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Escherichia coli Phosphoenolpyruvate-Dependent Phosphotransferase System: Mechanism of Phosphoryl-Group Transfer from Phosphoenolpyruvate to HPr

Onno Misset and George T. Robillard*

ABSTRACT: The mechanism of phosphoryl-group transfer from phosphoenolpyruvate (PEP) to HPr, catalyzed by enzyme I of the Escherichia coli PEP-dependent phosphotransferase system, has been studied in vitro. Steady-state kinetics and isotope exchange measurements revealed that this reaction cannot be described by a classical ping-pong mechanism although phosphoenzyme I acts as an intermediate. The kinetic data indicate that HPr and PHPr occupy binding sites on enzyme I that do not overlap with the binding sites for PEP and pyruvate. As a result, binding interactions between HPr and enzyme I exist regardless of their phosphorylated state. A general mechanism is presented that describes the phosphorylation of HPr. The physiological implications of this mechanism are discussed.

The Escherichia coli phosphoenolpyruvate-dependent phosphotransferase system is responsible for the concomitant translocation and phosphorylation of several sugars across the cytoplasmic membrane (Roseman, 1969; Postma & Roseman, 1976; Saier, 1977; Hays, 1978). The transport process can be described by a minimum of two enzyme-catalyzed reactions:

\[
\text{phosphoenolpyruvate} + \text{HPr} \rightleftharpoons \text{PHPr} + \text{pyruvate} \quad (I)
\]

\[
\text{sugar} + \text{PHPr} \rightleftharpoons \text{HPr} + \text{sugar-Pi} \quad (II)
\]

Sugar phosphorylation and translocation is mediated by several sugar-specific membrane-bound enzyme II complexes, which use PHPr as a phosphoryl-group donor (reaction II). HPr itself is phosphorylated by enzyme I (reaction I).

Since HPr and enzyme I can be purified to homogeneity (Anderson et al., 1971; Dooijewaard et al., 1979; Robillard et al., 1979; Waygood et al., 1980), detailed studies on the initial reactions in the process of phosphorylation and transport are possible. We have previously demonstrated that the active enzyme I molecule is a dimer, which, at low concentrations, dissociates into inactive monomers (Misset et al., 1980). Mg\(^{2+}\) and Mn\(^{2+}\) influence the stability and activity of the dimer (Hoving et al., 1982). Most of the accumulated data support a ping-pong mechanism in which HPr only reacts with phosphoenzyme I, as described in Scheme I.

In order to obtain a more complete picture of the molecular interactions between E\(_1\) and HPr, we measured the phosphorylation of HPr as well as the isoform exchange between PEP and pyruvate as a function of the concentrations of enzyme and substrate.

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1 Abbreviations: PEP, phosphoenolpyruvate; \(\alpha\)-MeGlc, methyl \(\alpha\)-glucopyranoside; PTS, phosphoenolpyruvate-dependent phosphotransferase system; DTT, dithiothreitol; PYR, pyruvate; EDTA, ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid; Tris, tri(hydroxymethyl)aminomethane; DEAE, diethylaminoethyl; BSA, bovine serum albumin.

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Salmonella typhimurium SB 2950 was grown and harvested as stated previously (Dooijewaard et al., 1979).

HPr was purified from E. coli P650 according to the procedure of Dooijewaard et al. (1979).

Enzyme II. The source of enzyme II was the cytoplasmic membrane fraction of S. typhimurium SB 2950, which was isolated as described previously (Misset et al., 1980) with 25 mM sodium phosphate buffer, pH 7.0, instead of Tris-HCl buffer.

Enzyme I was purified from E. coli P650 by the method of Robillard et al. (1979) with the modification as described by Brouwer et al. (1982). Apart from the reason mentioned by Brouwer, this modification was required because EI isolated solely by hydrophobic interaction chromatography, appeared to be contaminated with nucleic acids (Misset et al., 1980). UV absorption spectra of EI revealed an absorbance at 260 nm that was much higher than the absorbance at 280 nm. Treatment of EI with DNase and RNase, followed by several washing steps in an Amicon ultrafiltration apparatus with an UM-20 filter, changed the UV spectrum in that the maximum absorbance appeared at 277 nm and the minimum absorbance at 252 nm. In the modified procedure, EI eluted from the DEAE-cellulose column (DE-52, Whatman) at 0.23 ± 0.02 M NaCl, after which the pool was concentrated and washed several times on an UM-20 filter. Averaging data from 12 isolation procedures gave the following results. The yield of enzyme I was 12.0 ± 4.0 mg out of 50 g of cells (wet weight), equivalent to 0.25 ± 0.06% of the protein present in the 48000g supernatant of the French pressure lysate [as determined by the method of Lowry et al. (1951) using BSA as a standard]. The recovery of the enzymatic activity was 22 ± 7%, resulting in a purification factor of approximately 100. The ratio of the absorbances at 277 and 252 nm was 1.53 ± 0.20. Molar concentrations of enzyme I, determined with [14C]PEP (see below), gave a molar extinction coefficient \( \epsilon_{260\text{nm}} = 48000 \pm 4000 \text{M}^{-1} \text{cm}^{-1} \) equivalent to \( 10^{17} \text{mg mL}^{-1} = 3.6 \) [calculated with a dimer molecular weight of 134000 (Misset et al., 1980; Waygood & Steeves, 1980)]. This experimental value agrees well with the extinction coefficient calculated by Waygood from the amino acid composition of enzyme I: \( \epsilon_{280\text{nm}} = 8400 \) [Waygood et al., 1980]. When stored at high concentrations (>1 mg/mL), in 25 mM sodium phosphate buffer, pH 7.0, and 1 mM DTT at -20°C, enzyme I is stable for several months without significant loss of activity.

Protein was determined according to Lowry et al. (1951) or by the biuret method, using BSA as a standard.

Concentrations of active enzyme I and HPr were determined by measuring the initial burst of pyruvate formation after exposing enzyme I or enzyme I plus HPr to \([^{14}\text{C}]\text{PEP}\), as described by Brouwer et al. (1982). The result of this method, combined with protein determination of enzyme I (with the biuret method), revealed 0.8-0.9 phosphorylation site/enzyme I dimer.

Assay Procedures. The phosphorylation of HPr was measured by following the phosphorylation of methyl \( \alpha\)-glucopyranoside or 2-deoxyglucose in the presence of excess concentrations of enzymes II. The results presented in Figures 1 and 2 were obtained from three experiments in which the rate of phosphorylation was measured at varying concentrations of enzyme I and HPr, keeping the PEP concentration constant. After all components except enzyme I and PEP were equilibrated at 37°C, the indicated amounts of enzyme I were pipetted into the reaction vessels. Subsequently, the time curves were started by addition of the stated concentration of PEP. All three experiments were performed with one stock solution of enzyme I (35 \( \mu \text{M} \)), which was kept at 0°C. Enzyme I was diluted 300-fold in cold buffer shortly before the experiment started. Phosphorylated sugar was separated from the nonphosphorylated sugar and counted as described previously (Misset et al., 1980). Isotope exchange between PEP and pyruvate was measured according to Hoving et al. (1981). All experiments were carried out at pH 7.0 since at this value enzyme I showed maximal activity (data not shown).

Phosphoenolpyruvate (monopotassium salt) and dithiothreitol were obtained from Sigma Chemical Co.

Radioactive-Labeled Compounds. \([^{14}\text{C}]\text{PEP}\) and methyl \( \alpha\)-glucopyranoside and tritiated 2-deoxyglucose were purchased from the Radiochemical Centre, Amersham.

Sephacryl S-200 and Sephadex G-75 were purchased from Pharmacia Fine Chemicals. All other chemicals were reagent grade.

Results

Theory. The dependence of the steady-state rate of product formation (V) on the substrate concentration (S) is usually visualized in a Lineweaver-Burk plot in which \( V' \) is set out against \( S' \). In a reaction with two substrates \( S_1 \) and \( S_2 \), \( V' \) is set out against \( S_1' \) at fixed concentrations of \( S_2 \) and vice versa. The observed patterns are indicative of the reaction mechanism involved. A phosphoryl-group transfer reaction (e.g., the enzyme I catalyzed reaction) is said to operate according to a ping-pong mechanism if the phosphorylated enzyme acts as an obligatory intermediate. The phosphoryl-group donating substrate then reacts only with the phosphorylated enzyme while the phosphoryl-group accepting substrate only reacts with the phosphorylated enzyme (see, for instance, reactions Ia and Ib in Scheme I). In this case, the Lineweaver-Burk plots show patterns of parallel lines. Furthermore, since the steady-state rate is linearly dependent on the enzyme concentration at all substrate concentrations, the Lineweaver-Burk plot can be recorded at a fixed enzyme concentration. In the case of the enzyme I catalyzed phosphorylation of HPr, the existence of the equilibrium between inactive monomers and active dimers of enzyme I (Scheme I) causes the rate of phosphorylation of HPr to be linear with the total dimer concentration \( \Sigma [E_i^d] = [E_i^d] + [E_i^d-PEP] + [E_i^d-P-PYR] + [E_i^d-P+HPr] + [E_i^d-PHPr] \) in

\[ ^3 \text{As described previously, the phosphorylation of the sugar exhibited a lag time before attaining a steady-state rate (Misset et al., 1980). For our present considerations we only determined the steady-state rates from the time curves.} \]
Instead of with the total enzyme I concentration \( [E_I] \) (see eq 1), and recording a Lineweaver–Burk plot at a fixed enzyme I concentration will give sets of nonlinear, nonparallel lines. This property of enzyme I makes the Lineweaver–Burk plot meaningless. Proper analysis requires measuring at several \( E_I \) concentrations and extrapolating the results to infinite concentration where enzyme I is completely dimerized. This extrapolation can be done in a plot setting out \( [E_I]/V \) vs. \( V^{-1/2} \) as has been used by Hoving et al. (1981). The dependence of the steady-state rate of phosphorylation \( V \) on the concentrations of \( E_I, \) PEP, and HPr for the mechanism of Scheme I is given by

\[
\frac{[E_I^2]}{V} = \frac{p_2 + r_2 + r_{1-3}}{P_2} + \frac{p_4 + r_2 + r_{3-4}}{P_4} + \frac{1}{x_{PEP}[PEP]} + \frac{1}{x_{HPr}[HPr]}
\]

in which \( K_D = k_{-a}/k_{a} \) and \( k_{PEP} = p_1 p_{r_{1-2}}/(p_1 + p_2 + p_{r_{1-3}}) \), and \( k_{HPr} = p_2 p_{r_{3-4}}/(p_2 + p_{r_{3-4}} + p_{r_{4-5}} \cdot p_{r_{5-6}}) \). \( k_{PEP} \) and \( k_{HPr} \) are the second-order rate constants of the reactions

\[
Pep + E_I^{d} \xrightarrow{k_{PEP}} E_I^{d} + P + PYR
\]

and

\[
HPr + E_I^{d} \xrightarrow{k_{HPr}} E_I^{d} + PHPr
\]

respectively. In the plot of \( [E_I]/V \) vs. \( V^{-1/2} \), the intercept (see eq 1) is the value of \( [E_I]/V \) where enzyme I is completely dimerized. A plot of these intercepts as a function of the \( E_I \) concentration shows a pattern of straight, intersecting lines (Figure 1A). The intercept values at infinite HPr concentration \( [HPr] \) in (A) were obtained from (B) (and vice versa). Against the reciprocal HPr concentration at several fixed PEP concentrations. Both plots show patterns of nonparallel lines.

Equation 1 predicts that the slopes will be independent of the HPr concentration and vary as the square root of the PEP concentration. In Figure 2A, 2(slope)\(^2\) is plotted vs. the reciprocal PEP concentration at different fixed HPr concentrations. The dependence on the PEP concentration is not in accordance with that predicted from eq 1. Furthermore, the slopes are not independent of HPr but decrease with increasing HPr concentrations. Plotting 2(slope)\(^2\) vs. the reciprocal PEP concentrations shows a pattern of straight, intersecting lines (Figure 2B). Since the substrate dependence of the intercept and the slope of eq 1 are not in accordance with the experimental results (Figures 1 and 2), we can conclude that the phosphorylation of HPr is not properly described by the reaction mechanism of Scheme I.

**Alterations of Scheme I.** We have tried to alter Scheme I in order to explain the measured substrate dependencies. Competitive substrate inhibition (i.e., formation of the dead-end complexes \( E_I^d-HPr \) and \( E_I^d-P-PEP \)) can be ruled out as an explanation for the observed kinetics since they are predicted to have no effect on the slope of eq 1 and an effect on the intercepts opposite to that which was experimentally found.

Hydrolysis of the phosphorylated enzyme intermediate at a rate comparable to the overall reaction velocity could be a possible explanation. It would alter the parallel lines pattern of the intercepts into an intersecting lines pattern while the slope of eq 1 would become

\[
\text{slope} = \frac{1}{2} \left[ \frac{K_D}{k_{PEP}[PEP]} + \frac{k_h}{k_{HPr}[HPr] + 1} \right]^{1/2}
\]

(compare eq 2 with Figure 2B). \( k_h \) is the first-order hydrolysis rate constant of \( E_I^dP \). We carried out an experiment in order to establish to what extent hydrolysis of \( E_I^dP \) occurred. Parallel experiments, in which either the overall reaction rate was measured via the formation of \([^{14}C]\)-cy-MeGlc-6-P (see Materials and Methods) or the hydrolysis of \( E_I^dP \) via the formation of \([^{14}C]\)pyruvate, revealed no differences in these formation rates. There should be a difference, however, if a fast hydrolysis of \( E_I^dP \) and/or PHPr occurred. Therefore \( E_I^dP \) and PHPr do not hydrolyze at a rate comparable with the
overall rate of phosphorylation and cannot account for the result in Figures 1 and 2B.

Dissociation of Et_P cannot explain the observed substrate dependence of the slope and intercept of eq 1. Assuming a $K_D'$ for Et_P alters the slope of the eq 1 into

$$\text{slope} = \frac{1}{2} \left( \frac{K_D}{k_{\text{PEP}}[\text{PEP}]} + \frac{2K_D'}{k_{\text{HPr}}[\text{HPr}]} \right)^{1/2}$$

while the intercept remains unaltered. Neither of these predicted behaviors fits the data in Figure 2A,B.

From the observations that (i) the steady-state kinetics of the enzyme I catalyzed reaction are not in accordance with Scheme I, (ii) this behavior is found over a wide range of PEP and HPr concentrations, and (iii) this behavior cannot be explained by competitive substrate inhibition, hydrolysis of Et_P, or dissociation of Et_P, we must conclude that HPr and PEP form functional complexes with other enzyme I forms in addition to those described in Scheme I. This can be understood by a closer examination of the reaction mechanism of Scheme I.

The prediction of eq 1 that the intercepts, when plotted against the reciprocal substrate concentrations, should yield sets of parallel lines stems from the fact that PEP and HPr react with a chemically different form of enzyme I (Et and Et_P; see Scheme I). Since this ping-pong mechanism does not contain enzyme intermediates that bind PEP (or pyruvate) and HPr (or PHPr) at the same time, no product terms of the PEP and HPr concentrations appear in eq 1. However, the results in Figure 1 clearly show that product terms are present, and therefore, it may be concluded that PEP (or pyruvate) and HPr (or PHPr) form functional ternary complexes with enzyme I. These extra interactions will affect not only the intercept of eq 1 but also the slope. As has been pointed out in the preceding paper (Hoving et al., 1982), the slope is a measure for the dissociation of enzyme I. The ping-pong mechanism of Scheme I resulted in only a PEP dependence of the slope, but since we concluded that ternary complexes of PEP (or pyruvate) and HPr (or PHPr) with enzyme I are also involved, the slope will become dependent on the HPr concentration as well. In the next sections we will demonstrate (i) the direct phosphoryl-group transfer from Et_P to HPr, (ii) the binding of HPr to Et, and (iii) the binding of PHPr to Et whereby the dimer of enzyme I still can be phosphorylated by PEP.

**Phosphoryl-Group Transfer from Et_P to HPr.** Incubation of enzyme I with PEP and Mg^{2+} yields phosphorylated enzyme I and pyruvate (see Materials and Methods). Since the equilibrium of this reaction lies far to the pyruvate and Et_P side, incubation of equal amounts of enzyme I and PEP will give a complete conversion to Et_P and pyruvate (Hoving et al., 1981, 1982). This was confirmed by Sephadex G-75 gel filtration of such an incubation mixture. Enzyme I was eluted at 0 °C with a buffer containing EDTA (0.5 mM) to prevent hydrolysis of Et_P [see Hoving et al. (1982)]. The enzyme I was completely phosphorylated as judged by the inability to rephosphorylate it with [14C]PEP (see Materials and Methods). In order to determine whether phosphoryl-group transfer from Et_P to HPr occurs, we incubated stoichiometric amounts of PEP and enzyme I (each 10 μM) for 15 s. Lactic dehydrogenase and NADH were included in the incubation mixture to convert all pyruvate to lactate. Subsequently, HPr was added to a final concentration of 50 μM, and after 15 s, the incubation mixture was cooled to 0 °C and 5 mM EDTA was added. The reaction mixture was loaded on a Sephadex G-75 column and eluted with EDTA-containing buffer (see above). Peaks of enzyme I and HPr activity were well separated. In this case enzyme I could be quantitatively rephosphorylated, indicating that the Et_P that was formed during the first 15 s of the incubation could transfer its phosphoryl group to HPr in the absence of PEP and pyruvate.

**Binding of HPr to Et.** We cannot determine from the kinetic data alone whether HPr binds to all enzyme I intermediates present in reaction Ia (i.e., Et,Et_P, Et_P-PYR, and Et_P). In the previous section we have demonstrated the transfer of the phosphoryl group from Et_P to HPr, substantiating the existence of an Et_P-HPr complex. Although it is possible to obtain experimental conditions in which the complex Et_P-HPr or Et_P-PYR is preferentially present, studies on the binding of HPr to these complexes are difficult to carry out because HPr would be phosphorylated immediately. Et_P, however, does exist in the absence of PEP [see Hoving et al. (1982)], enabling us to investigate the binding of HPr to Et_P in the concentration range used in the kinetic experiments (up to 20 μM HPr). This interaction can be visualized with gel filtration chromatography. The ratio of enzyme I dimers to monomers is dependent upon the enzyme concentration (Misset et al., 1980; Hoving et al., 1982). Increasing the Et concentration increases the dimer/monomer ratio. The weight-averaged molecular weight of Et therefore

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**Figure 2:** Two times the square of the slope of the plot [Et]/V vs. $V^{-1/2}$ as a function of the reciprocal PEP (A) and HPr (B) concentration.
of the rate of phosphorylation are described in the preceding paper (Hoving et al., 1982).

Separation of pyruvate and PEP and determination of the ratio of dimers/monomers was found only to occur in the presence of Mg2+ or Mn2+ but not in the absence of these metal ions. This result confirms the interaction of HPr with Ei as originally proposed from the kinetic data.

This interaction implies, however, that HPr-complexed enzyme I can be phosphorylated by PEP. In order to compare the specific activity of the uncomplexed dimer of enzyme I with the HPr-complexed dimer, we measured the initial rate of phosphorylation of enzyme I, as described in detail in the preceding paper (Hoving et al., 1982). The rate values obtained equal \( k_{\text{PEP}}[\text{Ei}] \) and will be dependent upon the total enzyme I concentration. Due to the monomer–dimer equilibrium of enzyme I, the rate will increase more than proportionally with the total enzyme I concentration. This was found experimentally [Figure 3A, (X)]. Addition of HPr increases the initial rate of enzyme I phosphorylation [Figure 3A, (O) and (Δ)]. This confirms that HPr-complexed dimers of enzyme I are phosphorylated as well. Whether the increased phosphorylation rate is due to a higher specific activity of \( \text{E}_i^\alpha \)-HPr or solely to a higher total dimer concentration can be established by extrapolating the results of Figure 3A to 100% dimers of enzyme I. This can be done in a plot according to eq 1 [see Hoving et al. (1982)]. Figure 3B shows this plot. From the fact that the intercept (i.e., the reciprocal specific activity of the dimer) slightly increases with HPr, it can be concluded that the enzyme I dimer, when it is complexed with HPr, is phosphorylated at a slightly decreased rate. The HPr-dependent stimulation of the initial rate of phosphorylation (Figure 3A), therefore, can be attributed to the fact that HPr increases the total enzyme I dimer concentration, which is reflected by a decrease of the slope in Figure 3B.

**FIGURE 3:** (A) Initial rate of enzyme I phosphorylation in the absence and presence of HPr. Experimental conditions: 25 mM sodium phosphate buffer, pH 7.0, 1 mM DTT, 1 mM NaCl, 0.25 mM [\(^{14}\)C]PEP, and the stated concentrations of enzyme I and HPr. Separation of pyruvate and PEP and determination of the ratio of phosphorylation are described in the preceding paper (Hoving et al., 1982). (B) Replot of the data from (A).
The phosphorylation of HPr, which is catalyzed by enzyme I, cannot be described by the simple ping-pong mechanism presented in Scheme I. This has been concluded from the kinetic experiments described under Results. In order to propose a new mechanism, we will first summarize all the available data that must be included in it. (i) The active form of enzyme I is the dimer that is in equilibrium with its inactive monomers (Misset et al., 1980). (ii) In order to become phosphorylated, the dimer of enzyme I should be complexed with one metal ion [Mg2+ or Mn2+; see Hoving et al. (1982)]. (iii) The monophosphorylated enzyme I dimer acts as an intermediate in the transfer of the phosphoryl group from PEP to HPr. This is based upon the observations that $E_{d}^{P}$ can transfer its phosphoryl group to HPr and that the phosphorylation rate of enzyme I is comparable to that of HPr. Further, the elution position on Sephacryl S-200 (Misset et al., 1980; Hoving et al., 1982) of enzyme I dimer can be phosphorylated regardless of whether it is complexed with HPr or PHPr (Figures 3 and 4). (iv) The stoichiometry of the reaction is presumably one PEP and one HPr molecule reacting with the enzyme I dimer. This must be concluded from the fact that enzyme I can only be phosphorylated at one site per dimer (Materials and Methods; see discussion below). (v) In order to become phosphorylated, HPr can bind not only to $E_{d}^{P}$ but also to other forms of enzyme I that are present during its phosphorylation: $E_{d}^{P}$, $E_{d}^{P}$-PEP, and $E_{d}^{P}$-PYR. The observed interactions of HPr with $E_{d}^{P}$ and of HPr with $E_{d}$ (Figure 3) suggest that HPr also interacts with $E_{d}^{P}$-PEP and $E_{d}^{P}$-PYR. (vi) HPr only binds to the metal ion complexed dimer of enzyme I (Figure 3). (vii) The enzyme I dimer can be phosphorylated regardless of whether it is complexed with HPr or PHPr (Figures 3 and 4). (viii) Uncomplexed dimers of enzyme I dissociate more easily than complexed dimers. Complexation of $E_{d}^{P}$ with Mg2+ (Hoving et al., 1982), PEP, HPr, and PHPr results in more stable dimers (Figures 2-4). This is also true for $E_{d}^{P}$ as judged from the elution position on Sephacryl S-200 (Misset et al., 1980; Hoving et al., 1982). Combining (i)–(viii) results in the mechanism given in Scheme II. In this mechanism, the (active) metal ion complexed dimer is represented by $E_{d}^{P}$. Reaction A is the phosphorylation of enzyme I, which can be measured by isotope exchange between PEP and pyruvate in the absence of HPr (Hoving et al., 1981). Reaction B describes the phosphorylation of enzyme I when it is complexed with HPr (Figure 3), while reaction C describes the phosphorylation of enzyme I in the presence of PHPr and explains the observation that isotope exchange between PEP and pyruvate is enhanced in the presence of PHPr (Figure 4). Reaction A is coupled to B and C by the addition of HPr and PHPr, respectively, to the individual enzyme complexes of reaction A. Therefore, HPr and PHPr increase the total dimer concentration that can be phosphorylated by PEP.

The mechanism of Scheme II differs from the one presented by Waygood & Steeves (1980). They concluded that Scheme I is the proper mechanism for the enzyme I catalyzed phosphorylation of HPr. Their conclusion was based on the fact that the Lineweaver–Burk plot (in which $V^{-1}$ is set out against [PEP]−1 at fixed HPr concentrations and vice versa) showed a pattern of parallel lines. However, this Lineweaver–Burk plot was recorded at a single, fixed enzyme I concentration, thus neglecting the influence of the monomer–dimer equilibrium of enzyme I. In the theoretical section we have shown that such an approach is incorrect.

The PTS: A Multiprotein Complex? In the literature, the PTS is considered to be a two-phase system consisting of cytoplasmic (i.e., water-soluble) proteins ($E_{l}$, HPr, IIGc) and the integral membrane-bound (i.e., water-insoluble) proteins (IIA, IIB, IIBGc). This consideration is primarily based on the fact that the soluble proteins are found in high-speed supernatants of cell-free extracts and can be handled in aqueous media without the use of detergents, whereas the membrane-bound proteins demand the use of detergents in order to be extracted from the membrane and kept in solution. The enzyme I catalyzed phosphorylation of HPr is supposed to occur in the cytoplasm. PHPr then diffuses to the membrane in order to be available as substrate for enzyme II in the sugar translocation and phosphorylation reaction. There are, however, several indications that enzyme I and HPr may be associated with the membrane surface, thus allowing the possibility of a protein complex of $E_{l}$, HPr, and IIG. (i) Enzyme I is a hydrophobic protein. In our laboratory, the enzyme is purified by using hydrophobic interaction chromatography. It binds so strongly that it can only be removed by lowering the solvent polarity or using detergents. This hydrophobic
character of enzyme I may play a role in its binding to the membrane. (ii) Isolation of the cytoplasmic membrane fraction from a wild-type E. coli (i.e., containing E₂, HPr, and E₁₃) via differential centrifugation yields a membrane pellet containing HPr and E₁ in amounts exceeding those expected for a cytoplasmic protein that has no affinity for the membrane (O. Misset, unpublished data). (iii) When a crude cell extract is subjected to sucrose density gradient centrifugation, one expects that cytoplasmic proteins will remain at the top of the gradient and heavier particles, like membrane vesicles, sediment to their equilibrium position. Indeed, E₁ activity is found at a density of 1.17 g/cm³, which is expected for cytoplasmic membrane vesicles (Osborn et al., 1972). However, although most of the E₁ activity remains at the top of the gradient, the peak is very asymmetric and tails into the gradient toward the position of the cytoplasmic membranes. This can be explained by the fact that initially an amount of E₁ was bound to the membranes, which dissociates from the membranes during centrifugation through the sucrose gradient (O. Misset, unpublished data). (iv) Right-side-out vesicles, prepared by an osmotic shock treatment that resulted in the release of the soluble proteins, were, when loaded with PEP, able to transport and phosphorylate α-MeGlc (Kaback, 1968). Since vesicles, prepared from an enzyme I mutant, failed to accumulate the sugar, Kaback suggested that part of enzyme I and HPr were associated with the cytoplasmic membrane and could not be removed by the osmotic shock treatment. (v) The PTS of Rhodopseudomonas sphaeroides consists of an integral membrane-bound protein (E₃) and a fully membrane-associated enzyme I type protein called Soluble Factor (Saier et al., 1971). Like E₁, Soluble Factor can be phosphorylated by PEP. Recently, Brouwer et al. (1982) have demonstrated that the Soluble Factor is a tightly or even covalently linked complex of an E₃ and HPr-like molecule. This is consistent with our finding that HPr can bind to unphosphorylated E₁ although this interaction is weaker than in the Soluble Factor.

These observations make the existence of a PTS protein complex in E. coli plausible. One of the consequences of such a protein complex would be that interactions between the proteins exist, regardless of their phosphorylated state. Scheme II shows that such an interaction exists between (P)HPr and (phospho)enzyme I. More evidence can be obtained from mechanistic studies of the enzyme II catalyzed reaction. Another approach would involve treatment of whole cells with cross-linking agents in order to stabilize the presumed protein complex and prevent it from dissociation during cell rupturing and subsequent analytical procedures. These experiments are now in progress.

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