Electrostatic Conveyer for Excitons

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We report on the study of indirect excitons in moving lattices—conveyers created by a set of ac voltages applied to the electrodes on the sample surface. The wavelength of this moving lattice is set by the electrode periodicity, the amplitude is controlled by the applied voltage, and the velocity is controlled by the ac frequency. We found the dynamical localization-delocalization transition for excitons in the conveyers and determined its dependence on exciton density and conveyer amplitude and velocity.

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An indirect exciton is a bound pair of an electron and a hole confined in spatially separated layers. Because of their long lifetimes, indirect excitons can travel over large distances before recombination [1–10]. Furthermore, indirect excitons have a built-in dipole moment $\vec{d}$, where $d$ is the separation between the electron and hole layers, so their energy can be controlled by voltage: an electric field $F_z$ normal to the layers results in the exciton energy shift $U = edF_z$ [11]. This gives an opportunity to create in-plane potential landscapes for excitons $U(x, y) = edF_z(x, y)$ by laterally modulated voltage $V(x, y)$. Excitons were studied in a variety of electrostatically formed potential landscapes: ramps [1,7], lattices [12–16], traps [15,17–20], and circuit devices [21–24]. In this Letter, we present an excitonic conveyer—a moving lattice created by a set of ac voltages. The excitonic conveyer realizes controlled transport of excitons as charged coupled devices (CCD) realize controlled transport of electrons [25].

Moving potential lattices can be created by surface acoustic waves (SAW). Transport of excitons, exciton-polaritons, and laterally separated electrons and holes via SAW is intensively studied [26–29]. The transport velocity in this case is defined by the sound velocity of SAW propagation $\sim 3 \mu m/\mu s$. In contrast, the velocity of the electrostatic excitonic conveyer can be controlled by the ac frequency and can be from well below to well above the sound velocity.

The indirect excitons are created in a GaAs coupled quantum well structure (CQW) grown by molecular beam epitaxy [Fig. 1(a)]. An $n^+$-GaAs layer with $n_{GaAs} = 10^{18} \text{cm}^{-3}$ serves as a homogeneous bottom electrode. Two 8 nm GaAs QWs separated by a 4 nm Al$_{0.33}$Ga$_{0.67}$As barrier are positioned 0.1 $\mu m$ above the $n^+$-GaAs layer within an undoped 1 $\mu m$ thick Al$_{0.33}$Ga$_{0.67}$As layer. Positioning the CQW closer to the homogeneous electrode suppresses the in-plane electric field [15], which otherwise can lead to exciton dissociation [12].

The conveyer potential is created by a set of semitransparent 1 $\mu m$ wide 120 nm thick indium tin oxide (ITO) electrodes on the sample surface. The distance between the electrode centers is 2 $\mu m$, the conveyer periodicity is 7 electrodes, and the wavelength of the conveyer potential is $\lambda_{\text{conv}} = 14 \mu m$. The conveyer electrodes are covered by a...
layer of transparent insulation (300 μm thick SiO2). A set of connecting electrodes (10 μm wide, 300 nm thick ITO) provides the contacts to the conveyer electrodes through 1 × 10 μm etched openings in the insulating layer [Fig. 1(b)]. The conveyer length is 380 μm, width is 80 μm.

The sample mounts in a He cryostat at 1.7 K. ac voltages to the conveyer electrodes are applied by coaxial cables with impedance-matching termination at the sample. The regime, where the indirect excitons have lower energy than spatially direct excitons in the CQW, is realized by dc bias $V_{\text{bias}} = 4$ V supplied separately [30]. A set of differentially phase-delayed ac sine waves at frequency $f_{\text{conv}}$ creates a traveling potential lattice for indirect excitons—the excitonic conveyer. The amplitude of the conveyer potential for indirect excitons $A_{\text{conv}}$ is controlled by the applied voltage [30]. The conveyer velocity is controlled by the ac frequency $v_{\text{conv}} = A_{\text{conv}}/f_{\text{conv}}$.

The excitons are photoexcited by 788 nm Ti:sapphire laser focused to a spot ≈5 μm in diameter. The exciton density is controlled by the laser excitation power $P_{\text{ex}}$. Photoluminescence (PL) images of the exciton cloud are taken by a CCD with a bandpass filter 810 ± 5 nm covering the spectral range of the indirect excitons. The diffraction-limited spatial resolution is 1.4 μm. The spectra are measured using a spectrometer with resolution 0.18 meV.

Figures 1(c)–1(f) show x-y and x-energy PL images for conveyer off and on. The PL intensity profiles $I(x)$, obtained by the integration of the x-energy images over the emission wavelength, are shown in Figs. 1(g) and 1(h). Exciton transport via conveyer is presented by the extension of the exciton cloud along the direction of the moving potential. We quantify it by the first moment of the PL intensity $M_1 = \int x I(x) dx/\int I(x) dx$, which characterizes the average transport distance of indirect excitons via conveyer. The spectrally broad emission at $x = 0$ [Figs. 1(e) and 1(f)] and sharp peak in $I(x)$ [Figs. 1(g) and 1(h)] originate from the bulk GaAs in the structure. To remove the contribution from the bulk, the shaded area is not included in the calculation of $M_1$ in the analysis of exciton transport.

Figure 2 presents exciton transport via conveyer as a function of the conveyer amplitude $A_{\text{conv}}$. For a shallow conveyer, the exciton cloud extension $M_1$ is not affected by the conveyer motion indicating that the excitons do not follow the moving lattice, i.e., are dynamically delocalized in the lattice [Fig. 2(a)]. In contrast, at higher conveyer amplitudes, excitons are moved by the moving lattice, i.e., are dynamically localixed in the lattice. At the dynamical localization-delocalization transition (DLDT), the exciton cloud starts to follow the conveyer and $M_1$ changes from constant to increasing with $A_{\text{conv}}$. We define the conveyer amplitude at the DLDT, $A_{\text{conv}}$, as the point where the extrapolation of the growth of $M_1$ to small $A_{\text{conv}}$ becomes equal to the low-$A_{\text{conv}}$ constant. The DLDT is a dynamical counterpart of the LDT for excitons in static lattices [16].

The control of $f_{\text{conv}}$ gives an opportunity to study exciton transport via conveyers and, in particular, the DLDT as a function of the conveyer velocity. Figure 2 shows that exciton transport via conveyer is less efficient for higher $v_{\text{conv}}$. In particular, $A_{\text{conv}}$ increases with $v_{\text{conv}}$.

The control of $P_{\text{ex}}$ gives an opportunity to study exciton transport via conveyers as a function of the exciton density. Figure 3(a) shows that excitons are hardly moved by the conveyer at low densities, efficient exciton transport via conveyer is achieved at intermediate densities, and exciton transport via conveyer becomes less efficient at high densities.

The following nonlinear partial differential equation was used to model in-plane transport of indirect excitons subject to the applied conveyer potential $U_{\text{conv}}(x)$:

$$\frac{\partial n_x}{\partial t} = \nabla[D_x \nabla n_x + \mu_x n_x \nabla(u_0 n_x + U_{\text{conv}})] + \Lambda - \frac{n_x}{\tau_{\text{opt}}},$$

The first term in square brackets in Eq. (1) accounts for exciton diffusion; $D_x$ is the diffusion coefficient. The second term accounts for exciton drift due to the dipole-dipole exciton interaction, which is approximated by $u_0 n_x$ [31,32], and the conveyer potential $U_{\text{conv}} = e d F_z(x) = e d \frac{\partial}{\partial z} V(r)$, where voltage $V(r)$ originates from the voltage applied to the conveyer electrodes $V_{\text{conv}}(x)$. The mobility $\mu_x$ is given by the generalized Einstein relationship

![FIG. 2](color online). (a) The average transport distance of indirect excitons via conveyer $M_1$ as a function of the conveyer amplitude, $A_{\text{conv}}$. Lines are a guide to the eye, $A_{\text{conv}}$ is the line intersection. (b) The measured (points) and calculated (triangles) $A_{\text{conv}}$ versus the conveyer velocity. $P_{\text{ex}} = 20$ μW.

![FIG. 3](a) The measured and (b) calculated average transport distance of indirect excitons via conveyer $M_1$ as a function of density. $A_{\text{conv}} = 4.9$ meV, $v_{\text{conv}} = 0.7$ μm/μs.
\[ \mu_x = D_x(e^{T_0/T} - 1)/(k_BT_0), \] where \( T_0 = (2\pi\hbar^2 n_x)/(M_x g k_B), M_x \approx 0.22 m_0 \) is the exciton mass, \( g = 4 \) is the spin degeneracy [31]. Because of the geometry of the system, we use the approximation \( \nabla = \partial/\partial x \) and solve for the density of indirect excitons \( n_x(x, t) \).

The effect of disorder intrinsic to QWs is included using a thermionic model for the diffusion coefficient, \( D_x = D_x^{(0)} \exp[-U^{(0)}/(k_BT + u_0 n_x)] \) [31]. \( D_x^{(0)} \) is the diffusion coefficient in the absence of QW disorder and \( U^{(0)}/2 \) is the amplitude of the disorder potential. The temperature of indirect excitons \( T \) is approximated as \( T = T_{\text{bath}} \). The nonresonant photexcitation causes heating of the exciton gas by a few kelvin. However, the hot excitons cool to the lattice temperature within a few microns of the excitation spot [10] justifying the approximation.

The last two terms in Eq. (1) take account of the creation and decay of excitons. \( \lambda(x) \) is the generation rate and \( \tau_{\text{opt}} \) is the optical lifetime. The increased exciton velocity due to transport via the conveyer can, in principle, shift the energy of excitons outside the photon cone and increase their optical lifetime. However, we evaluated \( \tau_{\text{opt}} \) using the expressions given by Eqs. (1)–(6) in [10], and found that for the studied range of parameters, the corrections to the lifetime are small and can be neglected. Therefore we used a constant \( \tau_{\text{opt}} \) independent of \( v_{\text{conv}} \).

The results of the simulations are presented in Fig. 4. The gray (green) curve in Fig. 4(a) presents a snapshot of the conveyer potential for \( n_x = 0 \). The sinusoidal envelope of the conveyer potential with \( \lambda_{\text{conv}} = 14 \mu m \) is modulated by \( 2 \mu m \)-period ripples, which originate from the finite spacing between the conveyer electrodes. The amplitude of these ripples can be controlled by the spacing between the conveyer electrodes \( d_x \) (the ripples essentially vanish for \( d_x < 0.5 \mu m \) for the structure). The repulsively interacting indirect excitons screen the external potential [31]. The snapshot of the exciton density distribution is shown by the gray (red) curve in Fig. 4(b) and the corresponding screened conveyer potential by the black (blue) curve in Fig. 4(a).

The time-integrated exciton PL with the spatial resolution taken into account is presented by the black curve in Fig. 4(b). The average exciton transport distance via conveyer is evaluated by \( M_1 \), excluding the shaded area shown in Figs. 1(g) and 1(h) as for the experimental data. The obtained theoretical simulations of exciton transport via conveyer [Fig. 4(c)] are in qualitative agreement with the experimental data (Fig. 2) exhibiting the dynamical exciton delocalization in shallow conveyers and the DLDT with increasing conveyer amplitude. The simulated and measured conveyer amplitude at the DLDT, \( A_{\text{conv}} \), are in qualitative agreement [Fig. 2(b)].

In order to simplify the calculations for the analysis of the exciton density dependence, we approximate the conveyer potential by a cosine function \( U_{\text{conv}}^{*} = \Delta + A_{\text{conv}} \cos[2\pi(x/\lambda_{\text{conv}} - f_{\text{conv}}t)] \) and treat the ripples in the same way as the disorder potential. The position of the ripples is fixed, similar to the position of the ripples in the COQW disorder potential. We approximate the effect of the COQW disorder and conveyer ripples on exciton transport within the thermionic model [31] via \( D_x = D_x^{(0)} \exp[-(U^{(0)} + U_{\text{ripple}}^{(0)})/(k_B T + u_0 n_x)] \). Here \( U_{\text{ripple}}^{(0)} \) is the ripple amplitude obtained by simulations. \( U_{\text{ripple}}^{(0)} \) is nearly proportional to \( U_{\text{conv}}^{*} \) and, therefore, it is approximated by \( U_{\text{ripple}}^{(0)} = C U_{\text{conv}}^{*} \) (C is a fitting constant). The simulated density dependence of exciton transport via conveyer is in qualitative agreement with the experimental data (Fig. 3). The results are discussed below.

**Conveyer amplitude dependence** [Figs. 2(a) and 4(c)].—When the conveyer amplitude is smaller than the exciton interaction energy or disorder amplitude, excitons are not localized in the minima of the moving conveyer potential, and therefore are not moved by the conveyer. When the conveyer amplitude becomes larger than both the exciton interaction energy and disorder amplitude, excitons can localize in the minima of the moving conveyer potential. This results in efficient transport of excitons via conveyer. The saturation of \( M_1 \) at large \( A_{\text{conv}} \) can be related to a device imperfection and can be studied in future works.

**Conveyer velocity dependence** [Figs. 2 and 4(c)].—Excitons can efficiently follow the moving conveyer potential when the maximum exciton drift velocity in the conveyer is higher than the conveyer velocity, \( v_{\text{drift}} = \mu_x (\partial U_{\text{conv}}/\partial x)_{\text{max}} \approx v_{\text{conv}} \). This leads to an estimate \( A_{\text{turn-on}} \sim \mu_x v_{\text{conv}} A_{\text{conv}}/\mu_x \), qualitatively showing that a higher conveyer amplitude is required for efficient exciton transport via conveyer at a higher \( v_{\text{conv}} \). The efficiency of exciton transport via conveyers can be improved by in-
creasing $\mu_x$. This can be achieved by reducing $d_x$ and, in turn, $v_{\text{conv}}^{(0)}$.

A monotonic dependence of $A_{\text{turn-on}}$ on $v_{\text{conv}}$ without abrupt changes at the sound velocity is consistent with the thermal velocity of excitons, $\sqrt{2k_BT/M_x} \approx 15 \mu m/ns$ at $T = 1.7$ K, being much higher than the sound velocity.

Density dependence (Fig. 3).—At low densities, the excitons are localized in local minima of the disorder potential (given by the intrinsic disorder and ripples in the conveyer potential) and hardly follow the moving conveyer. At the intermediate densities, excitons effectively screen the disorder and can be efficiently moved by the conveyer. Exciton transport via conveyer becomes less efficient at the high densities when excitons screen the conveyer potential (given by the intrinsic disorder and ripples in the conveyer). At the intermediate densities, excitons effectively screen the disorder and can be efficiently moved by the conveyer. At the low densities, the excitons are localized in local minima of the disorder potential.

In summary, we report on the realization of electrostatic conveyers for excitons and experimental and theoretical studies of exciton transport via conveyers.

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