

Moving Hydrogen through the UK Gas Distribution Network

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Abstract

We state the appropriate thermodynamic and transport properties to use for the delivery of hydrogen through pre-existing natural gas distribution networks. We show that the flow is not as fully-turbulent as past work has assumed, that hydrogen makes the flow even less turbulent, and that the pipe friction calculation requires more careful treatment in this partially-turbulent regime.

We propose that the relevant final energy demand is the energy delivered as heated water. The different dew points of the flue gases from hydrogen versus natural gas combustion affect the boiler efficiency. This impacts the relative amount of hydrogen required to be delivered.

We find that to deliver the same amount of useful energy as hot water, hydrogen requires a gas velocity of $3.076 \times$ and a pressure gradient that is $1.294 \times$ higher. The compression power increase required to deliver hydrogen through the low pressure network can be up to $7.8 \times$ that for natural gas.

Keywords: Hydrogen, pipe-flow, friction factor, natural gas, condensing boiler, gas velocity.

1. Introduction

A possible future for the UK gas network is to reuse parts of it to distribute hydrogen instead of natural gas[1, 2]. In recent years it has become apparent that reusing parts of the low pressure distribution grid is a very different problem from re-using the intermediate pressure distribution grid or the transmission grid[3, 4].

While a high pressure transmission system for hydrogen may be required in the UK[5], this would largely be new construction built in parallel with the existing natural gas National Transmission System. However parts of the intermediate and low pressure distribution system would be repurposed from natural gas to carry hydrogen.

These are the questions we want to answer:

1. Can the pipework carry enough hydrogen to match the amount of energy delivered to domestic housing?
2. What are the pressure and gas velocity differences?
3. How much extra energy would be required to deliver the hydrogen?

1.1. Bossel

An early attempt at these calculations was made by Bossel[6] but he considered pure methane, not natural gas,

through a transmission pipe with assumed fully-turbulent flow. In the distribution system non-linear friction effects become significant and the flow is not fully-turbulent. Models which have used Bossel's number are inaccurate for distribution and may not be quite right for transmission either, quite apart from considering the wrong gas.

2. Standard gas and reference conditions

Public data on the exact composition of natural gas in the UK national transmission system is sparse. There are regulatory limits on certain properties of the gas, including the Wobbe number, density, and calorific value under defined conditions.

	[mol/mol]		[mol/mol]
CH4	89.5514 %	iC5	0.0344 %
C2H6	5.1196 %	neoC5	0.0020 %
C3H8	1.3549 %	C6	0.2377 %
nC4	0.2162 %	CO2	2.0743 %
iC4	0.1269 %	N2	0.9354 %
nC5	0.3472 %		

Table 1: Composition of NG at Fordoun NTS on 20th Jan.2021.[7]

As a concrete example, this paper uses the composition of the gas taken directly from an 84 bar NTS transmission pipe at Fordoun (near Aberdeen) on 20 Jan.2021[7] as the composition of natural gas (NG).

This gas has 11 components: methane, ethane, propane, n-butane, iso-butane, n-pentane, iso-pentane, neo-pentane, hexane (including traces of higher hydrocarbons), carbon

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dioxide, and nitrogen. The Peng-Robinson equation of state can be used to calculate the average properties of this mixture[8]. The mixture has a molecular weight of 18.359 g/mol, a higher heating value of 940.813 kJ/mol and a density of 0.83556 kg/m³ at 8°C.

The conditions of the gas in the distribution network that were used for these and all other material properties are representative of gas in the Service Line pipe entering a UK home during winter. The temperature of the gas in the distribution network is not significantly different from that of the surrounding ground, and the ground temperature at the depth of the distribution network will be about 8° during the winter months on average[9]. The average pressure in the distribution network is taken to be 40 mbar above one atmosphere (1.05325 bar)[2, 10].

3. Delivering combustion energy through a pipe

In comparing the delivery of natural gas and hydrogen through a pipe system, the metric by which they must be evaluated is the delivery of the same heat to the consumer.

3.1. Molar Properties

When dealing with natural gas, quantities of the gas are often expressed either as mass, or volume at standard temperature and pressure. However as we are comparing different compressible gases (see Appendix B), both in the transport as well as the chemical reaction of combustion, we shall work in moles of gas. An ideal gas obeys the ideal gas law, equation (1).

$$P V_{ideal} = n R T \quad (1)$$

where n is the number of moles of gas, R is the ideal gas constant (8.3145 J/mol·K), P is the absolute pressure, and T is the absolute temperature.

We account for non-ideality of the gases by using the compressibility factor, Z , which is the ratio of the actual volume to that of an ideal gas under the same conditions:

$$Z = \frac{V_{real}}{V_{ideal}} \quad (2)$$

Z is related to the external conditions via the molar volume, the volume of one mole of gas, V_m , which is linearly proportional to Z by the conditions of the gas:

$$V_m = \frac{V_{real}}{n} = \frac{Z R T}{P} \quad (3)$$

3.2. Energy delivered

For the flow of a fuel through a pipe, such as the distribution system which supplies natural gas to domestic homes, the energy supply may be calculated by equation (4).

$$Q = A v \frac{[HHV]}{V_m} \eta = A v [HHV] \frac{P}{Z R T} \eta \quad (4)$$

Q , is the rate at which useful combustive energy is transferred along the pipe, in kJ/s. A is the cross section area of the supply pipe in m². v is the linear velocity of the gas in m/s, which is the parameter that may be controlled to modify the rate of energy transfer to account for differences between the two gases.

The important gas properties are the molar volume, V_m , in m³/mol, and the Higher Heating Value, [HHV], also called the heat of combustion, in kJ/mol. Lastly, η is the efficiency of combustion reactions of the gases within domestic boiler systems.

To calculate the difference in gas velocity required for hydrogen compared to natural gas, equation (4) is calculated for each gas¹ for the same value of Q , and then the ratio of the two gives equation (5). We are considering the two gases in the same section of the distribution system, thus the pipe cross section area A and the temperature T , which should be equal to the ground temperature, are not included as they will be the same for both gases.

$$\left(\frac{v_{H_2}}{v_{NG}} \right) = \frac{\left(\frac{Z_{H_2}}{Z_{NG}} \right)}{\left(\frac{[HHV]_{H_2}}{[HHV]_{NG}} \right) \left(\frac{P_{av,H_2}}{P_{av,NG}} \right) \left(\frac{\eta_{H_2}}{\eta_{NG}} \right)} \quad (5)$$

Equation (5) shows that there are four terms that affect how much more gas is needed when switching from natural gas to hydrogen, each given as a ratio:

1. Compressibility factors
2. Higher heating values (by mole)
3. Pipeline pressures (average)
4. Boiler efficiencies

We will look at each of these ratios and compare the relative magnitudes of their effects on the overall velocity ratio. Note that as this form uses the molar HHV, the effect of density has been confined to the compressibility factor.

3.3. Compressibility factor

The compressibility factor, Z , of any gas is a quantitative measure of its non-ideal behaviour. The temperature dependence of Z for hydrogen, natural gas, and pure methane is shown in Figure 1. The dependence on pressure is very slight for the narrow pressure range present in the distribution system[13, 1].

In the distribution pipework the compressibility factor of hydrogen is nearly constant at 1.0003 and the compressibility factor of natural gas is 0.997 at 8°C[8]. This means that the ratio of compressibility factors is $Z_{H_2}/Z_{NG} = 1.003$. This is a very small effect that is potentially within the uncertainty of other parameters in equation (5).

¹ The thermophysical data used in the paper come from NIST[11] and also from the CoolProp project[12] which publishes the algorithms as open source code.

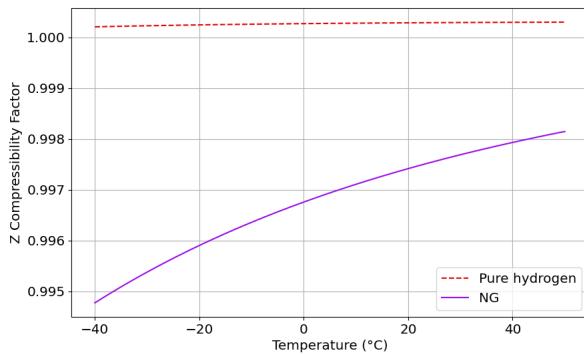


Figure 1: Plot of gas compressibility factors Z , showing the deviation from the ideal gas value of 1.0 calculated using the Peng-Robinson equation of state at 8°C[8].

3.4. Higher Heating Values [HHV]

Of these four terms in Equation (5), the HHV of the gases is the simplest as it is a molecular property that does not depend on the conditions of the gas. All Higher Heating Value data are by convention referred to a standard temperature and pressure of 25°C and 1 atm, i.e. close to room temperature. The HHV is the energy of the reaction in which the fuel and oxygen start at 25°C and 1 atm, are combusted, and then the sensible and latent heat of the combustion products is recovered as they are brought back down to 25°C and all the water is condensed[14]. The HHV of natural gas and hydrogen are shown in Table 2.

	HHV [kJ/mol]
H ₂	285.826
NG	940.813
ratio	0.304
reciprocal	3.292

Table 2: Higher Heating Values at 25°C and 1 atm.

A naive approximation to calculating the ratio of gas velocities may be made by assuming both gases to be close to ideal, the pressures close to atmospheric, and the boiler efficiencies to be the same for hydrogen and natural gas. Under these assumptions, then the velocity ratio would be equal to the reciprocal of the HHV ratio as shown in Table 2, and the velocity of hydrogen required to supply the same quantity of heat would be 3.292 × that of natural gas. Previous studies have published a value of 3.13 for this velocity ratio, because they did not use the correct values for natural gas[1, 6]. The major cause of this difference is the approximately 7% by mole of longer hydrocarbons in UK natural gas that raise the molar HHV significantly compared to pure methane (Table 1).

3.5. Average pressure

The average pressure in the distribution network will depend on the pressure drop in the delivery of the gas

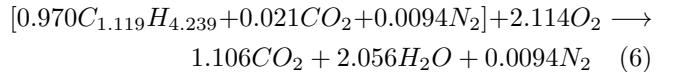
along the pipes, which in turn depends on the velocity of the gas. We are using the average pressure for natural gas as 40 mbar above atmospheric[10], but we require a value for hydrogen. This requires an iterative solution procedure which will be performed in Section 4.4, so for now we simply state the result, that the average pressure for hydrogen is 45.88 mbar above atmospheric. Therefore the ratio of average pressures is $P_{av,H_2}/P_{av,NG} = 1.0056$.

3.6. Boiler efficiency

The efficiency of a domestic boiler is highly dependent on the design and operation of each individual unit. Rather than attempt to quantify the diverse array of domestic boilers in use in the UK, we will instead look at how the *maximum possible efficiency* differs for hydrogen and natural gas, and assume that the operation relative to this maximum efficiency is comparable for the two fuels. This means we are not considering gas velocity or heat transfer within the heat exchanger section of the boiler. We categorise boilers into one of two different operating modes:

- A non-condensing boiler vents the flue gas, the products of the combustion, with all of the water still in the gas phase.
- A condensing boiler attempts to recover latent heat by condensing some of the water vapour into liquid water.

The HHV is the absolute maximum energy that may be obtained from the fuel so the boiler efficiency η will be relative to the HHV[15]. Furthermore, as the fuel is not burned in pure oxygen, there is sensible heat lost to heating up the nitrogen in the air. Also a boiler will typically operate with 15% excess air, to ensure complete combustion of the fuel[16]. Any heat which is not recovered by not condensing water vapour, and inlet and outlet gases not being at 25°C and 1 atm, is a reduction in efficiency[15].



The overall combustion reaction of one mole of the UK natural gas is given by equation (6), and the HHV of this reaction is 940.813 kJ/mol[14]. The list of reagents (fuel and air) and products of the combustion are shown in table 3. All of the combustible hydrocarbons have been combined into one pseudo-component[12] (see Appendix B), with a mole-averaged heat capacity of 37.276 kJ/mol·K[11] and the air is approximated as a mixture of 20.95% oxygen and 79.05% nitrogen²

²The weather-dependent humidity of the inlet air has an insignificant effect on the subsequent calculations, as does the small quantity of the pollutant NO_x produced in the combustion.

We reason that a condensing boiler operating with a 50° flue gas temperature has a higher possible maximum efficiency when using hydrogen fuel than when using natural gas, as the higher dew point temperature means it is more easily able to recover heat by condensing water vapour out of the gas phase. Conversely if this heat is *not* recovered by condensation, such as by an imperfectly controlled boiler, then the efficiency *decreases* significantly.

These calculations⁶ may be repeated for any specified flue gas exit temperature. If the temperature is above the dew point of the combustion then *all* of the latent heat of the water is lost. This data is plotted in Figure 2.

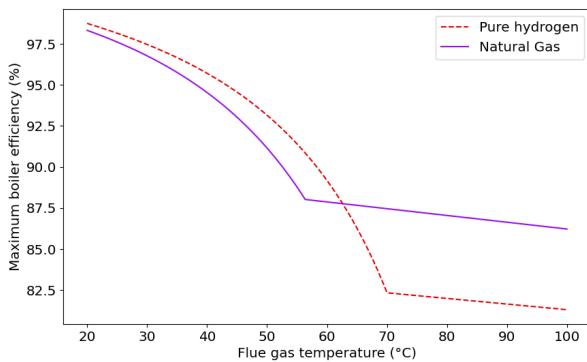


Figure 2: Maximum thermodynamic HHV efficiency of representative natural gas (blue) and hydrogen (red) combustion in 15% excess air as a function of the temperature to which the flue gas is cooled.

It can be seen that the lines for hydrogen and NG in Figure 2 intersect at 63°C. For a flue gas temperatures below this value, the hydrogen combustion has a *higher* maximum possible efficiency. For flue gas temperatures above this value, the hydrogen combustion has a *lower* maximum possible efficiency. The gradient of the efficiency curve above the dew point temperature⁷ represents the sensible heat loss by the heat capacity of the flue gas: much of this is the energy required to heat the nitrogen in the inlet air.

For equation (5), we require a ratio of the two efficiencies. If we assume that all the existing boilers are condensing, and that all of them are perfectly adjusted with a flow temperature of 50°C, then the efficiency ratio would be $\eta_{H_2}/\eta_{NG} = 1.027$. This parameter is placed on the denominator of equation (5), and so because hydrogen boilers are more efficient, the velocity ratio will be decreased by accounting for boiler efficiencies.

⁶ We have calculated dew points for 10 natural gas compositions, from Tokyo and the Netherlands to Algeria and the North Sea. The dew point temperatures range from 56.03 to 58.8°C[8].

⁷ In some published versions of this boiler characteristic, if the line to the right of the dew point is horizontal, it means that those authors have not calculated the sensible heat loss. As this can be up to a third of the potential latent heat loss, any results in such a publication should be treated with caution.

However, it is not sensible to assume that all existing boilers operate this optimally. We have data on how many piped-gas boilers in the UK are condensing, but we would need to make an assumption as to how this would change after conversion to pure hydrogen boilers. Current regulations[22] are that all new boilers must be condensing, so the population boiler efficiency ratio will change substantially purely from this, without including the extra benefit from having a higher-efficiency fuel. In addition, it is highly doubtful that all current condensing boilers are correctly set with a return flow temperature of 50°C whereas it is more likely that more of the new hydrogen boilers would be configured correctly. Appendix C calculates that an appropriate overall efficiency multiplier using 2022 data would be $\eta_{H_2}/\eta_{NG} = 1.067$.

3.7. Velocity ratio

Combining all of terms that have been calculated for equation (5) gives us, from equation (8), a value of 3.076 for the ratio of the velocities of hydrogen to natural gas through the same pipes.

- The ratio of compressibilities is 1.003, indicating that hydrogen is less dense than natural gas on a molar basis.
- The ratio of HHVs is 0.304, indicating that hydrogen produces significantly less energy when combusted than natural gas, on a molar basis.
- The ratio of average pressures is 1.0056. This value is determined iteratively from the velocity ratio in Section 4.4.
- The ratio of boiler efficiencies is 1.067, indicating that condensing boilers burning hydrogen combustion are more efficient than those burning natural gas.

$$\left(\frac{v_{H_2}}{v_{CH_4}} \right) = \frac{1.003}{0.304 \times 1.0056 \times 1.067} = 3.076 \quad (8)$$

This velocity ratio is very close to the reciprocal of the molar HHV ratio. The compressibility ratio and average pressure ratio each contribute less than 1% change to the velocity ratio. The largest secondary effect is the efficiency of condensing boilers.

These are the values for the Fordoun natural gas. We have also run the same calculations with other gas mixtures and there is no substantive difference in the results (details are listed in the software [8]).

4. Flow though pipes

We need a way of comparing the flow of hydrogen with the flow of natural gas through a pipe. There is a wide

choice of apparently useful equations⁸ available in the gas industry, but almost none are correct for hydrogen and few describe the range of flow regimes we need to understand.

We need to take a more fundamental approach. At the low pressure and narrow pressure range present in the distribution grid, the incompressible fluid approximation is accurate[18], so we should use the Darcy-Weisbach equation for the pressure drop along a pipe:

$$\Delta p = f \left(\frac{L}{D} \right) \frac{1}{2} \rho v^2 \quad (9)$$

where L is the length of the pipe, D the diameter of the pipe, v is the mean velocity of the gas, ρ the density, and f the Darcy friction factor.

The Darcy friction factor is a dimensionless parameter that determines the resistance to flow. It depends on the type of flow, or regime, that the fluid experiences.

The different flow regimes are separated by the relative importance of inertial and viscous forces. The ratio of these two behaviours is the Reynolds number, Re , which also serves as a dimensionless form of the velocity:

$$Re = \left(\frac{\rho v D}{\mu} \right) \quad (10)$$

where μ is the dynamic viscosity in Pa s.

Experimental results have shown that f always takes a value between 0.007 and 0.1, however its dependence on the Reynolds number is somewhat complex[23], and also depends on the pipe roughness.

4.1. Flow regimes

It is helpful to visualise the flow of fluids through pipes with the Moody diagram, see Figure 3. This relates the friction factor f against the Reynolds number Re and the pipe roughness ϵ/D , where ϵ is the absolute pipe roughness in m and D is the diameter of the pipe in m. This shows three regimes with different flow behaviour.

1. At the left-hand side of the Moody diagram is the laminar regime, which follows the analytical result of the Hagen-Poiseuille equation regardless of the roughness of the pipe (dotted line).
2. In the middle, between the laminar line (dotted) and the Piggot line (dash-dotted) there is the partially-turbulent regime. Most real gas distribution pipes operate in this regime.
3. At the right-hand side is the fully-turbulent regime, in which the friction factor depends only on roughness, and is independent of Re (horizontal lines to the right of the Piggot line).

⁸ Weymouth, Panhandle A, Panhandle B, Spitzglass, various 'power laws', Colebrook[23, 24]. Many of these are dimensionally inhomogeneous and use 'industry units' where conversion factors are embedded in the equation constants, or where the range of applicability is not at all obvious to the user.

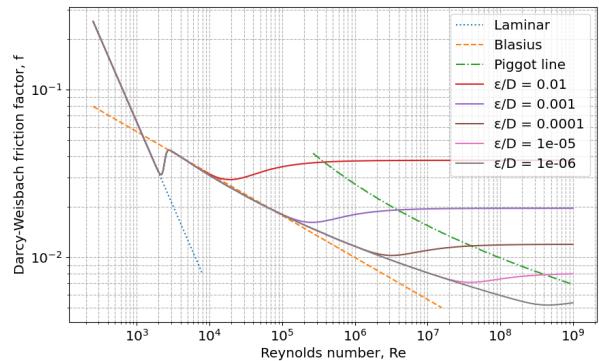


Figure 3: Moody diagram showing the friction factor as a function of the Reynolds number. The Piggot line marks the transition between inflectional- and fully-turbulent behaviour[25]. We use a modified Afzal equation[26] for the lines of different roughness as this is algebraically the most convenient of several which match the inflectional nikuradse behaviour[23, 27]

Figure 3 shows lines for pipes of different roughnesses⁹ for relative roughness values of 10^{-2} , 10^{-3} , 10^{-4} , and 10^{-5} .

The minimum visible at $Re \approx 2,300$ is where the flow transitions from laminar to turbulent[23].

4.2. Regimes in the distribution network

Distribution networks for natural gas¹⁰ are designed to run in the turbulent regime at peak design flow, with gas velocities in the range 8-12 m/s. A general guideline for all gas networks is that the gas velocity should be between 5 and 10 m/s and always less than 20 m/s to prevent erosive wear by dust particles[28, 29, 30].

The maximum Reynolds number expected within the transmission may be calculated from the natural gas properties, the maximum velocity of 20 m/s, and the maximum pipe diameter of 630 mm[31]. This is a value of $Re = 1.0 \times 10^6$, which is in the middle of the partially-turbulent regime, as per Figure 3.

At the other end of the scale is the domestic connection to the distribution network, which in the UK is typically a 35 mm tube of drawn copper, steel, or polyethylene[1]. A typical domestic boiler in the UK is rated at 30 kW[22, 32]. The energy supply equation (4), as well as the material properties used in Section 3.7, allows us to calculate that the gas velocity of natural gas in this situation is $v=0.838$ m/s, and the Reynolds number is $Re=2363$. This places the flow at the lower end of the partially-turbulent regime.

⁹There are at least 50 different semi-empirical equations which approximate the implicit Colebrook equation but these are simply mathematical fits and ignore the fact that the Colebrook equation itself does not describe experimental data to better than $\pm 15\%$ [23, 26, 24].

¹⁰Numerical evidence is from the Netherlands[28] as UK gas network data is now redacted by the regulator.

friction factor in this regime can be derived analytically from Poiseuille flow as:

$$f_{Lam} = \frac{64}{Re} \quad (15)$$

This may be used in place of equation (11) for expressions for the pressure drop ratio and the compressor power ratio in the laminar regime with different exponents on the 3 terms:

$$\left(\frac{\Delta P_{H_2}}{\Delta P_{NG}} \right)_{Lam} = \left(\frac{\rho_{H_2}}{\rho_{NG}} \right)^0 \left(\frac{\mu_{H_2}}{\mu_{NG}} \right)^1 \left(\frac{v_{H_2}}{v_{NG}} \right)^1 = 2.523 \quad (16)$$

4.6. Fully turbulent regime

At sufficiently high Reynolds number, flow enters the fully turbulent regime where f is independent of Re . For smooth drawn tubing with $(\epsilon/D) = 5 \cdot 10^{-5}$ this transition is at $Re = 3.5 \cdot 10^8$, determined by the Piggot relationship in equation (17).

$$\frac{3500}{\epsilon/D} = Re \quad (17)$$

The limiting value for these pipes is $f_{FT} = 0.009$. This may be also used in place of equation (11) to derive expressions for the ratios in the fully turbulent regime:

$$\left(\frac{\Delta P_{H_2}}{\Delta P_{NG}} \right)_{FT} = \left(\frac{\rho_{H_2}}{\rho_{NG}} \right)^1 \left(\frac{\mu_{H_2}}{\mu_{NG}} \right)^0 \left(\frac{v_{H_2}}{v_{NG}} \right)^2 = 1.035 \quad (18)$$

There is no reason to expect that this fully-turbulent regime can be achieved within the distribution network, however it is interesting to note that the pressure ratio between the gases is very close to 1.

4.7. General relationships

While the three sets of values derived above work well for cases in which the fluid regime is well defined, there are gaps between these regimes. The transition from laminar to partially turbulent behaviour is notoriously complex, however recent works have made an effort to understand this transition on a fundamental level[27, 24]. There is also a wide section of the partially-turbulent regime from $Re = 2 \times 10^5$ to 3.5×10^8 where the friction factor is not yet constant but also does not follow the Blasius equation. We hypothesise that much of the UK gas grid should be in this non-Blasius sub-regime.

Furthermore, replacing natural gas with hydrogen can change the flow regime entirely. In the service pipe modelled in section 4.2, the regime was partially turbulent with natural gas, yet switching to hydrogen resulted in laminar flow.

For the gas velocity change of $3.076 \times$ from natural gas to hydrogen, there is a Reynolds' number shift which depends on the relative velocity changes and also on the relative densities of hydrogen and natural gas:

$$\left(\frac{Re_{H_2}}{Re_{NG}} \right) = \frac{\left(\frac{\rho_{H_2}}{\rho_{NG}} \right) \left(\frac{v_{H_2}}{v_{NG}} \right)}{\left(\frac{\mu_{H_2}}{\mu_{NG}} \right)} = 0.4103 \quad (19)$$

Using the modified Afzal equation for the friction factor, the increase in pressure drop may be plotted against the any pipeline Reynolds number for natural gas in Figure 4. The Reynolds number for hydrogen will be $0.4103 \times$ the x-axis value, for the same pipe geometry, and this has been incorporated into the calculations.

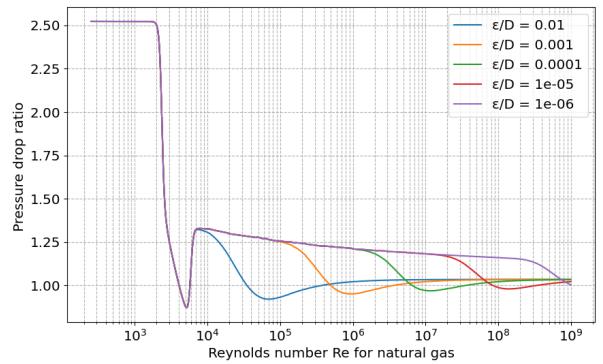


Figure 4: The increase in pressure drop as a function of the Reynolds number for natural gas, when replacing natural gas with hydrogen. The curves for the friction factor and compressor power follow the same trend, but are scaled by combinations of the ratios of density, viscosity, and velocity, which are independent of the Reynolds number.

Figure 4 shows that at locations and times where the natural gas flow is slower, there will be a proportionally larger increase in the pressure drop by switching to hydrogen. The dip below a value of 1 at $Re \approx 5 \times 10^3$ is where the switch to hydrogen causes the flow to change from turbulent to laminar, which can result in a decrease in the pressure drop in the pipe. However, as the transition from laminar to turbulent is effectively a time-average of an unstable switching between the two states, it is not practical to design systems to make use of this behaviour.

The increase in the compression power for hydrogen over natural gas has been noted by Schouten[28] and others, but only for fully-turbulent conditions. The increase in friction factor and the consequent further increase in compressor power required has not previously been recognised.

4.8. Compressor power

The pressure drop of a flowing fluid arises from frictional losses. The pumping power, W , required to overcome these losses for an incompressible fluid is the product of the pressure drop and the volumetric flow rate. In a pipe this is:

$$W = \Delta P \cdot v \cdot A \quad (20)$$

The proportional increase in the compression power requirement when switching from natural gas to hydrogen is therefore the ratio of this equation for the two gasses:

$$\left(\frac{W_{H_2}}{W_{NG}} \right) = \left(\frac{\Delta P_{H_2}}{\Delta P_{NG}} \right) \left(\frac{v_{H_2}}{v_{NG}} \right) \quad (21)$$

As we have shown, the velocity ratio is largely independent of the flow regime and depends mostly on the thermodynamics of combustion, this means that the ratio of compressor power follows the exact same trend as the ratio of pressure drop does in Figure 4, with the values all scaled up by the velocity ratio, 3.076.

We can calculate individual values for the three major regimes. In the Laminar regime $(W_{H_2}/W_{NG})_{Lam} = 7.76$, in the Blasius regime $(W_{H_2}/W_{NG})_{Blas} = 3.98$, and in the fully turbulent regime $(W_{H_2}/W_{NG})_{FT} = 3.19$. Even in the dip where the pressure ratio is less than one, the compressor power still increases by approximately $2.5\times$ due to the much faster gas velocity for hydrogen.

Since we expect the majority of the flow in the distribution network to be in the Blasius regime, this tells us that the energy required to deliver hydrogen through the distribution network will be $3.98\times$ greater than for natural gas.

5. UK distribution capabilities

Although the standard maximum pressure for the Low Pressure (LP) distribution grid is 75 mbar much of the older network runs at only 50 mbar [2] to reduce leakage, where this still gives adequate pressure (20 mbar) at the most distant user. This could be increased up towards the maximum 75 mbar level with new polyethylene pipe which is less prone to leaks[2].

The UK domestic gas demand[34] peaked in 2004 at 34,035 toe (tonne of oil equivalent, 1 toe is equal to 11.63 MWh) and in the most recent cold winter year (2021) it was 26,275 toe. This means that the network today can cope with an annual demand of natural gas at least 29.5% higher than it currently supplies. While it is possible that during the peak hourly demands of 2004 and 2021 this ratio was less than the annual ratio, we can only expect that this over-capacity will continue to grow into the future as more houses get insulated, upgraded or replaced and also due to climate change reducing the heating demand overall[35].

5.1. Other factors

Distributing hydrogen has other complexities that this paper does not address. These include maintaining the required concentration[3], Joule-Thompson cooling and the effects of retrograde liquid dropout[28], compressor issues[36], compatibility with tanks in CNG vehicles[37] and linepack[38].

6. Conclusions

While it is clear that burning hydrogen for heat in a boiler, or even in a combined heat and power cell, is almost a use of last resort[39, 40], there appear to be no pressure difficulties with delivering pure hydrogen using the existing UK distribution network. This paper shows that the velocity is similar to that which had previously been thought but that the pressure drop and power requirement are higher.

It has not previously been noted that:

- Burning hydrogen means that care must be taken to reduce the condensation temperature of the condensing boiler as much as possible because a greater proportion of the combustion energy is in the form of condensable water.
- Converting from natural gas to hydrogen reduces the Reynolds' number of the flow rather than increasing it.
- There is a slight effect of increasing the mean pressure, and thus the energy density, of the hydrogen because it requires a 29% higher pressure gradient to be delivered.
- The Blasius material parameter $\rho^{3/4} \cdot \mu^{1/4}$ has a very low temperature dependence, meaning that our conclusions on relative pressure drop and the relative compression power are largely insensitive to temperature whilst the Blasius equation holds.
- As well as the low pressure system investigated here in detail, we hypothesise that the Medium and Intermediate Pressure distribution pipes are operating for much of the time in the partially-turbulent regime.

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URL <https://www.nationalgas.com/insight-and-innovation/gas-ten-year-statement-gtys>
- [5] S. Samsatli, N. J. Samsatli, The role of renewable hydrogen and inter-seasonal storage in decarbonising heat comprehensive optimisation of future renewable energy value chains, Applied Energy 233-234 (2019) 854–893. doi:10.1016/j.apenergy.2018.09.159.

- T_c , the critical pressure P_c , and the *omega* coefficient (a measure of the molecule asphericity) of each pure gas.
2. the coefficient b of the mix is the weighted sum of the b values of the component gases, where the weights are the mole fractions.
 3. The temperature dependent binary interaction parameter k is calculated using the Courtinho method [45] from the b value of each gas in a pair. For an 11 component gas there are 55 pairwise interactions.
 4. The a values are calculated as the weighted sums of the geometric means of the pair-wise values of a between each pair of components. The weights are the mole fractions of each pair multiplied together, times the value $(1-k)$
 5. The effective T_c , P_c and *omega* of the natural gas, the pseudo-component, are calculated from the a and b values for the mix for the given temperature
 6. the compressibility and thus the density of the natural gas is calculated using the effective T_c , P_c and *omega* values.

The precise algorithm is in the code on GitHub [8].

The published paper is likely to be limited to 12 pages. The bibliography should compress slightly as the URLs get rendered more compactly in the final format.

Appendix G. Wobbe number and reference temperatures

At 15°C the Fordoun gas has a density of 0.81507 kg/m³, an HHV of 39.8902 MJ/m³, and a Wobbe number ¹⁵ of 49.97451 MJ/m³.

In the UK 15°C is the temperature for assessing allowable¹⁶ Wobbe limits[13, 47]. Wobbe values of fuel gases are sensitive to temperature via the effect of temperature on gas density and molar volume and the distinction between 15°C and the industry informal standard of 0°C is significant. However, despite ISO 13443, the 25°C reference heat of combustion always seems to be used in practice for Wobbe calculations. ¹⁷ .

This paper does not use Wobbe numbers in any of the calculations.

Appendix H. Laminar flow

If the gas velocity at night is sufficiently slow that both the natural gas and the hydrogen fall within the laminar flow regime, then the pressure drop is linear in both velocity and viscosity. The viscosity ratio is 0.8209 at 8°C and the velocity ratio, which is unchanged, is 3.076. Thus, the pressure drop ratio is 2.523 .

The compressor power required to deliver it will be the velocity ratio times the pressure drop ratio, i.e. 7.763× greater.

Ratios for H2/NG	
velocity	3.076 ×
pressure drop	2.523 ×
power reqd.	7.763 ×

Table H.6: Laminar flow – at 8 C

Appendix I. Lower Heating Value (LHV) and process heat

Some users on the distribution network use gas for process heat; for an oven, furnace or kiln. Replacing natural gas with hydrogen for these users means that the velocity factor, the ratio of the gas velocity for hydrogen and natural gas, is the ratio of the gases' LHV in kJ/m³.

There is no generally agreed way of defining LHV unless the exit temperature of the flue gas is specified. If

¹⁵The Fordoun gas is thus centrally within the regulatory limits.

¹⁶The multiplicity of “standard reference conditions” of temperature, pressure and humidity (state of saturation) used in the measurement of natural-gas quality and quantity can cause much confusion’, ISO 13443[46]

¹⁷ ISO 13443 defines standard reference conditions of 15°C and 1.01325 bar for use with natural gases and natural gas substitutes. ISO 6976 was substantially revised in 2016 and data, especially Wobbe data, from papers published before then should not be re-used without being re-evaluated[47]

the latent heat of the water is simply subtracted from the HHV, that is equivalent to saying that the flue gas exits at 25°C which would be quite wrong. For a bread oven it would be about 190°C whereas a pottery kiln could be up to 1,400°C (though in that case the flue gases should, one would hope, go into a heat recovery system and also be used to dry wet clay).

Appendix J. Mean pressure corrections

In the main paper we have shown that the pressure drop of the hydrogen in the distribution pipe is affected by the required velocity of the hydrogen, but also that the velocity is slightly modified by the mean pressure, which depends on the pressure drop. Because this dependence is slight we have been able to iterate to find an exact solution - always with the assumption that the whole pipe is experiencing the same flow regime.

However we have implicitly assumed that the pressure gradient along the pipe is linear by assuming that the mean pressure is half-way along the pipe and that that is representative of the average behaviour of the gas. This is not true, even for ideal gases.

For the service pipe with pressures below 75 mbar this correction is slight, but for intermediate pressure distribution pipes at 7 bar the correction should be calculated more accurately.

At steady state there is the same amount of gas entering the pipe as leaving, so if the pressure (and thus density) is higher at the inlet (as it must be), the velocity must be greater at the exit where the pressure (and density ρ) is lower. For an ideal gas the product ρv is a constant: as the pressure drops and the density drops (linearly), the velocity must increase. The gas accelerates as it flows through the pipe. The Reynolds' number is proportional to ρv , which is a constant along the pipe so, for an ideal gas, the friction factor is also constant along the pipe.

But according to the Darcy-Weisbach relation (equation 9) the pressure gradient at any point is proportional to ρv^2 , so as the velocity increases, the local pressure drop at each point increases. This means that the local pressure along the pipe is a monotonic, convex curve: it is flatter at the higher pressure inlet end. The point at which the pressure drops to the mid-point of the pressures at each end is not the middle of the pipe, but some way towards the exit end, perhaps 2/3 of the way along. This can be solved analytically, but to be accurate we need to take into account the compressibility of the gas which itself depends on the absolute pressure. So more than half the gas in the pipe is experiencing a higher pressure than the assumption made in the paper for the service pipe, so the gas is on average a little denser, so the mean velocity a little lower than we calculated.

If the local pressure drop $\delta P/\delta x$ were the same at every point along the pipe (assumption), then the local increment of velocity would be the same all along the pipe

and the would be the same all along the pipe. But as we have seen, the local pressure drop increases along the pipe. So the gas does not just accelerate, its rate of acceleration increases along the pipe. [[[rephrase this, it is backwards]]]

Appendix K. 16km visualisation

A way of visualising the network characteristics is to imagine a single 110 mm diameter pipe carrying the natural gas with 75 mbar pressure at one end and 20 mbar pressure at the other with a velocity of 1.73 m/s¹⁸ and $Re = 11,849$. We use the Darcy-Weisbach equation (equation (9)) and rearrange to get

$$Length = \left(\frac{2 \cdot \Delta P}{0.079} \right) \cdot \rho^{-3/4} \cdot \mu^{-1/4} \cdot v^{-5/4} \cdot D^{5/4} \quad (K.1)$$

$$\Delta P = (75 - 20)/1000 \text{ bar}$$

$$\rho^{-3/4} = (0.84148)^{-3/4} \rho : (\text{kg/m}^3)$$

$$\mu^{-1/4} = (10.37391 \cdot 10^{-6})^{-1/4} \mu : (\mu\text{Pa.s})$$

$$v^{-5/4} = (1.7323)^{-5/4} v : (\text{m/s})$$

Solving this we find that this pipe would be about 16 km long .

If we imagine that this was representative of the UK gas demand in 2004, then in 2021 the reduced amount of gas (77.2%) would mean that the velocity would reduce in proportion and the pressure drop would reduce. So if the high pressure end was maintained at 75 mbar the pressure at the low pressure exit would rise to 40.03 mbar.

If we now replaced the gas with pure hydrogen delivering the same useful energy flowing at $3.076 \times$ the velocity then the pressure at the domestic end would be 29.7 mbar with a Reynolds' number of 4,868. So with hydrogen, even though it requires a higher pressure drop, this example network would still have 'headroom' of 9.7 mbar above the domestic exit limit of 20 mbar.

Appendix L. UK Boilers in yet more detail

The gradient of the condensation curve of Figure 2 is shown in Fig. L.7. For a hydrogen boiler, the increase in efficiency per degree cooling peaks at 0.009 %/K at the dew point.

Appendix L.1. Enriched air

Burning a fuel in pure oxygen always gives a slight benefit of efficiency because the heat loss in the sensible heat of hot nitrogen is avoided, but this is rarely worth doing for the slight extra efficiency. However in a condensing boiler, removing some of the nitrogen significantly shifts the dew point of the flue gas thus a much greater leverage on the efficiency is achieved.

¹⁸ This is the gas velocity when the domestic meter maximum of 6 m³/s of gas is delivered to a single household through a 35 mm pipe.

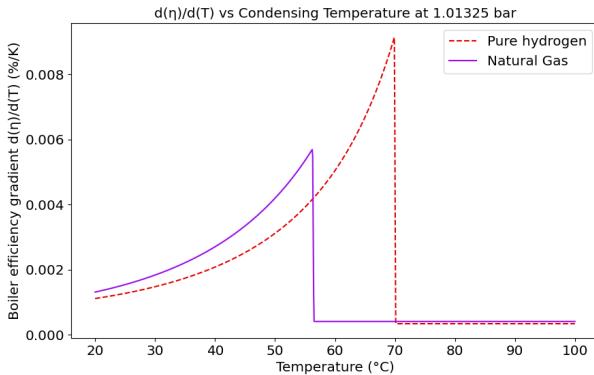


Figure L.7: How the efficiency of the boiler changes for each degree that the condensation temperature reduces.

This would have the effect of reducing the return flow temperature in the heating system without having to modify the radiator circuit. This has a greater effect for hydrogen fuel than for natural gas: shifting the dew point 10°C could increase the efficiency from 82.4% to 89.4%, a very substantial benefit.

Commercially available domestic oxygen concentrators are now available for medical support, and it would be interesting to see whether a new condensing boiler could be designed to use this technology effectively.

Appendix L.2. Published boiler efficiencies

Boiler efficiency[33] is measured either in a test rig at steady-state load, or estimated as a seasonal average as installed in a house with a typical daily heating cycle and weather pattern. Repeated on- and off-periods increase losses[15]. Boiler manufacturer published efficiency values may be legally-required in some jurisdictions to be a seasonally-adjusted average number.

Appendix L.3. Hydrogen upgrade boiler controls

When considering a transformation to 100% hydrogen, every boiler will require replacement or systemic upgrade, and it would be reasonable to expect that as well as setting correct return temperatures, modern weather-compensating controls¹⁹ would be installed at the same time. This would have a dramatic effect on the energy demand of the UK housing stock and significantly reduce the quantity of hydrogen required over the year - though not on cold days during peak demand hours.

¹⁹ Weather compensation uses an external thermometer reading to reduce the flow temperature of a boiler on mild days. It can reduce annual fuel requirements by reducing the return flow temperature, the condensation temperature, optimally every day. But it has no effect on the peak demand on the coldest days.

Appendix L.4. Dew point and steam tables

There are several explicit formulae which model the vapour pressure of water as a function of temperature, but the dew point temperature is very sensitive to slight inaccuracies. For example, the commonly used Antoine equation would get the dew point incorrect by nearly 2°C.

In our work we use the Sonntag method[18].

Appendix L.5. Solubility of Carbon Dioxide

There is one extra effect which means that the Higher Heating Value for natural gas is a very slight underestimate of what is achievable.

The standard heat of combustion is derived assuming that the resultant gases are in their standard state at 25°C and one atmosphere. For CO_2 this will not be true: in a condensing boiler some of the CO_2 will preferentially dissolve in the condensing water and this is (overall) an exothermic reaction generating more heat.

The solubility of CO_2 is about 0.004% mole fraction[48] at 20°C and at a partial-pressure of 0.09 bar (8.94% mol/mol in Table 3), and it is less soluble at higher temperatures, so the effect on the HHV is very small.

In a boiler burning pure hydrogen, there is no effect as there is no CO_2 .

Appendix L.6. Boiler overcapacity

There is likely to be significant heating capacity headroom with existing domestic boilers, which are almost invariably oversized[32] ²⁰ as shown in Fig L.8.

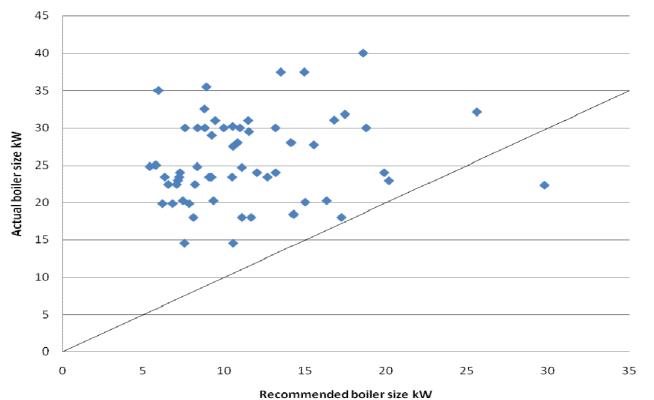


Figure L.8: Example data from the Energy Saving Trust[22] illustrating that nearly all UK boilers are oversized.

However this tells us little about whether the Service Line low pressure distribution network is oversized.

²⁰Where domestic heating is inadequate, this is almost invariably due to inappropriate ventilation, piping, radiators or controls.

Appendix M. 20% Hydrogen in Natural Gas

UK standards state that boilers installed since 1996 must be capable[3] of combusting up to 23% hydrogen. However when burning 100% hydrogen, the internals of the boiler would need to be significantly changed because of flame velocity issues.

When considering hydrogen being introduced as a partial blend into the gas network, it is appropriate to assume that the population of boilers will require no systemic maintenance or upgrades if the percentage of hydrogen is 20% or less as this is the purpose of limiting the addition to 20%.

All efficiency calculations of properly adjusted condensing boilers assume that the heat exchanger is perfect, with all water condensed at the reflow temperature. In reality there will be an additional loss. When adding hydrogen, the velocity of the *flue* gas increases by an amount which is quite different from the increase in velocity of the *fuel* gas. This increased flue gas velocity is likely to degrade the efficiency of the the exchanger through these opposing effects:

1. Increased shear at the exchanger walls[33] increases heat transfer rate,
2. Decreased residence time of the flue gas in the heat exchanger

It is the second of these which is likely to be the more significant effect. So for a fixed exchanger geometry and return water flow, the flue gas exit temperature will be higher when burning some hydrogen.

Therefore while in principle we might attempt to estimate the change in efficiency of the entire boiler population, we cannot actually estimate the effect on the flue gas heat exchanger without experimental data.

Thus we should expect that a pure hydrogen boiler would need a redesigned, longer heat exchanger for the flue gas exit temperature to be the same as it would be for a natural gas boiler.

Therefore, although the maximum possible efficiency for a condensing boiler increases when the fuel is switched to hydrogen, the actual operating efficiency will be very dependent on individual heat exchanger parameters[20, 22].

Appendix N. Annual power requirement

Appendix N.1. annual average

There is no good public data on the energy used to compress natural gas across the UK transmission network. The distribution network is entirely passive: there are no compressors, only pressure reduction systems. So the compression energy calculated here for the distribution system will actually be supplied by compressors on the transmission system.

UK gas demand has vast daily and seasonal variations. There is perhaps only 10% of the demand at night, during

the summer, and there is a substantial dip in the middle of the day even in winter.

While the peak gas demand is well documented, much of the gas, perhaps half, will be delivered when the gas velocity is much lower than at peak. However, the instantaneous relationships between the flow of natural gas and the flow of hydrogen still holds (so long as all flows are within the Reynolds' number range of the Blasius flow) so the annual energy cost of delivering hydrogen over delivering natural gas will be $3.980 \times$.

A fortunate consequence is that these values decrease as the Reynolds number decrease, thus the largest increases to the pressure and compressor power occur at the locations where the flow is already slow, and thus have the lowest pressures and frictional losses. This decrease in Re means an increase in f , however the reduction in velocity means that the power requirement overall drops. But the energy requirement to deliver a fixed amount of gas increases.

Appendix N.2. Pressures of UK gas pipelines

This paper only considers the low pressure and service pipes.

		(bar)
Transmission	Transmission	70–94
Distribution	High Pressure	7.0–30.0
	Intermediate Pressure	2.0–7.0
	Medium pressure	0.075–2.0
	Low pressure	< 0.075
Service	Building connections	> 0.019, < 0.075

Table N.7: Pressures of UK gas pipelines[1]

Also, in 2023 there is new technology available to automatically vary the pressure at the governors at the higher-pressure end of the LP pipes such that it is as low as possible, consistent with good service[10]. There are more than 26,000 of these governors in the UK network and the majority of them are currently set manually or by clock mechanisms. Thus recent technology developments are expected to ease considerably the management of a 100% hydrogen service with existing pipes.

Appendix N.3. Leaks

The generally expected result of changing from natural gas to hydrogen is an increase in the volume of gas leaked, because of the lower viscosity and slightly higher pressure with hydrogen, but a lower loss of combustive energy.

Leaks are through small holes or planar cracks. Given this geometry, leaks (especially of hydrogen) will have very low Reynolds' numbers and will be in the laminar flow regime if they are long and deep, otherwise they will be in the orifice-flow regime[49].

Since slow leaks will be laminar for both natural gas and hydrogen, but the pressure increase for hydrogen reflects the flow in the pipe, which is likely to be in the

Blasius regime, it is possible to calculate the differential effect of hydrogen leaks compared with natural gas leaks.

Appendix O. Modified Afzal friction factor

There are several formulae which have been constructed to fit the Nikuradse experimental data for pipes of different sand-grain roughness at Reynolds' numbers just above the transition from laminar flow. The best known is 'Virtual Nikuradse' [50] but this is computationally over-complex and some implementations fail to converge to the correct high-Reynolds' values. The Afzal equation [51] is simpler, but does not cover behaviour at lower Reynolds' numbers than the Blasius line.

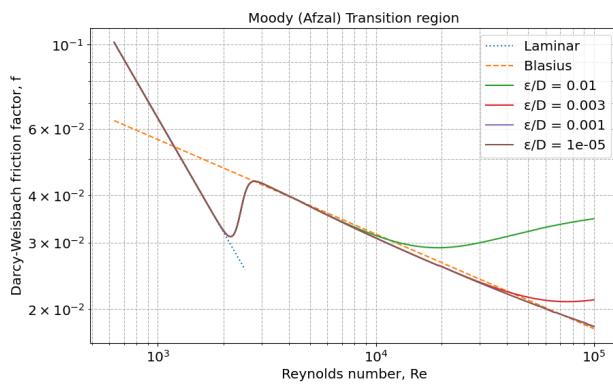


Figure O.9: Darcy-Weisbach friction factor - Modified Afzal

We use the Afzal equation as the basis for our Moody plot and Pressure drop ratio figures by making the following additions:

1. Where the Afzal line crosses the Blasius line, the modified Afzal is merged into the Blasius line over a range of Reynolds' numbers by taking the geometric mean of the two lines.
2. Over the transition range to laminar behaviour, the modified-Afzal (now Blasius) line is merged into the laminar relationship with a logistic smoothing function.

This gives a computationally smooth line which can be numerically differentiated and where the ratio of a hydrogen to natural gas lines can be computed without numerical artefacts. However the shape over the laminar-turbulent transition is only approximate and this version of the function has not been fitted to experimental data.

Appendix P. Darcy-Weisbach Reynolds-Blasius material parameter

See Figure P.10 to see that the Darcy-Weisbach Reynolds-Blasius material parameter 'B' (when normalised by the values for natural gas) varies by less than 1.2% over the

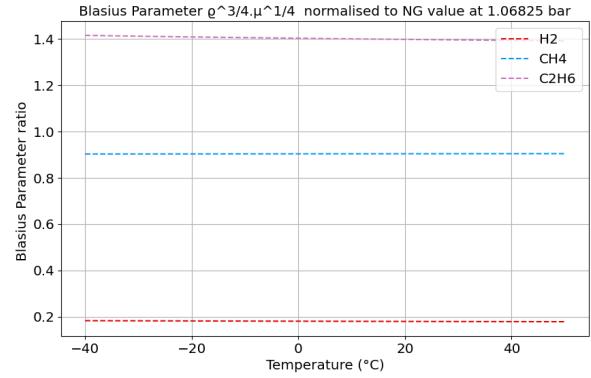


Figure P.10: Ratio of Darcy-Weisbach-Reynolds-Blasius material parameter to that of natural gas NG

temperature range. However, when considering pressures of 4 and 7 bar (5 and 8 bar absolute), the assumption of nearly-ideal behaviour does not hold. The properties of the gas are not nearly linear, so one can not assume that the behaviour along a pipe can be treated as a simple average of the behaviour at each end.

Blasius Parameter $\rho^{3/4}\mu^{1/4}$ normalised by the value for natural gas (Table 1) between -40.0°C and 50.0°C

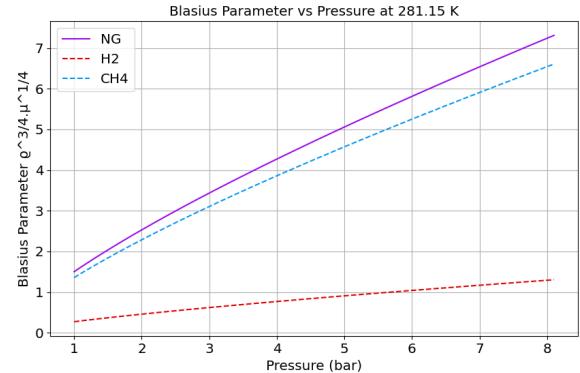


Figure P.11: Darcy-Weisbach-Reynolds-Blasius material parameter depends on pressure

Appendix Q. Flow at the turbulent transition

Appendix Q.1. Hydrogen and Natural Gas comparative behaviour

If we look at how the friction factor changes when natural gas is replaced by hydrogen we get the family of curves in Figure Q.12.

When the velocity increases by a factor of 3.076 the Reynolds number decreases by a factor of 0.4103, at the pressure and temperature of the distribution service pipe.

When the flow is so low that both gases are in the laminar regime then the ratio of friction factor is a steady $2.4\times$ higher for hydrogen than for natural gas. At large Reynolds'

where the coefficients A and B are defined by (Q.5) in terms of the roughness ratio $r=\epsilon/D$:

$$A = 30 + 8.8r + 7.1r^2 + 2.4r^3 \quad (Q.5)$$

$$B = 550 + 33r^2$$

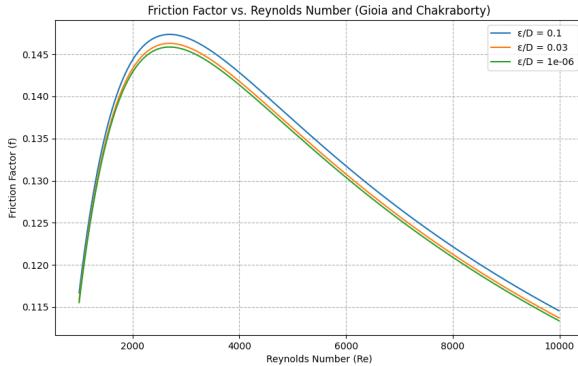


Figure Q.15: Friction factor for all pipe roughnesses at the turbulent transition.

However Brackbill has shown that the critical Reynolds' number is roughness dependent (Figure 9 in[53]) and since 2018 it is now known that this is due to the time-average of laminar, slug and flash flow [26].

The Colebrook equation (Q.6) does not represent the nikuradse 'hump' and 'belly' which recent research at Princeton and Okinawa shows is real.

$$\frac{1}{\sqrt{f}} = -2.0 \log_{10} \left(\frac{(\epsilon/D)}{3.71} + \frac{2.51}{Re\sqrt{f}} \right) \quad (Q.6)$$

The Goldenfeld equation (Q.7) illustrates the form that any physically reasonable model should conform to [27].

$$f = Re^{1/4} \cdot g(Re^{3/4}, \epsilon/D) \quad (Q.7)$$

It should be observed that none of the semi-empirical curve fits of Colebrook, Afzal, Swarmee etc. conform.

"The nikuradse data show four features: a hump, the Blasius regime, a shallow minimum, and the Strickler regime. The scaling argument presented here implies that the Blasius and Strickler regimes are both manifestations of inertial range scaling coupled with wall friction, and, indeed, Gioia and Chakraborty[52] find from momentum flux considerations that this is sufficient to reproduce the Blasius and Strickler regimes." [27]

Appendix R. Piping design rules

The design rules[31] for expected pressure drop along polythene pipe have a power law exponent of 1.17. This matches none of the theories referenced in this paper.

Flow Charts for Low Pressure Polyethylene Gas Pipelines

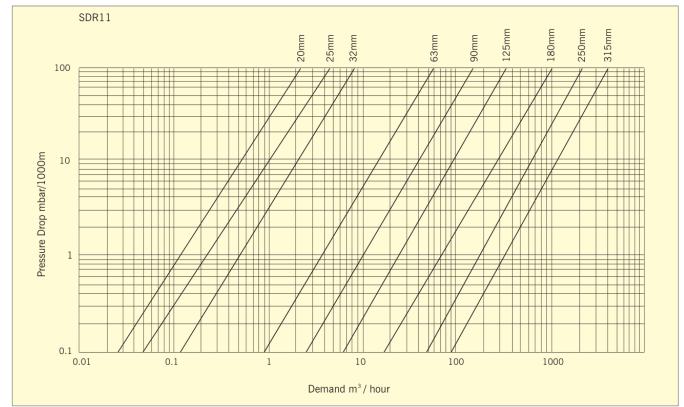


Figure R.16: Design rules for specifying PE gas pipelines

The dimensions of the pipe are the outside diameters. The SDR11 specification is that a 32mm OD pipe has an internal bore of 25.8mm.

Appendix S. Modelling Background

High-level economic models of hydrogen deployment use quite different, less detailed calculations for how hydrogen flows in an existing network than do detailed engineering designs.

These broad-brush models can unwittingly promote inaccurate intuitions which are not mere matters of detail. While it is true that pure hydrogen requires a volumetric flow rate nearly 3× that of natural gas to provide the same combustion power, it is not true that this requires pipelines 3× the size, or running an existing pipeline at 3× the pressure.

A techno-economic model needs simple formulae to describe technology choices. Unfortunately the voluminous technical literature on the delivery of hydrogen through pipes does not always present the results in a form that can be used, or even understood, by techno-economic modellers.

Appendix S.1. Policy making

Techno-economic models need to evaluate required equipment capability at peak demand as this determines the capital expenditure. They also need to calculate the mean throughput over each year as this determines the running costs, e.g. the annual energy requirement for pumping hydrogen. But rather than central values for each of these, a policy-relevant model would produce upper and lower bounds. This means that upper and lower bounds on the friction values of hydrogen flows are useful, even if (as is the case) the actual turbulent behaviour is uncertain.