



NASA SBIR 2015 Phase I Solicitation

A1.02 Aerodynamic Efficiency Drag Reduction Technology

Lead Center: LaRC

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The challenge of energy-efficient flight has at its foundation aerodynamic efficiency, and at the foundation of aerodynamic efficiency is low drag. Drag can be broadly decomposed into four components: viscous or skin friction drag, lift-induced drag, wave or compressibility drag, and excrescence drag due to various protruding items such as antennae, wipers, lights, etc. The relative impact of these four forces depends upon the targeted flight regime and vehicle-specific design requirements. The first force, however, viscous skin friction, stands out as particularly significant across most classes of flight vehicles and effective measures for its control would have a major impact of flight efficiency. In particular, supersonic, low-boom flight and new generations of energy-efficient subsonic transport airplanes including high L/D strut-braced designs, the blended wing body (BWB), so called "double-bubble" designs and other concepts with large expanses of surface area would benefit from effective viscous drag control.

Viscous skin friction can be classified as either laminar or turbulent. While the laminar case and its attendant laminar flow control (LFC) techniques remain important scientific and technological disciplines, the goal of high Reynolds number flight efficiency requires that the turbulent case receive renewed attention. In place of the first-principles-derived theoretical framework of the laminar flow stability problem, in the turbulence case we have a wide collection of experimental observations, data correlations, various CFD approaches requiring turbulence closure models and, at low Reynolds numbers, full direct numerical simulation of the Navier-Stokes equations (DNS). While such experimental and CFD-derived knowledge, has greatly increased our understanding of turbulent boundary layer physics over the past decades, key relationships between wall layer and outer layer dynamics essential to a full understanding remain to be identified and verified.

Inadequacies in our understanding of boundary layer turbulence increase reliance upon a more qualitative, physics-guided approach to discovery. For example, the experimental observation of reduced skin friction in the corners of triangular cross-section pipes lead to the discovery of drag-reducing V-groove riblets (subsequently also associated with the skin of certain shark species). The quasi-periodic, low-speed streak structures observed in the near-wall layer of turbulent boundary layers lead to the implementation of mechanically controlled spanwise waves or lateral oscillations of the wall to disrupt the processes associated with low speed streak bursting. Similar observations have either been made or suggested with respect to the stabilizing influence of convex and in-plane curvature; long length-to-diameter ratio particulates; passive, active and reactive wall motion; manipulation of the wall layer by various geometrical devices (e.g., vortex generators (VG) and large eddy breakup devices (LEBU)), and various weakly ionized gas (WIG) and magnetohydrodynamic/electrohydrodynamic (MHD/EHD) concepts. This solicitation is offered in this spirit of innovation based on experimental or computational observations guided by a basic, though not necessarily complete, physical understanding of the turbulent processes.Â

In order to stimulate innovation in the area of turbulent viscous drag reduction, proposals are sought subject to the following guidelines:

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- Proposals shall address passive, active or reactive concepts for external, attached, fully developed, turbulent boundary layer viscous drag reduction in air.
 - Experimental, hardware-based proposals and theoretical/computational proposals based on realizable hardware are preferred.
 - All practical physical concepts are acceptable including but not limited to: mechanical/electro-mechanical actuators, weakly-ionized-gas (WIG) concepts, laser/microwave energy deposition, MHD/EHD devices, surface microstructure/geometry, embedded mechanical devices (VGs, LEBUs), wall mass transpiration, heat transfer, wall motion, wall curvature effects and pressure gradient (vehicle shaping).
 - Significant enhancements or refinements of existing concepts and technologies are acceptable.
 - First order assessment or technically plausible discussion of any net system energy saving claims shall be provided.
 - Proof-of-concept experimental demonstrations are encouraged for Phase I where applicable but are not required.
 - Target conditions are flight-relevant Reynolds numbers at either high subsonic ($0.7 < M < 0.9$) or low supersonic ($M < 3$) speeds. Proposals at lower Mach and Reynolds numbers shall provide discussion of a developmental path towards flight-relevant conditions but not necessarily inclusive of actual flight.