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Measurement of Neutrino Oscillations with the MINOS Detectors in the NuMI Beam


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This letter reports new results from the MINOS experiment based on a two-year exposure to muon neutrinos from the Fermilab NuMI beam. Our data are consistent with quantum mechanical oscillations of neutrino flavor with mass splitting $|\Delta m^2| = (2.43 \pm 0.13) \times 10^{-3} \text{eV}^2$ (68% confidence level) and mixing angle $\sin^2(2\theta) > 0.90$ (90% confidence level). Our data disfavor two alternative explanations for the disappearance of neutrinos in flight, namely neutrino decays into lighter particles and quantum decoherence of neutrinos, at the 3.7 and 5.7 standard deviation levels, respectively.

Several experiments [1] have produced compelling evidence of the disappearance of neutrinos of a given lepton flavor. In previous publications [2], the MINOS experiment has also presented evidence for energy-dependent disappearance of muon neutrinos produced by the NuMI facility at Fermilab. Based on the number of events, that result provides evidence of the disappearance of $\nu_\mu$ at a level of 5.2 standard deviations. Such observations support the description of neutrinos via two independent basis sets, the mass and the flavor eigenstates, with the bases related by the $3 \times 3$ PMNS matrix [3]. They imply that at least two of the neutrino eigenstates have non-zero mass. In this letter we present results obtained from a larger dataset than that used in [2]. These results provide a precision measurement of the oscillation parameters and further disfavor two other theoretical interpretations of neutrino flavor disappearance [4, 5].

The MINOS detectors [6] and the NuMI beam line [7] are described elsewhere. In brief, NuMI is a conventional two-horn-focused neutrino beam with a 675 m long decay tunnel. The horn current and position of the hadron production target relative to the horns can be configured to produce different $\nu_\mu$ energy spectra. MINOS consists of two detectors: a 0.98 kt Near Detector (ND) 1.04 km from the NuMI target; and a 5.4 kt Far Detector (FD) 735 km from the target. Both are segmented, magnetized calorimeters that permit particle tracking. The curvature of muons produced in $\nu_\mu + \text{Fe} \rightarrow \mu^- + X$ interactions [19] is used for energy determination of muons that exit the detector and to distinguish the $\nu_\mu$ component of the beam from the 6% intrinsic $\bar{\nu}_\mu$ contamination. The energy of muons contained in the detector is measured via their range. Oscillations of $\nu_\mu$ into other neutrino flavors result in an energy-dependent depletion of $\nu_\mu$ interactions in the FD relative to the expectation based upon the ND measurement.

The present letter describes results from data recorded between May 2005, and July 2007. Over this period, a total of $3.36 \times 10^{20}$ protons on target (POT) were accumulated for this analysis. A $1.27 \times 10^{20}$ POT subset of this exposure (hereafter referred to as Run I) forms the data set from Ref [4]. In Run I and for most of the new running period (Run II), the beam line was configured to enhance $\nu_\mu$ production with energies 1-5 GeV (the low-energy configuration). An exposure of $0.15 \times 10^{20}$ POT was accumulated with the beam line configured to enhance the $\nu_\mu$ energy spectrum at 5-10 GeV (the high-energy configuration). The Run II data were collected with a replacement target of identical construction due to failure of the motion system of the first target. The new target was found to be displaced longitudinally $\sim 1$ cm relative to the first target, resulting in a 30 MeV shift in the neutrino spectrum. This effect is incorporated in the Monte Carlo simulation, and the Run I and Run II data sets are analyzed separately to account for this shift.

The simulation of neutrino production and detection is accomplished with a model of hadron production in the target using FLUKA [8] and a GEANT3 [9] simulation of the beamline and detector. NEUGEN3.5.5 [10], tuned to data from previous bubble chamber neutrino experiments and experiments with pion beams scattering on iron, is used to model neutrino interactions. As in our previous analysis, the Monte Carlo (MC) simulation of the neutrino flux was constrained to agree with the neutrino energy spectrum in the ND collected in nine different configurations of the NuMI beam [2], thereby reducing uncertainties in the flux prediction at the FD. Fig. 4 compares the simulation to the ND data acquired in the two configurations used in the oscillation analysis.

Neutrino interactions in the MINOS detectors can either be charged-current, $\nu_\mu + \text{Fe} \rightarrow \mu^- + X$, or neutral-current, $\nu_\mu + \text{Fe} \rightarrow \nu_\mu + X$. In this analysis, only the former are used because they identify the interacting neutrino flavor and because the reconstructed energy best measures the full neutrino energy. To select charged-current events, we have implemented a new algorithm [11] based on a multivariate likelihood including four variables that characterize a muon track: the event length; the average pulse height per plane along the track; the transverse energy deposition profile of the track; and the fluctuation of the energy deposited in scintillator strips along the track. The new selection algorithm, along with a new track-finding algorithm, improve our efficiency to identify and select charged-current interactions in the FD from 75.3% using the previous selection [2] to 81.5% in the current selection, in the absence of oscillations. The new selection reduces the neutral-current contamination in the charged-current sample from 1.8% in our previous

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and high-energy datasets is shown along with the pre-
observed energy spectrum of the events from the low-
parameters
II. Both configurations are utilized in the oscillation anal
beam configurations before and after tuning the Monte Carlo
FIG. 1: Energy spectra in the MINOS ND for two of the nine
compared with an expectation of 936
the number of events observed in the data is 730, to be
1065
in the FD for all energies 0-120 GeV produced by the
integration checks were performed. We observe 848 events
in the analysis procedure was finalized and basic data in-
isons to other calculations of the FD spectrum [2].

The FD energy spectra were inspected only after
the analysis was used to
nu
oscillations [1], a fit is performed to extract the
measurement to lie in the physical region. To reduce the e-
effects of systematic uncertainties were evaluated
the data to Eq. [2] was constrained
to lie in the physical region. To reduce the effect of the dominant systematic uncertainties in Table [1] (a) and (c) for $|\Delta m^2|$ , and (d) for $\sin^2(2\theta)$ these three systematic uncertainties were included as nuisance parameters in the fit. The resulting best fit to the neutrino energy spectrum is shown in Fig. 2 and Fig. 3. We obtain $|\Delta m^2|=(2.43 \pm 0.13) \times 10^{-3}$ eV$^2$ and $\sin^2(2\theta) > 0.95$ at 68% confidence level (C.L.) [15]. The fit $\chi^2=90$ for 97 degrees of freedom. The resulting 68% C.L. ($\Delta \chi^2=2.30$)
publication to 0.6% in the present analysis. The present
analysis uses a larger fiducial mass of 4.17 kt in the FD, an increase of 2.9% over the mass used in [2].
The measured energy spectrum at the ND is used to
predict the energy spectrum at the FD. As in our previous analysis [2], we compute a transfer matrix to correct
for ~20% differences expected in the shape of the energy
spectrum in the FD relative to the ND that arise from
meson decay kinematics and from beam-line geometry

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and 90% C.L. (Δχ²=4.61) intervals for the oscillation parameters |Δm²| and sin²(2θ) are shown in Fig. 1. The MC predicts negligible backgrounds of 0.7 events from cosmic ray muons, and, at the best-fit value for |Δm²| and sin²(2θ), 2.3 events from neutrino interactions in the upstream rock, 5.9 neutral current and 1.5 ν_e events in the final sample. If the fit is not constrained to the physical region, |Δm²|=2.33×10⁻³ eV² and sin²(2θ)=1.07, with a 0.6 unit decrease in χ². Correspondingly, the contours in Fig. 1 are smaller than those expected for the present data set. Our measurement is the most precise determination of the mass splitting |Δm²|.

Fig. 4 also shows that the previous MINOS result [2] is in good agreement with the current measurement. Taken alone, the Run II data yield |Δm²|=(2.32±0.17)×10⁻³ eV² and sin²(2θ)=1.0, to be compared with (2.57±0.23)×10⁻³ eV² and sin²(2θ)=1.0 from Run I. The two results are consistent at 68% C.L. We note that the value of 2.57×10⁻³ eV² for Run I differs from that quoted in [2] because of our improved reconstruction and selection of charged-current events and improved MC simulation of neutrino interactions.

We have also fit the FD energy spectra to alternative models that have been proposed to explain the disappearance of neutrinos in flight, namely, the decay of neutrinos to lighter particles (Eq. 13 of [4]), and the decoherence of the neutrino’s quantum-mechanical wave packet (Eq. 5 of [5]). Fig. 3 shows the ratios of the energy spectra arising from our best fits to these alternative models to the prediction of the FD spectrum in the absence of νμ disappearance. The χ² for the best fit to the decay model is 104/97 d.o.f., while that for the decoherence model is 123/97 d.o.f. Given the Δχ² = 14 and 33 of these two models relative to the oscillation hypothesis, these models are disfavored with respect to the oscillation hypothesis at the 3.7 and 5.7 standard-deviation levels.

In summary, we have presented updated measurements of neutrino oscillation parameters from the MINOS experiment. Based upon an exposure of 3.36 × 10²⁰ POT from the NuMI beam, we obtain |Δm²| = (2.43 ± 0.13)×10⁻³ eV² (68% C.L.) and mixing angle sin²(2θ) > 0.90 (90% C.L.). As the dataset presented here includes the subset analyzed in [2], these results supersede our previous publication. Our data disfavor two alternative explanations for disappearance of neutrinos in flight, namely neutrino decays [3] into lighter particles and quantum decoherence of neutrinos [5] at the 3.7 and 5.7 standard-deviation level, respectively.

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* Deceased.

FIG. 4: Contours for the oscillation fit to the data in Fig. 2, including systematic errors. Also shown are contours from previous experiments [17, 18] and our earlier result [2].

[13] The experiment measures an unresolved mixture of $|\Delta m^2_{31}|$ and $|\Delta m^2_{32}|$, which we refer to as $|\Delta m^2|$ for brevity. The parameter $\sin^2(2\theta)$ is likewise an admixture. For further discussion see G. L. Fogli et al., Prog. Part. Nucl. Phys. 57, 742 (2006).
[15] Although the contours in Fig. 4 are calculated with two degrees of freedom (d.o.f.), the parameter errors are calculated with only one d.o.f. as in [17] using $\Delta \chi^2 = 1$ and 2.71, respectively.
[16] The effect of the constraint to the physical region was investigated using the unified approach of G.J. Feldman and R.D. Cousins, Phys. Rev. D57, 3873, (1998), which gave slightly smaller confidence intervals.
[19] Approximately 5% of $\nu_\mu$ interactions occur in aluminum and scintillator.