

Design Comparison of Four-Layer Full-Nb₃Sn and Hybrid Nb₃Sn/NbTi Cos-Theta Dipoles for the CERN High Field Magnet R&D Programme

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Abstract—The High Field Magnet (HFM) R&D programme at CERN aims to find technological solutions for the construction of accelerator magnets to be installed in future post-LHC colliders. The Italian Institute for Nuclear Physics (INFN) and CERN are collaborating to design and fabricate a new four-layer cos-theta dipole able to achieve a bore field of 14T with at least 20% margin on the load-line. Two design options are under evaluation: a four-layer dipole entirely made of Nb₃Sn, and a hybrid configuration combining inner Nb₃Sn layers with outer NbTi layers. Both options are being assessed for feasibility as short models, with scalable design choices for longer magnet prototypes suitable for accelerator integration. This paper presents a comparative study of the performance of the two design options. The results provide insights into the trade-offs between performance, complexity, and protection constraints in the development of next-generation high-field dipole magnets. The Full-Nb₃Sn solution satisfies the HFM requirements, but the Hybrid solution is a promising, cost-effective alternative that can be considered for next-generation colliders.

Index Terms—Accelerator magnets, dipoles, Nb₃Sn, NbTi.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE continuous push for higher energy frontiers in particle physics necessitates the development of next-generation accelerator magnets capable of producing magnetic fields significantly stronger than those currently achieved at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) [1]. While the cos-theta layout has proven to be a reliable and well-established architecture for generating high-quality accelerator fields, the community is actively exploring alternative coil configurations—such as block-coil [2], common-coil [3], [4], canted cosine-theta [5] and stress-management cosine-theta [6] designs—to address the increasing mechanical and manufacturing challenges associated with high-field magnet technologies. In the context of the High Field Magnet (HFM) programme [7], [8], the primary objective is to validate a magnet design capable of reaching a nominal bore field of 14 T within a 50 mm aperture, while maintaining a minimum 20% operating margin on the load-line. This paper presents and compares two distinct magnet designs developed within the HFM framework: a four-layer Full-Nb₃Sn configuration and a four-layer Hybrid Nb₃Sn/NbTi configuration. Both designs were developed starting from the selection of the superconducting cable, which significantly influences not only the electromagnetic performance but also the mechanical and thermal behaviour of the final magnet. In contrast to the previous design [9], the strand diameter has been reduced from 1.1 mm to 0.85 mm while maintaining the same number of strands. This reduction in strand diameter is intended to facilitate the winding process, as experience from FALCON Dipole [10], [11], [12], [13], [14], [15], [16], [17], [18], [19], [20], [21] indicate that winding a 1 mm diameter strand with 40 strands around a 50 mm aperture is challenging. Moreover, the increased copper fraction helps with the magnet quench protection, and the finer filaments contribute to improve flux jump stability. It's crucial to note that these Nb₃Sn strands have already been extensively tested and validated in the context of the High-Luminosity LHC programme [22], thus providing a strong basis for reliability. Both designs aim to satisfy the

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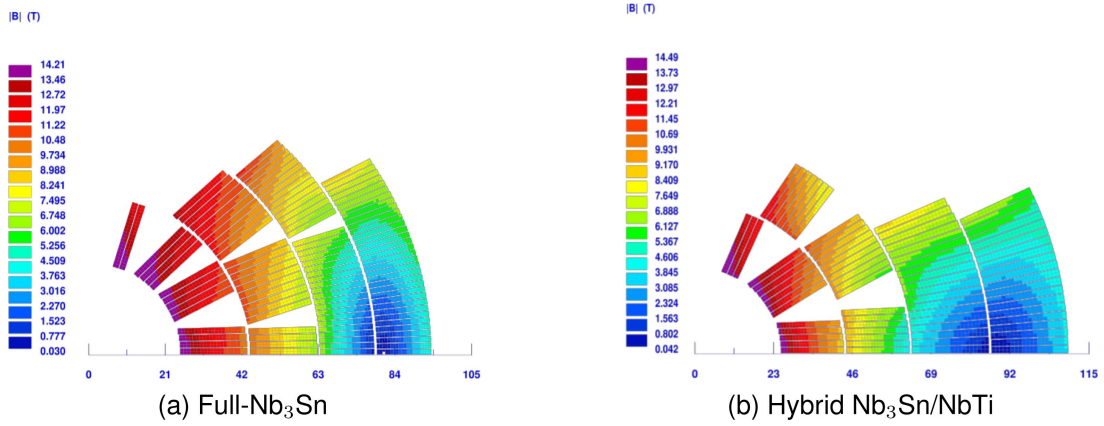


Fig. 1. Field distribution in one quadrant of each cross-section evaluated with the ROXIE software.

TABLE I
COMPARISON OF THE TWO DESIGNS

	Full Nb ₃ Sn				Hybrid Nb ₃ Sn/NbTi	
	HF 1.9K	HF 4.2K	LF 1.9K	LF 4.2K	HF 1.9K	LF 1.9K
Achieved bore field [T]	14				14	
Current [A]	9800				13330	
Peak field [T]	14.21			11.28	14.47	8.44
Current density [A/mm ²]	280			400	380	260
Supercond. current density [A/mm ²]	950			1400	1300	973
Copper current density [A/mm ²]	792			1167	1080	608
Loadline fraction [%]	80	87.5	73	80	86.5	78
Temperature margin [K]	4.4	2.2	5.6	3.3	3.28	2.28
Enthalpy margin [mJ/cm ³]	12.4	8.9	19.3	16	6.6	2.5
$b_3 / b_5 / b_7 / b_9$ at nominal [unit]	0.47 / -5.81 / 3.57 / 1.33				-0.98 / -0.93 / 4.29 / 2.94	
Equivalent width [mm]	55.4				59	
N° of turns (per pole)	39			69	39	39
N° blocks (per pole)	7			3	6	2
Aperture [mm]	50				50	
Maximum azimuthal stress [MPa]	83				116	
Maximum radial stress [MPa]	97				138	

requirements set by the HFM programme, but with different trade-offs.

II. FULL-Nb₃SN DIPOLE

The first design option under consideration is a four-layer dipole made entirely of Nb₃Sn superconductor. As illustrated in Fig. 1(a), the coil is structured into two High-Field (HF) inner layers and two Low-Field (LF) outer layers. To optimize the use of the superconductor and manage costs, a “grading” approach has been implemented [23], [24]. This technique involves using different cables for each region, depending on the local magnetic field condition. The bare cable details are listed in Table II. Regarding the critical current density fit for the Nb₃Sn, the one provided by the HFM programme was selected to enable comparison with results reported in the scientific literature [25]. Then for the iron yoke, the outer radius is set to 350 mm with a squared central window suitable for bladder and key technology, requiring pads with a minimum thickness of 25 mm. In particular, for the non-linear computations the soft iron ARMCO BH-curve has been used. The electromagnetic design and performance

calculations for both configurations were carried out using the ROXIE [26], [27] software from CERN. The overall results of this design are summarized in Table I, and will be discussed later in Section IV-A.

III. HYBRID Nb₃SN/NbTi DIPOLE

The second design, inspired by [3], [28], explores a Hybrid solution that represents the best compromise found between performance and cost. This design is based on a “material grading” strategy: since NbTi is only effective at lower magnetic field strengths, its use is restricted to the two outer Low-Field layers of the magnet (strand details can be found in [29]), while the two inner High-Field layers are wound with Nb₃Sn. This configuration (Fig. 1(b)) seeks to maximize performance where it is most needed while limiting expenses. The bare cable specifications are listed in Table II. The same characteristics of the iron yoke of the Full-Nb₃Sn design were adopted. Regarding the critical current densities, the same fit used for the Full-Nb₃Sn was applied to the Nb₃Sn layers, while for NbTi the LHC inner cable fit was adopted [30]. The resulting performance of this

TABLE II
BARE CABLE PROPERTIES

	Full Nb ₃ Sn		Hybrid Nb ₃ Sn/NbTi	
	HF	LF	HF	LF
Material	Nb ₃ Sn	Nb ₃ Sn	Nb ₃ Sn	NbTi
N° strands	40	40	40	40
Strand diameter [mm]	0.85	0.7	0.85	1.065
Cu/non-Cu	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.6
Cable inner thickness [mm]	1.53	1.228	1.53	1.736
Cable outer thickness [mm]	1.658	1.437	1.658	2.222
Cable width [mm]	18.36	14.85	18.36	22.365
Insulation thickness [mm]	0.145	0.145	0.145	0.145
Quench integral [MA ² s]	30	15	30	93

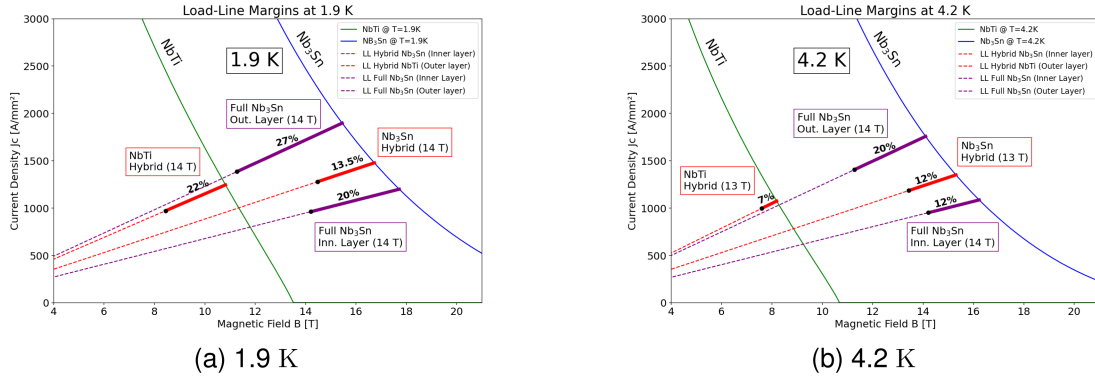


Fig. 2. Load-line margins evaluated with the ROXIE software.

Hybrid magnet is detailed in Table I and it shows a tradeoff between margin and achieved bore field that will be discussed in Section IV-A.

IV. DESIGN COMPARISON

A. Electromagnetic Margins

As shown in Fig. 2(a), at 1.9 K the Full-Nb₃Sn design meets the 20% load-line margin requirement across the entire coil. In contrast, for the Hybrid configuration, two operating scenarios must be considered. When targeting a bore field of 14 T, the Hybrid design satisfies the 20% margin only in the NbTi outer layers, while the inner Nb₃Sn layers become limiting, reducing the overall margin to 13.5%. Despite this reduction, the configuration remains attractive due to advantages in cost and potentially also in fabrication complexity. Alternatively, if the Hybrid is operated at 13 T at 1.9 K, it satisfies the 20% load-line margin requirement with margin still governed by the Nb₃Sn layers, as the NbTi remains well within its operating limits. In the FCC-hh case, this field reduction decreases the c.o.m. energy by 7%. At 4.2 K (Fig. 2(b)), the Full-Nb₃Sn design retains a margin of 12%, enabling operation at 14 T under relaxed cooling requirements. However, the Hybrid design cannot sustain 14 T at this temperature, as the NbTi outer layers exceed their short-sample performance limit. In this case, a reduced current must be used, limiting the bore field to 13 T, with a resulting load-line margin of only 7%, now dictated by the NbTi. This highlights the stronger temperature dependence of the Hybrid

design and the need to carefully balance field, temperature, and stability constraints when considering this configuration.

B. Persistent Current Losses

The strand magnetization was calculated using the semi-analytical scalar model within the ROXIE code [31] and neglecting Inter-Filament (IFCC) and Inter-Strand (ISCC) Coupling Currents contribution. Losses were determined for a single current cycle, ramping from 5% to 100% of the nominal current and back down. The resulting persistent current loss for this cycle was found to be 8.5 kJ/m and 4.7 kJ/m for the Full Nb₃Sn and the Hybrid design respectively. This corresponds to a significant reduction of approximately 45% in persistent current losses for the Hybrid design relative to the Full Nb₃Sn design.

C. Quench Protection

In this study, a preliminary quench protection analysis was approached using a conservative adiabatic approximation to estimate the maximum allowable quench integral (MIITs) for the superconducting cables in the different magnet regions [33], [34]. A maximum hot-spot temperature of 300K has been considered. For the HF region both designs employ the same superconducting cable, and due to the relatively small variation in the material properties at peak magnetic field, the budget remains similar (approximately 30 MA²s). These values were obtained under the assumption that the entire HF and LF winding operates under their peak field conditions, making this a deliberately

conservative scenario. For the LF region, the MIITs budgets differ significantly due to the use of different cable technologies and geometries. The Full-Nb₃Sn design employs a smaller Nb₃Sn cable to that of the HF region, resulting in a budget of approximately 15 MA²s. In contrast, the Hybrid configuration utilizes a NbTi cable with inherently better thermal and electrical properties, and a significantly larger cross-sectional area—nearly 50% greater than the Nb₃Sn cable used in the LF region of the Full design. These factors combine to yield a substantially higher budget of approximately 93 MA²s for the Hybrid working at 14 T, highlighting a distinct advantage in terms of protection margin. For a short demonstrator ($\cong 1$ m), a preliminary evaluation of the current discharge during a quench event has also been performed. Assuming a protection scheme employing an external dump resistor sized to limit the maximum voltage across the terminals to 500 V, the discharge MIITs were calculated using the total stored magnetic energy of the coils. The stored energy is 1.21 MJ/m for the Full-Nb₃Sn case and 1.08 MJ/m for the Hybrid case. Under these conditions, 24 MA²s and 29 MA²s respectively are needed for the discharge. If the maximum voltage constraint is relaxed to 1000 V, these MIITs values are effectively halved, providing greater flexibility in the protection scheme. These preliminary findings show that for a short demonstrator the Full-Nb₃Sn design with a 1000 V maximum voltage has a time margin of 31 ms (3 MA²s), whereas the Hybrid configuration has a time margin of 87 ms (14 MA²s). Nonetheless, further dedicated studies to refine and optimize the quench protection system are planned.

D. Conductor Cost

The conductor is one of the cost drivers in the manufacturing of a magnet. Using updated procurement costs of 330 €/kg for NbTi and 2274 €/kg for Nb₃Sn [35], [36], the material cost advantage of the Hybrid design becomes evident. Specifically for these two designs, the saving in Nb₃Sn mass is in the order of 43%, which results in a total conductor cost of approximately 82 k€/m for the Hybrid configuration, compared to 163 k€/m for the Full-Nb₃Sn option. However, it should be noted that the Hybrid design has a reduced margin in load-line with respect to the Full-Nb₃Sn and therefore, the reported 43% can be considered the cost needed to satisfy the 20% load-line margin requirement with 14T bore field.

E. Efficiency and Equivalent Coil Width

The *equivalent coil width* is a useful parameter for comparing different coil layouts [37]. It represents the width of a 60° sector coil that has the same cross-sectional area as the design under evaluation. This geometrical normalization provides a simple yet effective metric for assessing layout compactness. From the equivalent coil width, we derive the *layout efficiency* by calculating the bore field produced by the coil alone, removing both grading and iron contributions [37]. This approach provides a clearer understanding of the conductor performance and its utilization within the magnet design. Our benchmark value for the coil efficiency is 6.63×10^{-4} Tmm/A, result that comes from the efficiency of a 60° sector coil, without iron and grading [37].

Using this reference, the Full-Nb₃Sn layout achieves 98% of the benchmark, while the Hybrid Nb₃Sn/NbTi configuration reaches 97.1%. These values indicate that both coil layouts are highly efficient in terms of conductor utilization, with only a marginal difference between them. The Hybrid Nb₃Sn/NbTi configuration, despite incorporating a lower-performance material in the LF region, achieves over 97% of the benchmark efficiency. This observation suggests that there may be room for further optimization of the Hybrid layout. In particular, a reduction in the number of strands in the NbTi cable could be explored as a strategy to decrease the total cable cross-sectional area and, consequently, the equivalent coil width. Such an adjustment would have the potential to improve the normalized layout efficiency, while offering additional benefits in terms of material cost reduction. Given the significantly higher MIITs budget available in the LF region of the Hybrid design a slight reduction in the copper volume would likely not compromise quench protection. Instead, it may allow a more cost-effective and compact implementation, especially relevant for large-scale magnet production. Future iterations of the Hybrid concept could investigate this trade-off more quantitatively, balancing layout efficiency, protection margin, and economic considerations.

F. Conductor Stress

For high-field accelerator magnets with a bore field of 14T, the conductor stress could approach the 150MPa HFM threshold. This makes a detailed structural design crucial for project feasibility. We initiated this work by estimating the peak accumulation of azimuthal stress in the mid-plane and radial stress using the analytical model proposed in [38]. The agreement between this model and the FEM analysis for the peak azimuthal and radial stresses in D20, a relatively similar design, is within 20% [38]. The results for our designs, reported in Table I, are comparable to those of similar existing magnets such as MDPCT1 and D20. This comparison strengthens our confidence in the feasibility of the magnet mechanical structure. However, these results must be validated through FEM analysis, which will be carried out in collaboration with INFN Genova.

V. CONCLUSION

This study presented a comparative analysis of two design options for a four-layer high-field dipole magnet: a Full-Nb₃Sn configuration and a Hybrid Nb₃Sn/NbTi layout. While only the Full-Nb₃Sn magnet is capable of reaching the target bore field of 14 T with 20% load-line margin, the Hybrid configuration shows promising characteristics in terms of cost reduction, splice complexity and persistent current losses. These trade-offs make it a viable alternative for further exploration, especially in applications where slightly reduced performances are acceptable. However, the Full-Nb₃Sn design is selected for the fabrication of a short model at the upcoming *IRIS facility* [39], [40], [41], [42], [43] located at the *Laboratory of Accelerators and Applied Superconductivity* in INFN Milan in the next years. This will serve as a technological demonstrator for future high-field magnets intended for post-LHC collider applications. The next

steps in the project will include a detailed quench protection and structural analysis, which is essential to ensure operational safety and reliability. These activities will be key to validating the design and preparing for future scaling toward a full-length prototype suitable for accelerator integration.

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