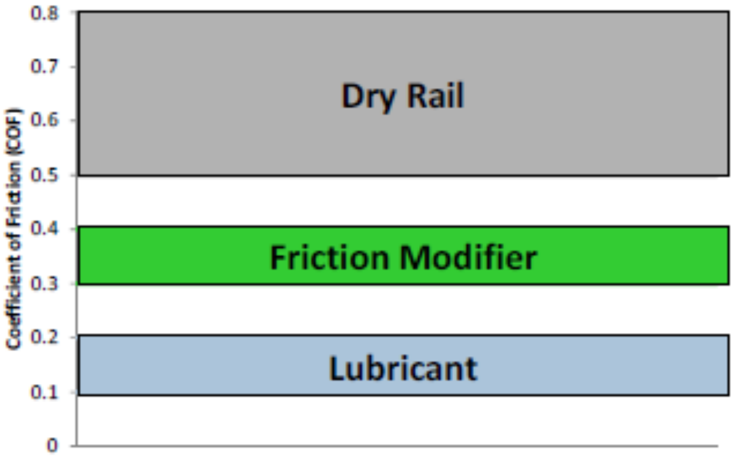
- Temperature
- Interfacial solid layers
- Fluids (water, oil, mixtures)

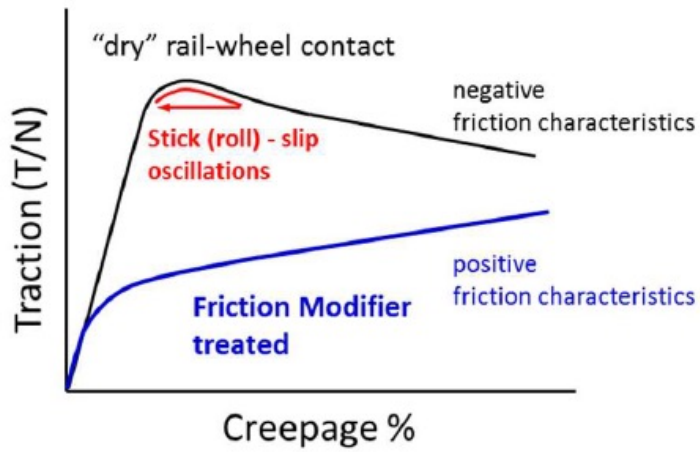
Coefficient of friction in fluid lubrication



Friction modifiers (FM)

- An additive that modifies the frictional properties of a lubricant.
- Goal: to provide one intermediate friction level and/or hold friction constant over a range conditions.

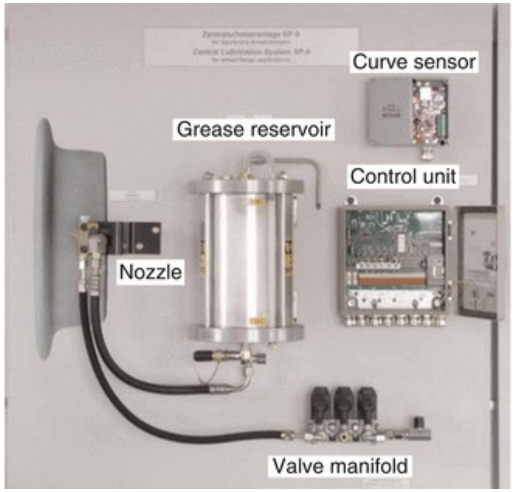




Friction management practices: FM classification

Wheel flange and rail gauge face and gauge corner

- Aim: to **reduce friction →** to reduce wear, damage, etc.
- Practice: wheel flange lubrication systems (on vehicle side) or wayside lubrication systems (on track side)



Friction management practices: FM classification

Wheel tread and top of the rail

Reduce friction

- Top of Rail Friction Modifiers (ToR-FM) μ : 0.5-0.7 → 0.3-0.4
- Aim: to reduce wear, damage, noise, energy consumption, etc.
- Attention: not to reduce the coefficient of friction to very small values → Braking and traction - SAFETY

Increase friction

- Adhesion or traction enhancers (sands and traction gels)
- Aim: to mitigate low adhesion and restore friction → Braking and traction - SAFETY

Friction modifiers drawback: liquid crack interaction

Test conditions: twin disc instrument at 1.5 GPa, 1% creep and 400 rpm

Studied cases:

(1) dry after 4,000 cycles;

(2) dry after 25,000 cycles;

(3) water after 25,000 cycles;

(4) TOR-FM after 25,000 cycles;

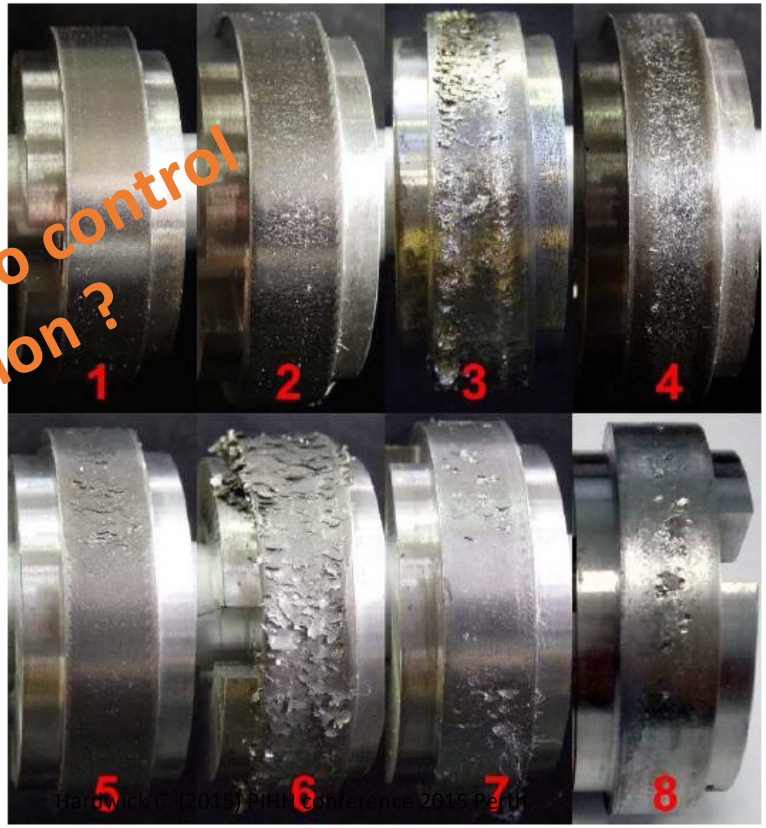
(5) GF lubricant after 25,000 cycles;

(6) TOR lubricant (oil) after 25,000 cycles;

(7) TOR lubricant (grease) after 25,000 cycles;

(8) TOR hybrid after 25,000.

Is still a good idea to control contact friction ?



Hardwick C. (2015) PIHH Conference 2015 Perth

Friction control in wheel-rail contacts

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

Alejandro Roda

Head Railway Testing Laboratory HOM

01.12.2025