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Prototype of a frictionless linear motor with compliant bearings for precision engineering applications

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the structural optimization and experimental evaluation of a novel linear motor for applications in precision engineering industry. The output linear motion from the motor is supposed to be highly accurate since it is supported by a couple of compliant bearings and a frictionless electromagnetic actuator. The 6-mm stroke of the proposed motor is determined by the largest displacement of compliant bearings in elastic region under the acting of more than 6-N axial force, i.e., both analytical and finite element methods (FEM) are applied before fabricating the motor prototype. By employing beam-type flexures, the design of compliant bearing is able to produce large elastic deformation while maintaining its stability during practical operation in high-frequency condition. In addition, the bearing design is optimized using the response surface methodology (RSM) through ANSYS, which is coupled with the previous static analysis by FEM, to achieve a compliant structure with even higher deformation capability in desired directions. The optimized bearings are then assembled with the voice coil actuator (VCA) to create a complete 1-DOF frictionless linear motor, this actuator is designed to fit the required maximum force for a pair of compliant mechanisms with the force/displacement relationship ~1. Several experimental evaluations are then carried out to verify the actual performance of the motor, e.g., highly linear transfer function and displacement error, under the input DC current 0-5A. The experimental results suggest that the proposed linear motor is able to produce precise translational motion with significant accuracy and high repeatability at micro-scale. Furthermore, the millimeter-scale stroke of the motor is large enough to integrate into variety of devices for precision engineering applications such as control valves, robotic components or even actuation in space, etc.

Key words: Linear motor, compliant bearing, compliant mechanism, optimization, response surface methodology

INTRODUCTION

² For every precise positioning system, two key factors 3 that reduce the precision of desired motions are fric-4 tion and inertia. Popular actuators and mechanisms, 5 such as pneumatic systems, servo motors with screw 6 shaft, slider-crank linkages, have unavoidable iner-7 tia, especially when working in high-speed or in mi-8 croscale/ nanoscale range. Meanwhile, the friction 9 between mechanical components cannot be estimated Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh₁₀ accurately after a period of used time due to various 11 reasons, such as lubrication, wear of material caused 12 by dry friction and many other unpredictable errors in ¹³ manufacturing and assembly processes. To overcome such limitations, compliant mechanisms can be con-14 sidered as a potential solution for applications with 15 16 relative-small working range, high precision, good repeatability, lubrication- and maintenance-free. 17 18 In this work, the elastic deformation of a thin beam-19 type compliant mechanism is employed to create de-

20 sired output motions of compliant bearings. As a re-21 sult, the compliant bearings can eliminate the inertia by spring force and produce precise displacement 22 based on Hooke's law. In addition, by combining a pair of compliant bearings with a voice coil actuator 24 (VCA), a novel linear motor actuated by electromag-25 netic force can be archived to perform frictionless and 26 precise motion. 27

Referring to previous literatures, the compliant mech-28 anism can be designed based on the combination be-29 tween rigid and deformable beam elements^{1–3}. To 30 improve the maximum deformation of the bearings 31 while the original structure^{4,5} is remained, the di-32 mensions of each beam are set as design variables for 33 static structural analysis^{6,7} in ANSYS. By varying the 34 values of these variables according to the constraints 35 for beam dimensions, the output displacement and 36 von Mises stress data can be collected to build the re-37 sponse surfaces^{8,9}. From these response surfaces, the optimized design that can produce large elastic defor-39 mation along the desired direction and has large stiff-40 ness in non-actuating directions can be achieved. The 41 mentioned literatures presented a variety of synthesis 42

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and optimization methods for compliant mechanism,
but most previous work only provided some individual compliant mechanism designs as case studies for
demonstrating the methods and have not considered
their industrial applications. In this work, a novel design of compliant bearing is optimized based on the
existing methods. Its design is specific for a linear motor, which is developed for precise motion systems.
From the optimized compliant bearing, a voice coil

module¹⁰ is then designed to fit the dimensions and 52 provide the required force for the deformation of 53 compliant bearings. To simplify the control system 54 and reduce the burden of signal linearization like previous actuators^{11,12}, the testing module is aimed to 56 have an open-loop control system with a linear trans-57 fer function that is developed based on the relation-58 ships between applied DC voltage, electromagnetic 59 force and translational displacement. Typically, a 60 VCA needs a translational joint to produce the desired 62 linear motion. In this work, the compliant bearings and voice coil module are designed to fit each other 63

⁶⁴ to create a unique linear motor with simple structure,

⁵⁵ but is capable of producing high accurate linear mo-

66 tion by exploiting the frictionless property of compli-

ant mechanism. A prototype of the motor is then builtand experimentally tested to demonstrate its effective-

69 ness.

⁷⁰ The remaining of the paper is organized as follow: de-

⁷¹ sign of the linear motor, optimization process, exper-

72 iment setup, optimization result, experiment result

73 and conclusion.

RESEARCH METHOD

75 Design of the Linear Motor

The linear motor consists of two main modules: a pair of compliant bearings and a voice coil actuator (illus-77 trated in Figure 1) with the targeted boundary dimen-78 sions being limited to 100mm x 100mm x 180mm to 79 fit popular precise motion systems. The rotor shaft of 80 the VCA, which is assembled with the central flanges 81 (moving bodies) of two bearings, will generate elec-82 tromagnetic force when a DC voltage value is applied 83 and will make the compliant mechanisms deform. 84 The stator of the VCA is mounted to the fixed bodies 85 of compliant bearings as shown in Figure 2. The actu-86 ated position of the rotor shaft is located at the mid-87 point between bearing centers so that each compliant 88 mechanism can be acted by equal force and producing identical displacement. 90 Based on previous works⁴, the initial model of the 91 92 compliant bearing is designed and calculated by ap-

⁹³ plying the serial-parallel relationships between beam

elements (Figure 2). In particular, the bearing consists 94 of four symmetrical legs about its center. Each leg is 95 constructed by five beam-type flexures connected serially. In this design, all of the beams have the same 97 thickness *b* and width *h*, only the lengths *L* of them are changed to well fulfill the given design space. For the 99 bearing material, aluminum alloy 6061 is selected due 100 to its popularity in the compliant mechanism. The detailed mechanical properties of this material are given 102 in Table 1.

Based on the Hooke's law in equation (1), to control the displacement *x* of compliant bearings, the total stiffness *k* along *z* axis of beam elements will be deterned by using 6x6 stiffness matrix of a typical fixed end beam (2) for each beam element above and then synthesizing these matrices together following relationships in Figure 3. The synthesize of the synthe

$\Gamma = K.X(1)$	
Where: F: Applied force (elastic force) (N)	112
k: Stiffness of element (Nm)	113
<i>x</i> : Displacement of element (m)	114

Kbeam =	=					
$\left[\frac{AE}{I}\right]$	0	0	0	0	0]	
	$\frac{12EI_Z}{I^3}$	0	0	0	$-\frac{6EI_Z}{I_Z}$	
0	L^{3}	$12EI_y$	0	$\frac{EI_y}{I}$	$\begin{bmatrix} L^2\\ 0 \end{bmatrix}$	(2)
	0	L^3	GJ	L^2		(2)
	0	$6EI_y$		$4EI_y$		
0	0 6EI-	L^2	0	L	$4EI_{7}$	
	$-\frac{1}{L^2}$	0	0	0	$\frac{1}{L}$	
TA71	Г. V		$(\mathbf{M}\mathbf{D}_{\mathbf{r}})$			

where: E: Toung's modulus (MPa)	115
G: Shear modulus (MPa)	116
A: Cross-sectional area (m ²)	117
I_y : Inertia moment about y axis (m ⁴)	118
I_z : Inertia moment about z axis (m ⁴)	119
<i>I</i> : Torsion constant (m ⁴)	120
To verify the calculated result, static structural analy-	121
sis is also performed in Ansys software and the final	122
result of maximum displacements for two methods is	123
shown in Table 2.	124
From the required force to archive the maximum dis-	125
placement of 2 compliant bearings and the boundary	126

placement of 2 compliant bearings and the boundary 126 dimensions of the motor, a moving-coil VCA was designed with two components: stator and rotor (Figure 4). The strongest output force that this VCA can 129 generate is estimated by the Lorentz force formula in 130 equation (3) with the maximum voltage source 12V 131 and the working current cannot exceed 10A. 132

- $\mathbf{F} = \mathbf{i}_{coil} \mathbf{I}_{pass} \mathbf{B}_{gap} \tag{3}$
- F: Electromagnetic force (N) 134





Figure 2: Original design for one leg of the compliant bearing.



Figure 3: Construction of the linear motor (a) and its stiffness modelling (b).



Table 1: Mechanical properties of aluminum alloy 6061

Young's modulus	$E = 69 \text{ x } 10^9 \text{ N/m}^2$
Density	$D = 2700 \text{ kg/m}^3$
Poisson coefficient	= 0.33
Shear modulus	$G = 259 \text{ x } 10^8 \text{ kg/m}^3$
Yield strength	YS = 276 MPa

Table 2: Result of the initial motor with 2 compliant bearings

Value	Maximum displacement -Stroke (mm)	Maximum required force (N)
Method		
Analytical method (Stiffness matrix)	6.2829	6.3785
Finite element method (Ansys simulation)	6.5699	6.3785
Error between 2 methods (%)	4.57	

 $_{135}$ i_{coil}: Current through the rotor coil (A)

¹³⁶ l_{pass} : Length of the wire which flux lines pass (m)

137 Bgap: Magnetic flux density (T)

While icoil and lpass can be determined from the 138 number of wiring turns, the magnetic flux density of 139 the VCA is calculated by both analytical method via 140 equivalent closed magnetic circuit model and finite element method with magnetostatic simulation5. It is 142 noted that the stator consists of the permanent mag-143 net and a cover while the rotor is a coil as shown in 144 Figure 4. From the calculation, the voice coil actua-145 tor can have maximum 3.2N linear force. This value 146 will not satisfy the maximum force from Table 2 with 147 nearly 6.4N. Therefore, an optimization is conducted 148 to not only reduce the required force but also increase 149 the maximum displacement. 150

151 Structural Optimization

The aim of this optimization is to improve the max-152 imum elastic displacement of the compliant bearings 153 while decreasing the required force from 6.4N to 3.2N 154 or lower. This section demonstrates the general model 155 of optimization in ANSYS with a defined objective, 156 constrains and then analyses the result data to deter-157 158 mine the most effective structure for the compliant bearing prototype. 159 As the compliant bearing is constructed by 4-legged 160

¹⁶⁰ Als the compliant bearing is constructed by 4 legged ¹⁶¹ configuration, the structural optimization is con-¹⁶² ducted for one leg only. For each beam element, there ¹⁶³ are three dimensions that can be set as design vari-¹⁶⁴ ables for the optimization: Thickness b_i , width h_i and length L_i of the beam i as shown in Figure 5a where i = 1651, 2, 3, 4. From the formula of stiffness of a cantilever beam under bending (illustrated in Figure 5b) written in equation (4), it is obvious that the minimum thickness will provide the lowest stiffness, which also means the beam can perform a high bending flexibility about this direction effectively. Due to the complexity of using an ultra-thin metal plate for the accurate fabrication and assembly, the beam thicknesses in this work are kept as constant of 0.5mm to create the high flexibility of the compliant bearing and ensure its stable structure during the manufacturing and assembly processes.

 $k_{cantilever} = 3EI/l^3 = Ebh^3/4l^3$ (4) 178

Take advantage of the symmetrical design of the com-179pliant bearing, seven dimensions of a leg are analysed180as input variables as illustrated in Figure 6a. By this181way, instead of setting ten variables for the lengths and182widths of 5 beams, the number of design variables is183minimized to 7 variables.184

After defining the input variables for constraining, the185output variables for the objective of optimization are186also considered. There will be two parameters that are187set as target variables: the center displacement (VCA188rotor shaft position) of the compliant mechanism un-189der the acting of 1N force (also known as the linear190compliance of the bearing under an actuating force191from the VCA) and the maximum von Mises stress192in the bearing structure.193



The objective of this optimization is to maximize
the displacement of the compliant bearing under desired actuating force while its original structure is remained, and the von Mises stress is constrained to be
lower than the yield strength of material as shown in
Table 1.



Figure 6: Optimization variables (a) Considered variables for each optimization case (b).

The result for displacement and von Mises stress variables with initial beam dimensions in Figure 2 will be calculated first in ANSYS and connected to 3 single-objective optimization (Pareto optimality) setups with different constraining cases, i.e., the input variables will change beam widths only, the input variables will change beam lengths only, the input variables will change both beam widths and lengths (Figure 6b). The constraints for input variables will be 208 defined based on the boundary dimensions of the motor model to avoid the penetration between beam elements. Each optimization setup will provide an output displacement - stress data and this result will be 212 used to build response surfaces. By using the genetic 213 algorithm (GA) with defined constraints and a single 214 objective to maximize the output displacement along 215 Z axis, the optimized dimensions of beam elements 216 can be determined from ANSYS software. 217 There is also another method to archive the optimized 218

dimensions, which is identifying the sweet spot of ²¹⁹ response surfaces by analysing the data from static ²²⁰ structural analysis. Because the target is to maximize ²²¹ the displacement and minimize the stress, the ratio *t* ²²² between these two parameters can be determined for ²²³ each dimensions combination in the result data following equation (5). ²²⁵

 $t = c_j / \sigma \max_j (5)$ 226

t: Ratio between max displacement and max stress227 C_j : Maximum displacement under 1N force (mm)228 σ max $_j$: Maximum von Mises stress (MPa)229The combination with highest t will be the best re-230

sult for optimization due to both high displacement 231 and low stress. In reverse, the model with highest 232 t or sweet spots of response surfaces is not always 233 the finest design to build the prototype. Too low 234 compliance can cause unstable motion when applying 235 and dependent displacements along remaining DOFs. 236 Thus, beside considering the sweet spots, the points 237 which locate close to these spots must also need to be noticed. 239

RESULTS

Optimization result

From the optimization process, response surface re- ²⁴² sults for 3 cases with the most influential design vari- ²⁴³ ables can be obtained and presented in Figures 7 and 8 ²⁴⁴

240

241

and 9. Overall, 3 cases have quite similar optimized
results for the new dimensions of beam elements and
the best combination of each case is shown in Table 3.
By using this data, each combination will be calculated by the stiffness matrix method from equation (2)
and also performed in simulation again to determine
which is the best one for building the prototype of the
linear motor later.

²⁵³ By using above optimized dimensions, the new com²⁵⁴ pliant bearing with ununiform beam elements is re²⁵⁵ design in Figure 10 and analysed by finite element
²⁵⁶ method in Figure 11.

The new model shown better deforming distribution
especially for beams 1 and 3. The maximum displacement for the optimized motor is shown in Table 4. The
motor stroke is determined by the ratio between the
yield strength of aluminum and maximum von Mises
stress from Figure 11b, this ratio is then multiplied
with the highest displacement in Figure 11a.

²⁶⁴ By comparing results from Tables 2 and 4, it is seen
²⁶⁵ that the optimized design has its deforming capabil²⁶⁶ ity improved nearly 55%. Meanwhile, the maximum
²⁶⁷ required force of the optimized design also fits to the
²⁶⁸ output force generated by the proposed VCA module.

269 Experimental setup

The experiment is conducted to study the linear transfer function with discrete input DC signal and has a
preliminary investigation on the operating tolerance
of the motor prototype.

To verify the actual performance of the optimized de-274 sign, a linear motor prototype (Figure 12a) was built 275 and an experimental setup was conducted to measure its translational displacement corresponding to a DC 277 current value (Figure 12b). In this experiment, the 278 motor prototype is clamped by a fixture. The out-279 put shaft then contacts directly with the dial indi-280 cator head to measure its translational displacement 281 along the desired DOF. The dial indicator and fixture 282 are both fixed to the ground to avoid external distur-283 bances from the environment. The resolution for de-284 vices will be as follows: 0.2A for the DC power sup-285 ply and 0.01mm for the dial indicator. The maximum 286 current that the power supply can archive is 5A. 287 The measurement was carried out at room tempera-288

ture of 20-25°C and repeated 10 measured times, the
DC current increases from 1 to 5A with 0.2A interval.
As a result, there are 25 data points for each measuring
time.



Figure 11: Simulation of the motor with two bearings for displacement (a) and von Mises stress (b) acted by 1N force.

Actual Performance of the Frictionless Lin- 293 ear Motor 294

Based on the experimental result, the average curve ²⁹⁵ demonstrates the highly linear relationship between ²⁹⁶ input current and output displacement can be ²⁹⁷ archived as shown in Figure 13. The maximum devia-²⁹⁸ tion between the average curve and measuring values ²⁹⁹ is 19 μ m, while the highest deviation between measuring times is nearly 45 μ m. These micro-level differences can be explained by the limited resolution ³⁰² of 10 μ m and 0.2A from the dial indicator and DC ³⁰³ power supply respectively. The experimental stroke ³⁰⁴ has come up to 0.45mm at 4A input current due to ³⁰⁵ the limitation of the DC power supply. With more ³⁰⁶ advanced devices, the linear motor is supposed to ³⁰⁷ achieve better performance in terms of resolution, accuracy, stroke and a linear characteristic. Overall, ³⁰⁹



Figure 7: Response surface of displacement (a) and maximum von Mises stress (b) in beam widths only optimization.





Table 3: Finest combinations of each optimization cases

Case	P1 (mm)	P2 (mm)	P3 (mm)	P4 (mm)	P5 (mm)	P6 (mm)	P7 (mm)
Width only	3	4	-	-	-	-	-
Length only	-	-	3	4	8	3	55
Width and length	3	4.5	3	4.5	4.5	5	58







Table 4: Result of optimized motor with 2 compliant bearings

value	Maximum displacement -Stroke (mm)	Maximum required force (N)
Method		
Analytical method (Stiffness matrix)	10.2152	3.0757
Finite element method (Ansys simulation)	10.1694	3.0757



Figure 12: Linear motor prototype (a) and experimental setup for displacement measurement (b).

³¹⁰ based on the experimental result, this motor model ³¹¹ can guarantee the workspace up to more than 10mm ³¹² (simulation result from Table 4). The experiments ³¹³ were repeated 25 times with 10 measured points each ³¹⁴ time. The measured results were then analyzed and ³¹⁵ the achieved result showed that the motor is able to ³¹⁶ perform a positioning tolerance of ± 22.5 microme-³¹⁷ ters.

318 **DISCUSSION**

³¹⁹ From the average curve of experimental result, the ³²⁰ linear function in equation (6) demonstrating the re-³²¹ lationship between the output displacement C (mm) ³²² and the input current i_{coil} (A) can be determined by ³²³ linearization. This can be also used as the transfer function for the open-loop control system of the linear motor. 325

$C = 0.117 \times i_{coil}$ (6) 326

It is noted that for the measurement in the electrical327current range from 0A to 1A, the measured value can328be unclear due to the small displacement and the ini-329tial reaction force by the dial indicator. Therefore, the330measurement is conducted from 1A to 5A.331

CONCLUSION

The linear motor presented in this paper has shown 333 the capability to work in micro-scale tolerance while 334 still ensuring high repeatability as demonstrated by 335 the experimental results. With the maximum stroke 336 of more than 10 mm together with the linear char- 337

332





338 acteristic for open-loop control system, this type of motor will be a potential solution for high-precision industrial applications such as actuating systems of 340 compact robotic modules, pick and place units of pro-341 duction lines, control valves in pneumatic systems, or 342 even actuating apparatuses for aerospace engineering 343 due to the maintenance-free characteristic, etc. 344 For the future, it is necessary to conduct the experi-345 ment in this paper again by devices with more accu-346 rate resolution and continuous input DC current; so 347 that the tolerance of the motor can be identified pre-348 349 cisely and the dynamic operation in a frequency range 350 can be studied. Furthermore, the effect of temper-

³⁵¹ ature and errors caused by fabrication and assembly

³⁵² processes will be also considered to investigate.

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157 COMPETING INTEREST

³⁵⁸ The authors declare that they have no competing in-³⁵⁹ terests.

360 AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

³⁶¹ H. N. Le: Conceptualization, Prototype Develop³⁶² ment, Investigation and Manuscript Preparation. H.
³⁶³ T. Nguyen: Investigation, Validation and Manuscript
³⁶⁴ Editing. T. A. Le: Design Optimization and Valida³⁶⁵ tion. M. T. Pham: Methodology, Funding Acquisi-

tion, Resources, Validation and Manuscript Editing. 366

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Mô hình động cơ tịnh tiến không ma sát với gối đỡ đàn hồi cho các ứng dụng trong cơ khí chính xác

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TÓM TẮT

Bài báo này trình bày việc tối ưu hóa kết cấu và đánh giá thực nghiệm một loại động cơ tuyến tính mới phục vụ cho các ứng dụng trong ngành công nghiệp cơ khí chính xác. Chuyển động tịnh tiến từ động cơ có độ chính xác cao vì trục động cơ được lắp trên một cặp gối đỡ đàn hồi và vận hành bằng một cơ cấu chấp hành điện từ không ma sát. Hành trình tối đa 6 mm của động cơ được xác đinh thông qua đô dich chuyển lớn nhất của gối đỡ trong vùng đàn hồi dưới tác dung của lực doc trục hơn 6 N (cả phương pháp giải tích và phương pháp phần tử hữu hạn (FEM) đều được áp dụng cho việc tính toán trước khi chế tạo mô hình động cơ). Bằng cách sử dụng các phần tử đàn hồi dạng dầm, thiết kế của gối đỡ đàn hồi có khả năng tạo ra biến dạng đàn hồi lớn trong khi vẫn duy trì được sự ổn định trong quá trình vận hành thực tế ở điều kiện tần số cao. Ngoài ra, thiết kế ổ đỡ được tối ưu hóa bằng phương pháp đáp ứng bề mặt (RSM) thông qua phần mềm ANSYS (được kết hợp với phân tích tĩnh trước đó bằng FEM) để đạt được kết cấu đàn hồi với khả năng biến dạng cao ở theo bậc tự do mong muốn. Các gối đỡ được tối ưu hóa và sau đó lắp ráp với bộ động cơ điện từ (VCA) để tạo ra một động cơ tuyến tính 1 bậc tự do không ma sát hoàn chỉnh, bộ VCA này được thiết kế để đáp ứng điều kiện về lực tối đa cần thiết cho một cặp cơ cấu đàn hồi với mối quan hệ tỉ lệ của lực và chuyển vị ~1. Một số đánh giá thực nghiệm sau đó được tiến hành để xác minh hoat đông thực tế của đông cơ, ví du: hàm truyền có đô tuyến tính cao và sai số chuyển vi, dưới dòng điện DC đầu vào 0-5A. Kết quả thực nghiệm cho thấy rằng động cơ tịnh tiến được đề xuất có khả năng tạo ra chuyển động tịnh tiến chính xác cao và độ lặp lại cao ở mức μ m. Hơn nữa, hành trình tối đa 6 mm của động cơ đủ lớn để tích hợp vào nhiều thiết bị cho các ứng dụng kỹ thuật yêu cầu độ chính xác cao và phạm vi hoạt động lớn như van điều khiển, bộ phận robot hoặc thậm chí truyền đông trong không gian, v.v

Từ khoá: Động cơ tịnh tiến, gối đỡ đàn hồi, cơ cấu đàn hồi, tối ưu hóa, phương pháp bề mặt đáp ứng

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