Intramolecular Communication and Allosteric Sites in Enzymes Unraveled by Time-Dependent Linear Response Theory

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ABSTRACT

It has been an established idea in recent years that protein is a physiochemically connected network. Allostery, understood in this new context, is a manifestation of residue communicating to remote parts in a molecule, and hence a rising interest to identify communication pathways within such a network. Recently, we have developed the time-dependent linear response theories (td-LRTs), which well described the ligand photodissociation relaxation dynamics of myoglobin. In this study, we applied the td-LRT with impulse force to investigate the allostery in an enzyme system - the dihydrofolate reductase (DHFR), which catalyzes the hydride transfer (HT) reaction to reduce dihydrofolate (DHF) to tetrahydrofolate (THF) using the cofactor nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate (NADPH). We developed a connection matrix to record the counts of mechanical signals propagating through donor-acceptor pairs launched from the active sites with the td-LRT. Through the connection matrix, the communication score (CS) of each residue is assigned, which quantify how often the signals propagate through a residue in its most accessible way. The sites with high CS are termed “intramolecular communication centers (ICCs)”, which were shown to be highly conservative. Furthermore, we showed that the HT rate reduction by a single residue mutation is highly correlated with its CS. Especially, the mysterious 200-fold HT rate reduction of the distal mutation G121V from kinetic isotope effect experiment is well described by our model with its ultra-high CS which means the G121 participating on the signal propagation process most frequently. On the other hand, several mutants: G67V, S148A and W133F causing minor HT rate reduction were described by its low CS, which means fewer signals through those sites. We proposed that the fold of HT rate reduction for a given mutant is an exponential function of its CS, which suggests that the dynamics signal propagation in the wild type play a background role to facilitate the HT quantitatively.

INTRODUCTION

The protein structures, dynamics and functions have been intensively studied for several decades. One of the most challenging parts of the task is to estimate the synergistic effects of mutations far from the binding pockets on the enzyme activity – known as the effect of allostery (1-3). Traditionally, allostery is considered to be driven by noticeable conformational changes. Such like, the pre-existing model (the MWC model) (4) and the KNF model (the induced fit model) (5) were used to explain the allosteric regulation of ligand binding. However, recently it is suggested that the allostery may not involve significant conformational changes. One such example is the cyclic adenosine monophosphate (cAMP) binding to the dimeric catabolite activator protein (CAP), a transcriptional activator (6). Kalodimos's group used the CPMG technique to measure the conformational exchange between states, and found that the binding of first ligand actually affects the microsecond-millisecond dynamics of the unbound subunit, which cause the negative cooperativity of the second cAMP binding (6). It is concluded that the allostery can be driven by protein dynamics without the need of notable conformational changes.

Another example is the E.coli dihydrofolate reductase (DHFR), which catalyzes the reductation of dihydrofolate (DHF), facilitated by the cofactor NADPH, to terahydrofolate (THF) and $NADP^+$ (Fig 1). The catalytic cycles (7, 8), kinetic data (9-13), folding stability (14-16), intermediate structures (17, 18), and binding dynamics (19, 20) and its hydride transfer rate of the mutants (7, 10, 11, 21-32) have been extensively studied. Recently, more evidences establish the dynamical view point of the enzyme catalytic process in the hydride transfer of DHFR (28, 30, 33, 34). One mutant G121V, 19 Å away from the catalytic center, can reduce the hydride transfer rate by 200 folds (10, 11, 26) while the mutant G67V (11), S148A (7, 23) and W133F (28) impact the activity only minimally. The non-additive property of hydride transfer rate reduction of double mutant data involving positions M42 and G121 further suggest that a coupled dynamics motion of these distal residues enhances crossing of the chemical reaction barrier (11, 26). The QM/MM study also suggests that when a reaction progresses from the reactants to products through chemicals' and protein's transition states; a network of "coupled promoting motions" could facilitate the chemistry in DHFR (12, 34). Furthermore, a recent NMR experiment shows that dynamics on the picosecond-nanosecond and microsecond-millisecond time scales (Using CPMG RD technique) are found significantly changed in the G121V mutant of DHFR, owing to the mutant inducing impaired residue network inside DHFR, which decreases dynamical signal propagation (33).

From NMR evidences, those 'invisible' protein motion ranging from *ps-ns* to *s-ms* are suggested to affect the hydride transfer rate (8). Optical experiments also show that low frequency collective vibrational excitations exist in *ps-ns* (35-38). It is still an extensively studied issue how the enzyme exploit the vibrational excitations through the signal propagation to catalyze the chemical reaction. In the past decade, several theoretical methods were proposed to elucidate intramolecular signal propagation pathways (39-48). Generally, the methods can be divided into two categories –structural/dynamical equilibrium (42-44, 46, 47) or non-equilibrium approaches (39-41, 45, 48). We give a short review in this proposal as well as in our previous work (49). On the equilibrium approaches, Chennubhotla and Bahar used the Markov approach to extract the communicating residues in a GroEL-GroES system (42, 47). Vishveshwara's group applied Floyd-Warshal algorithm to determine shortest paths between residues having high correlation in positional deviations, analyzed from MD trajectories (43). Kong and Karplus used an unsupervised clustering technique to group residues that are highly correlated in a PDZ domain, and the distributions of communicating

residues in a given cluster could report signal ‘pathway’ (44). Despite the good efforts, one major problem of these equilibrium approaches is that the propagation pathways are fixed and the perturbations/external forces play no roles in the resolved pathways. Non-equilibrium approaches serve as promising alternatives to investigate signal propagations through the network. Ota and Agard have developed a protocol called “anisotropic thermal diffusion (ATD)” to study the kinetic energy propagation using a non-equilibrium molecular dynamics (MD) simulation (41). The ATD starts with cooling down the protein to 10K in vacuum then a specific residue is heat up to 300K. Consequently, the signal propagation pathway from the heated spot can be tracked by the r.m.s.d. changes of atoms deviated from their equilibrated positions as a function of time. It was found that the speed of intramolecular signaling is about 14 Å/ps, which is comparable to the speed of sound in liquids water at room temperature. However, ATD suffers from low signal-to-noise ratio, which makes it hard to trace the complete network through a protein; also the non-natural environment causes the results unreliable. Sharp and Skinner used “pump-probe molecular dynamics simulations (PPMD)” to study the signal propagation. Selected residues are ‘pumped’ by oscillatory forces in a period ~10 ps, the ‘probes’, are found within those that have the highest enrichment in Fourier-transform-derived density of states about the ‘pumped’ frequency. The phase delay divided by inter-residue distance is interpreted as the speed of the signal, found at 5Å /ps (45). Although the “mutual correlated residues” were identified by PPMD, the time order of signal propagation is absent. Leitner’s group combines the non-equilibrium MD and the normal mode relaxation process to study the diffusivity of heat current in the homodimeric hemoglobin(39). Given an initial position and velocity, the normal mode relaxation method provides the displacement and velocity as a function of time, which serves as the route to estimate the kinetic energy propagation. Leitner’s approach is methodologically closer to ours than others. Notably, Ranganathan group proposed a correlated mutation method called the “statistical coupling analysis (SCA)” to identity the co-evolved residues (46). This approach however requires many homologous sequences to secure the statistical significance of calculations of wild type and perturbed “energies”. (However, a statistical coupling site W133 shows no obvious effect in hydride transfer of DHFR (28))

Supplementing the aforementioned theories, recently we developed a novel theory called the time-dependent linear response theories (td-LRT) to investigate the dynamics of protein motions subject to external perturbations (e.g. ligand dissociation) (49). The method combining the normal mode analysis (NMA) (50, 51) and damped harmonic driven Langevin dynamics (52) has been shown to well describe site-specific residue relaxation in carbonmonoxy myoglobin (Mb) characterized by time-resolved UV Resonance Raman (UVRR) spectroscopy (36). Using td-LRT, we are able to monitor a two-staged relaxation where the slower relaxation occurs from 4.4 to 81.2 ps (49) and the time constants characterized for a couple of aromatic residues agree with those observed by UVRR spectrometry and time-resolved X-ray crystallography (36, 53). The faster ‘early responses’, triggered as early as 400 femtoseconds, can be best described by the theory when impulse forces are used. Also, the sound speed estimated at 4-7 Å/ps in Mb is compared favorably with that in water (14 Å/ps) and concentration-dependent sound velocity in ~0.1 M protein solution (54, 55). Furthermore, we identify several residues in Mb as ‘disseminators’ that propagate the signals faster than others and are found to be kinetically important to modulate gas molecule diffusion and rebinding (49, 56). We further did several point mutations and found that their kinetic importance can be reflected by the number of retained disseminators identified from the wild type (49). For example, disseminators L29, A110, V68, I107, I30, L72, S108, F106, G73, E109 are those that have the shortest disseminating time within Mb.

We redid the disseminator analysis on the point mutation L29S *in-silico* and found only residues V68, I107, L72, S108 and G73 are still among the top 10 disseminators; while analysis on another point mutation D60G found that a higher number of wild-type disseminators can be retained in the top 10 disseminators (namely V68, L29, A110, I107, L72, G73, F106). The rebinding kinetics experiment showed that D60G impacts the binding behavior minimally while L29S dramatically changed the rebinding curve (49, 56). The quantitative agreement of our methods with several experiments (36, 53, 56) is an important distinction of LRT from other methods.

In this article, we further apply the td-LRT theory with the impulse force to investigate the dynamic driven allosteric regulation. We propose a new method to track the atomic level dynamic signal propagation pathway, and consequently the recorded signals are coarse-grained to extract the frequently through residues termed as the intramolecular communication centers (ICCs). The evolutional conservation and functional important of the ICCs are also examined. Finally, the possible coupling between mechanical perturbations induced by chemical modifications on allosteric sites (or sites remote to the active sites) and fold of the reduction of experimentally characterized hydride transfer rates (at the active site) of DHFR is reported.

THEORY, ALGORITHM and METHODS

2a. The System preparation

To study the dynamics relating the forward hydride transfer, the Michaelis-complex of DHFR (PDB code: 1RX2) including cofactor NADPH and substrate DHF is used to perform the normal mode analysis. The DHFR structure is formed by the rigid frame consist of an eight-strand β-sheet and four α-helices as well as three flexible loops: Met 20 loop (residues 9-24), F-G loop (residues 116-132) and G-H loop (residues 142-150) (20).The scalable molecular dynamics program, NAMD (Nanoscale Molecular Dynamics), (57) with CHARMM 36 force-field (58) is used to perform the energy minimization of full atom. Besides, the force-field of substrate, folate, is generated from the ParamChem web site (59, 60) based on the CHARMM General Force Field (CGenFF), where a further Q.M. calculation with MP2/6-31g(d) calculation for the folate support that the charges are close to the estimation of the ParamChem. After several million MD steps of energy minimization, the system reaches our criteria such that the mean force of atoms equals to 10^{-5} kcal/mol/ Å . Consequently, the full atom (*N=2615* atoms including all the hydrogen atoms) normal mode analysis (NMA) is carried out by diagonalizing the hessian matrix constructed by the second derivatives of the potential energy with respect to 3*N* mass-weighting Cartesian coordinates. Further detail steps of the NMA can be found in our previous work (49) and its supporting materials.

2b. The time-dependent linear response (td-LRT) theory and the characteristic time

To study a biomolecule perturbed by the impulse forces, we have developed a time dependent linear response theory (*td*-LRT) to describe the relaxation dynamics (49), which addresses dynamic allostery (64). The time progression of the positional changes of atom *i* are given by the following form

$$\langle \Delta\vec{r}_i(t)\rangle_f = \frac{1}{k_B T}\sum \langle \Delta\dot{\vec{r}}_j(0)\Delta\vec{r}_i(t)\rangle_0 \vec{k}_j \qquad \textbf{(1)}$$

, where $\sum\langle\Delta\dot{\vec{r}}_j(0)\Delta\vec{r}_i(t')\rangle_0$ is the velocity-position time-correlation function sampled in the absence of perturbations, $\vec{k}_j$ are the impulse forces applying on atom *j*. Consider a protein is surrounded by a viscous environment, we express $\langle\Delta\dot{\vec{r}}_j(0)\Delta\vec{r}_i(t')\rangle_0$ as superimposed independent harmonic oscillators (50, 51, 61) under solvent damping by solving the Langevin equation (52). The derivation can be found in supporting materials of our previous work (49). Through our previous studies (49), the speed of signal propagation is a function of locations/directions of perturbation forces and the network architecture within a protein. When impulse forces are introduced on atom *j*, atom *i* responds to these perturbations by its temporary positional departure from its equilibrium position as a function of time. In this process, the atom reaches its maximal deviation at a characteristic time (t_c^i) before the deviation eventually vanishes at long time (**Fig 2a**). We found that t_c^i is independent of the magnitude of $\vec{k}_j$ but varies with the directions and location of it. To examine the robustness of the perturbation-response relationship, we define a force ensemble, $k(\Omega_j) = k(\theta_j, \phi_j)$, acting at atom *j* with the same magnitude pointing toward 133 directions where θ_j is the angle between the direction of force $\vec{k}_j$ and the z-axis spanning from 0° to 90° with a step size 15°, and ϕ_j is the angle between the projection vector of the force $\vec{k}_j$ on the x-y plane and the x-axis spanning from 0° to 345° with the same step size 15°. Therefore, the characteristic times corresponding to a force ensemble $k(\Omega_j)$ are denoted by $t_c^i(\Omega_j)$.

2c. The longest dissemination time (LDT) relating to the active sites

To understand the role of residues in mediating signals, we would like to measure how fast the signal can propagate throughout the entire enzyme from a residue; in other words, to find the longest response time for all possible signals starting from a specific residue. As in the method proposed in our previous work (49), the force ensemble defined in section 2b was applied on the C_α atom of residue *s*. Consequently, a set of characteristic times consist of $133 \times N$ $t_c^i(\Omega_s)$ can be calculated (N is the number of $C_\alpha s$ or residues, which is 159 for DHFR). The longest $t_c^i(\Omega_s)$ in the *i*-th residue among all the 133×159 $t_c^i(\Omega_s)$ values is the longest dissemination time (LDT) for residue *s*. The residues with short LDT are called the "disseminators" (49), suggesting their roles in efficiently broadcasting the signals throughout the protein matrix. We calculate the LDT for each residue in DHFR by perturbing the corresponding C_α atom, also the C6 atom of the NADPH and N5 atom of the DHF. We then compare these calculated disseminators with the active site residues reported in reference (62).

2d. Coarse-Grained Connection Matrix (CGCM) and communication score (CS)

Although td-LRT provides the characteristic time $t_c^i(\theta_j, \phi_j)$ to characterize the time-evolution of signal propagation, we still need a method to trace frequent signal propagation pathways and identify crucial residues along these pathways, especially when the perturbation is introduced in a number of sites along 133 directions. Here, we introduce "the Coarse-Grained Connection Matrix (CGCM)" to record the signal propagations between residues. The idea is illustrated in **Figure S3**. With the CGCM, we can then extract "the intramolecular communication centers (ICCs)" - the residues having high CSs (see below) on popular pathways communicating dynamic signals.

Because the characteristic time $t_c^i(\theta_j, \phi_j)$ provides us the causality of signal propagation, we can trace the signal transduction pathway consist of the donor-acceptor pairs. There are **two**

criteria to define whether a donor atom propagates a signal to an acceptor atom, or say, whether two atoms are viewed as "connected" in the context of signal propagation. The atoms in the donor and acceptor residues are denoted as $atom_d$ and $atom_a$, respectively. **First**, given an impulse force exerted on the *j*-th C_α atom, $\vec{k}_j$, the atoms with characteristic times that differ by a small time interval Δt can be viewed as "connected" such that $t_c^{atom_a} - t_c^{atom_d} = \Delta t$, where the chosen Δt is the constant time interval we store/record the time correlation functions, or equivalently, the evolving protein conformations responding to the perturbation. Δt is 0.2 ps in our study. **Figure S3** demonstrates how the connection signal is recorded into a connection matrix. In order to track the physical causality of signal propagation, the "connected" pairs should also meet the **second** criteria - the angle between the vector *j*-th C_α to $atom_a$ and *j*-th C_α to $atom_d$ should be less than 90 degree. It is possible that a donor atom connects to several acceptor atoms, or several donors connect to an acceptor atom. As a result, in order to quantitatively recognize how frequently a residue participate in the signal propagation, we define a full-atom connected matrix $F(atom_d, atom_a)$ account for the number of the connection that the donor, a_d, connects to the acceptor, a_r

$$F(atom_d, atom_a) = \sum_j \langle \delta(\Delta t - [t_c^{atom_a}(\Omega_j) - t_c^{atom_d}(\Omega_j)]) \rangle_\Omega \qquad (2)$$

where j runs over all the selected C_α atoms that are perturbed, $\delta(x)$ is a Delta function equal to zero for any nonzero x, and unity when $x = 0$. Ω_j are forces exerted toward 133 directions defined in section 2b. With the full-atom **F** matrix, we further define the residue level CGCM by summing the counts belong to each residue pair such that

$$C(R_d, R_a) = \sum_{atom_d \in R_d} \sum_{atom_a \in R_a} \frac{F(atom_d, atom_a)}{N_d N_a} \qquad (3)$$

where R_d and R_a are donor and acceptor residues, respectively; N_d and N_a are the number of atoms in the donor and acceptor residue, respectively.

To model the signals propagation process during the hydride transfer reaction, we perturbed 21 sites including $C\alpha$ atoms within the distance of 7Å from the catalytic center (N5 atom of the DHF) as well as four sites locating at cofactor and substrate (see **Fig S1**). Consequently, 133 evenly distributed impulse forces defined in section 2b are applying at each perturbed site; all signals are summed up to one CGCM with elements of $C(R_d, R_a)$ which are then normalized with the 133 directions. In the CGCM, the elements in or immediately near the diagonal, indicating intra-residue communication or that between neighboring residues in primary sequence, have the largest values. The high $C(R_d, R_a)$ score (Communication Scores or CSs in short) along diagonals is intuitive for their strong covalent binding but less interesting in terms of allostery. We pay our attention to the off-diagonal elements satisfying $|index(R_d) - index(R_a)| > 2$, which provide information on the signal propagation between long range contacts (say, within or between secondary structures). Several hubs having the highest CGCM scores are the residue pairs that frequently communicate dynamic signals in one or multiple pathways. For a given residue, a unique "**communication score (CS)**" can be assigned as the highest CGCM score among pairs formed by this residue and any other non-consecutive residue in the protein – in other words, residue *i*'s CS is the highest score in either the *i*-th row or the *i*-th column (corresponding to donors or acceptors) of CGCM. The CS of each residue is listed in **Table S1**.

2e. Evolutionary importance of the ICCs

The evolutionary conservation of residues is compared with their CSs. The sequence conservation of residues are calculated by multiple sequence alignment conducted at the ConSurf web site (63-65), where residues are categorized into 9 conservation levels by "the ConSurf score" from 1 (the most diverse) to 9 (the most conserved). We then exam the distribution of the ConSurf score for residues with CS larger than several thresholds - 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4.

2f. The fold reduction of hydride transfer rates in DHFR mutants is presented as the difference of free energy changes

Suppose that the mutation of an amino acid would break and/or rewire the intrinsic dynamics network, then the chemical modifications (through mutagenesis) in frequently communicating sites, identified by physics approaches (such as td-LRT), could impair the function in the active site allosterically. Here, the forward hydride transfer rate, the chemical step extensively characterized by kinetic isotope experiments (7, 10, 11, 21-32), of wild type DHFR is defined as k_{WT} and that of its mutant is defined as k_{mut}. Converting the reaction rates to its activation free energy, we can use the inverse Boltzmann relation to obtain $\Delta G = -RTln(k)$. Consequently, the difference in activation free energy of hydride transfer reaction between the wild type and a mutant can be written as $\Delta\Delta G = -RTln(\Gamma)$, where $\Gamma = k_{WT}/k_{mut}$ that is the fold reduction of the hydride transfer rate due to a single point mutation. $RT =$ 0.6 kcal/mol. As can be seen in **Table 1**, a large Γ value means that the hydride-transfer rate is largely suppressed by the mutation, while Γ near unity means that the reaction rate stays unchanged. The correlation between the CS of each sites and the corresponding averaged change in free energy difference $\langle\Delta\Delta G\rangle$ is reported in this study, where $\langle ... \rangle$ denotes the average over different mutations at the same site. The results are reported in section 3e.

RESULTS

3a. The signal propagation and characteristic time

Movie S1 and Fig. 2(a) show the relaxation motion of atom *i* (the C_α atom of residue G121) as a function of time, where the point impulse force acting on the atom *j*, the N5 atom of the DHF at the catalytic center, toward the z-direction, is denoted by $(\theta_j, \phi_j) = (0,0)$; the characteristic time, $t_c^i(0,0)$, is 2.6 ps. Considering the force ensemble act at the catalytic center, the red circle in Fig. 2(b) shows the average characteristic time of every single atom *i* over the force ensemble, $\tilde{t}_c^i = \langle t_c^i(\theta_j, \phi_j)\rangle_{\theta,\phi}$, and the black bars denote the corresponding standard deviation. It can be seen that the signal starting from the catalytic center can almost go through the entire DHFR within few picoseconds. Further, $\tilde{t}_c^i$ as a function of the distance between atom *i* and *j*, d_{ij}, is shown in **Fig. 2c**. The linear regression of $\tilde{t}_c^i(d_{ij})$ marked by blue line gives a propagation speed of ~580 *m/s* with a correlation of ~0.8. Generally, the data show that the atom *i* with larger $\tilde{t}_c^i$ is farther in distance from the perturbed site and has larger variance. The variances suggest that the speed of signal is not isotropic and could be affected by the intramolecular dynamic network of residues.

3b. The Longest Dissemination Time (LDT) and disseminators

The dynamic network inside a protein also regulates how fast a perturbation could propagate through the entire protein. In this study we perturb the C_α of all the 159 residues in DHFR, also the C6 atom of the NADPH and N5 atom of the DHF. The LDT of four groups in NADPH and three groups in DHF are also noted (**Fig S2**). For each residue *j*, a perturbation

force ensemble in 133 different directions is used and then the slowest $t_c^i(\theta_j, \phi_j)$ at a given residue *i* is noted as the longest dissemination time (LDT) of the residue *j*. The residues with short LDT are called "disseminators" (49). Figure 3 shows the LDT for all the residues. It was found that several active sites (ILE 5, Phe 31, ILE 94, C6 of NADPH and N5 of DHF) are among good disseminators. The results suggest that the active sites locate at the optimal position of network to efficiently broadcast the mechanical signals.

3c. The Coarse-Grained Connection Matrix (CGCM) and communication score (CS)

Following the procedure in section 2d, the CGCM of DHFR can be obtained (**Figure 4a**). There are several hot spots in the off-diagonal elements, especially, the largest two elements are found to locate at C(13,122)=1.52 and C(13, 121)=1.42 - the donor-acceptor pairs of V13-D122 and V13-G121, respectively. Previous experiments have shown that the mutations in D122 and G121 can significant obstruct the hydride transfer rate. Interestingly, as shown in **Table S3**, we decomposed C(13,121) into 21 components by the perturbed sites, and it is found that signals from the perturbed C6 of the pterin group (site 164) and Y100 are almost twice the size of signals from other perturbed sites. The results provide an evident supporting that a strong coupling between the residue G121 and the catalytic center. Consequently, the CSs are determined following section 2d. **Figure 4b** shows the color-coded DHFR structure by **the CSs**, where the lowest and highest CS correspond to dark blue and dark red, respectively. The first few highest CSs can be found at the residue D122 as well as the second highest CS at the residue G121 located in the F-G loop. Some other residues such like M42, L54 and D27 show moderate CS of 0.6~0.7, while G67, S148 and W133 show CS lower or equal to 0.5. Comparing to the experimental mutation data that provide the ratio of wide-type hydride transfer rate (7, 10, 11, 21-26, 28) to that of a mutant, Γ, it is found that when those residues with high CSs were mutated, the hydride transfer rates of DHFR would significantly drop (resulting in a very large Γ value).

3d. The conservation of residues of DHFR in evolution

We further examined the evolutional importance of the identified ICCs. The number histogram of the ConSurf scores for all residues in DHFR is shown in **Figure 5** (the black line). There are 31 residues with the lowest ConSurf score (that is 1) as well as 57 residues with the highest ConSurf scores (8 or 9) which dominate the population. As examining the histograms of ConSurf scores for residues having a CS >0.9 (84 residues; in blue line), >1.0 (57 residues), >1.1 (30 residues), >1.2 (16 residues) and >1.3 (5 residues; in red line), we found the population gradually shifts toward evolutionarily conserved regions. The finding supports the aspect that dynamically significant residues are also evolutionarily conserved (66).

3e. The exponential dependence between the hydride transfer rate reduction and CS

By collecting experimental data from the literature, as shown in the **Table 1,** we summarized the fold reduction of hydride transfer rate in 35 mutants at 17 sites. The fold of hydride transfer rate reduction for a point mutation is expressed as $\Gamma = k_{WT}/k_{mut}$. For example, the I14A mutation causes 40 fold of hydride transfer rate reduction. The red and blue highlights indicate active sites and perturbed sites, respectively. $\langle \Delta\Delta \mathrm{G} \rangle = \langle \Delta \mathrm{G}_{WT} - \Delta \mathrm{G}_{mutant} \rangle = \langle -\mathrm{RT} ln(\Gamma) \rangle$ is the average for a set of difference of activation free energy in the hydride transfer rates between the wild type and its mutants at a given site (average over the rows in **Table 1**), where $\langle ... \rangle$ denotes the average of $\Delta\Delta \mathrm{G}$ for mutants at the same site. **Figure 6** reveals there is an appealing correlation (>0.8) between mutants' -$\langle \Delta\Delta G \rangle$ and their

communication scores, suggesting that the frequency of dynamic signal propagation through a residue could play an important role in allosteric control over the hydride transfer rate.

DISCUSSIONS

Is communication frequency between ICCs a function of geometric or physiochemical properties of a protein?

Although the correlation between the allosteric sites and the ICCs is established in our study, the question still remains as for how this "communication" property is related to known geometric or physiochemical features in an enzyme. This is not immediately clear at the moment. Our ENM analysis of the DHFR structure showed that the frequent communicators V13 and G121 are not located in the hinge of the slowest mode (suggesting functional importance (67-71)), nor are they located at the peaks of highest frequency modes (indicating the possibility to serve as a local folding core (72)) (Fig S4). The H-bonds formed between V13 and G121 are nowhere standing out as compared to those formed between other pairwise interactions. Thus far we have not found that the communication frequency of ICCs is correlated with other basic geometric or physiochemical properties such as mechanical hinges (68), binding interface (69-71) or high local packing density (72). Yet, they are evolutionarily conserved and regulatory of enzyme catalysis even when situated remotely.

The nonadditive of the changes of free energy difference for double mutant relating to the coupling of two distal residues also revealed by the elements of CGCM

The coupling between two distal residues has been studied by measuring the changes in free energy difference ($\Delta\Delta G = k_B T ln(\Gamma)$ where $\Gamma = k_{WT}/k_{mut}$) for DHFR's hydride transfer rates between two single mutants and a double mutant of the same two residues (11, 28).
It was proposed that the degree of coupling of two distal residues can be measured by the non-additivity of coupling energy ΔG_I (11), where the coupling energy $\Delta_3 G_I$ between two residue A and B is $\Delta_3 G_I = \Delta\Delta G_{A,B} - (\Delta\Delta G_A + \Delta\Delta G_B)$. The larger the magnitude of $|\Delta_3 G_I|$, the higher degree of coupling between the two selected residues is. For instance, given Γ for three single mutants M42W($\Gamma = 41$), G121V($\Gamma = 163$) and F125M($\Gamma = 42$), the coupling energies $|\Delta_3 G_I|$ of three double mutants: M42W-G121V ($\Gamma = 7600$), M42W-F125M ($\Gamma = 512$) and G121V-F125M ($\Gamma = 61$)(28) are 0.077, 0.73 and 2.83, respectively, suggesting positions 42 and 121 are relatively independent, while the 121-125 pair are the most coupled among the three pairs. Interestingly, we found that the communication scores [C(42,121) = 0.26 and C(121,42) = 0.24] are indeed the smallest as compared to [C(42,125) = 0.46 and C(125,42) = 0.45] and [C(121,125) = 0.59 and C(125,121) = 0.66] that is the most frequently communicating pair among the three. Our results show the same order of coupling strength G121V-F125M > M42-F125M > M42W-G121V as that derived from experimentally characterized hydride transfer rates, suggesting the count of propagating signals between a pair of residues can be viewed as a measure to quantify functionally relevant residue-residue coupling in proteins.

The robustness of CS

We have tested several combinations of perturbation sites involving including or excluding p6, p7, p24 to p159. Overall, the conservation dependence (Fig 5) barely changed, and the correlation between CS and hydride transfer rate reduction in mutants varied slightly (Fig 5a, 5b). In addition to the local structure dynamics such as the flexibility predicted by NMR[8,20,33] or contact number from the structural information [], the herein reported CSs could provide a quantitative measurement describing "the propensity of signal propagation between residues".

According to the evidence that CSs highly correlate with the hydride transfer rate reduction, our analysis support the aspect that the signal propagation regulates (if not facilitates) the enzyme catalysis, providing an alternative theoretical basis (apart from NMR[8,20,33], bioinformatics, MD) for enzymologists' further exploration.

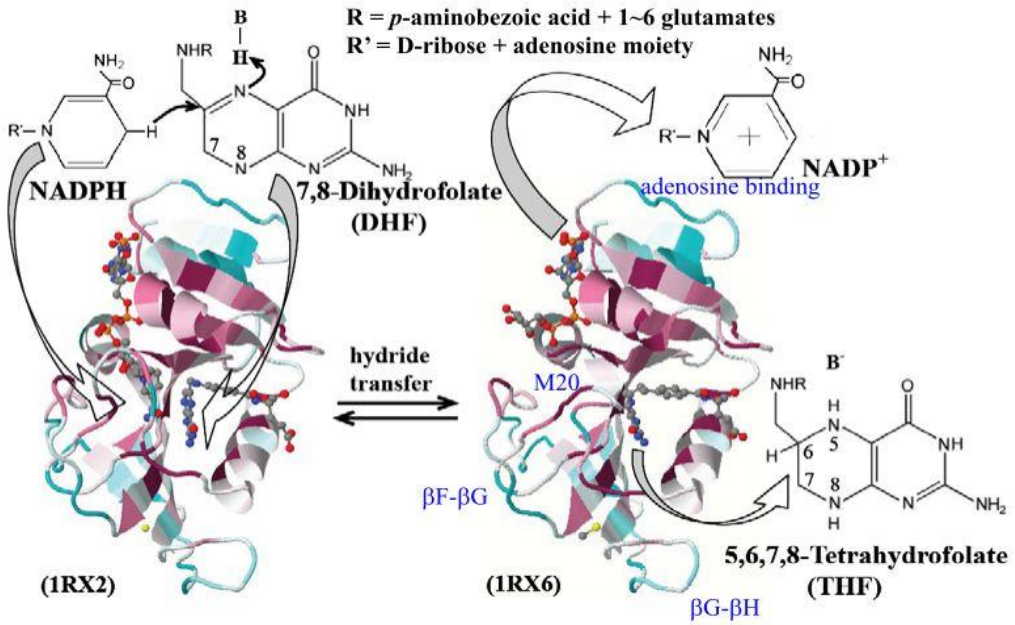


Figure 1 E. coli DHFR ("DHFR" thereafter) facilitates the hydride transfer from NADPH to the C6 of the pterin nucleus with a concurrent protonation in N5 position of DHF in the reaction of NADPH + H^+ + DHF → $NADP^+$ + THF. The hydride transfer-prompting Michaelis (binary) complex on the left (PDB ID: 1RX2) and the product ternary complex on the right (PDB ID:1RX6) are color-coded by residue's evolutionary conservation based on multiple sequence alignment of 77 DHFR homologs from cyan, the most variable, to dark red, the most conserved using Consurf server (63).

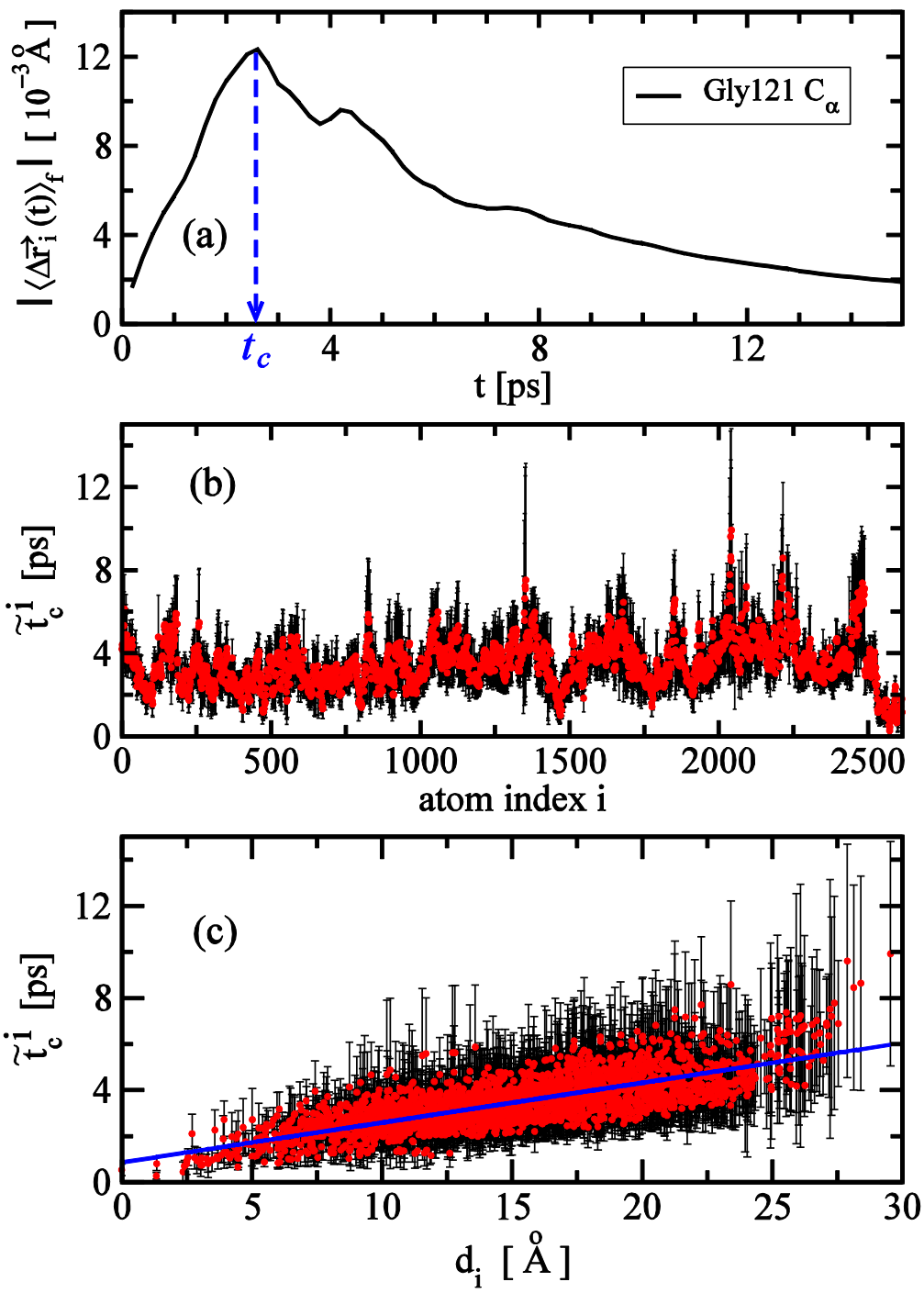


Figure 2 (a) The displacement of Gly 121 C_α atom against the response time with the characteristic time t_c = 2.6 ps predicted by LRT using an impulse force on the N5 atom of the DHF. **(b)** By applying 133 evenly distributed forces on the N5 atom of the DHF, a red dot is the average characteristic times $\tilde{t}_c^i$ of atom *i* and a black error bar is the standard deviations. **(c)** The $\tilde{t}_c^i$ as a function of the distance d_i between atom *i* and the N5 atom of the DHF, where the blue line is the linear regression with the correlation coefficient of 0.76. The inverse slope provided to estimate the propagation speed of 580 *m*/*s*, and the estimated speed is compatible to results from a few theoretical groups (41, 45).

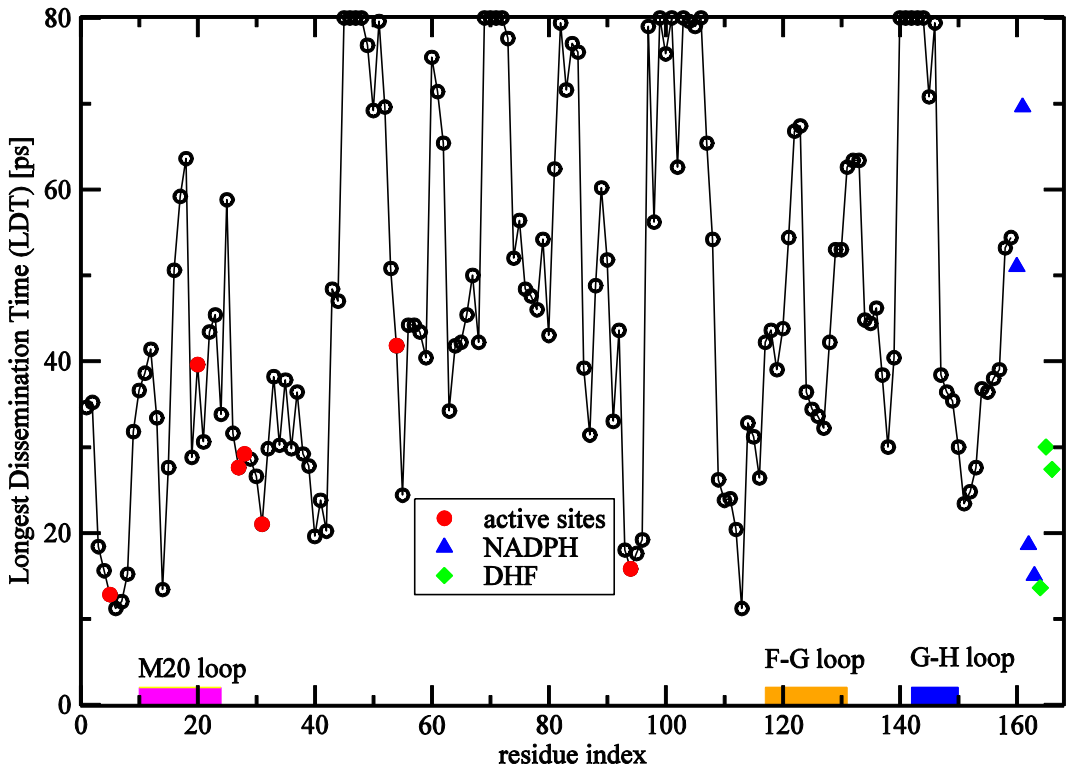
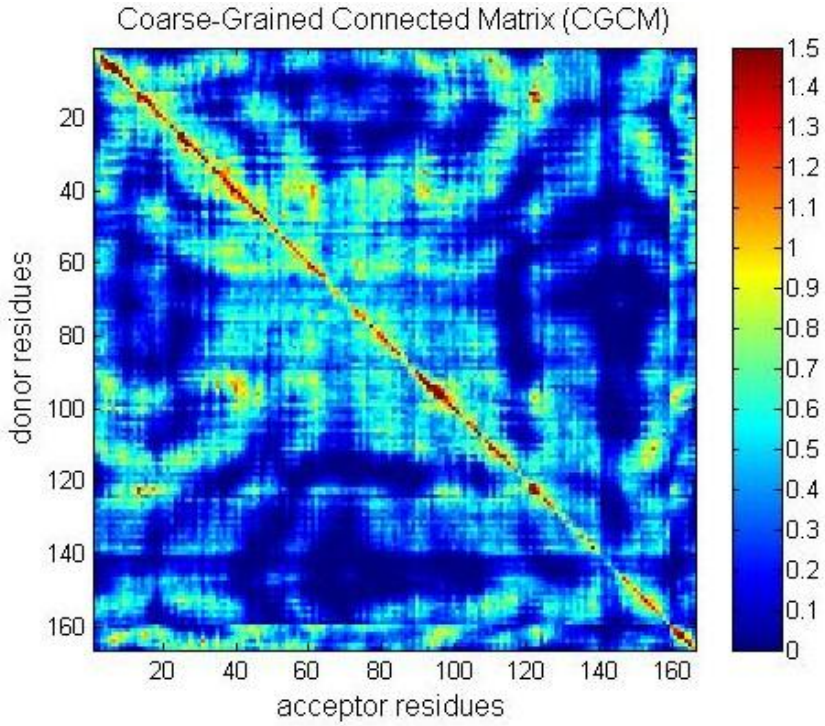


Figure 3 The longest dissemination times (LDTs) (49) of selected indices of sites. An LDT is the slowest response time defined by the longest t_c in the DHFR with 133 evenly distributed impulse forces starting from a C_α atom of a selected residue. Indices 160-163 (in blue triangle) and 164-166 (in green diamond) indicate 4 and 3 groups of NADPH and DHF, respectively (see Figure S2). Index 163 is C4 of nicotinamide group of NADPH and index 164 is C6 of pterin group of DHF; both 163 and 164 are good disseminators with the smallest LDTs among all the perturbation sites (residues). For our studying purpose, we do not concern large LDTs; hence an estimation of LDT larger than 80 ps is shown as 80 ps. The solid red circles indicate the active sites: Ile5, Met20, Asp27, Leu28, Phe31, Leu54 and Ile94 (62) showing relatively small LDT among all.

(a)



(b)

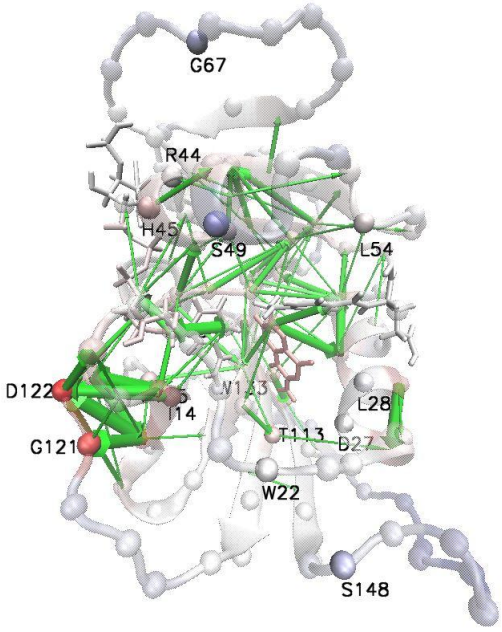


Figure 4 (a) The coarse-grained connection matrix (CGCM) in which each element, $C(R_d, R_a)$, records the counts of mechanical signals propagating from a donor (R_d) residue to an acceptor (R_a) residue, generated by the method described in section 2d. Consequently, a unique "communication score (CS)" is assigned to a selected residue with the highest CGCM off-diagonal element satisfying |index(R_d)-index(R_a)| > 2 pertaining to that residue (either a donor or an acceptor). In other words, the CS of residue *i* is the highest CGCM score of the *i-th* row or the *i-th* column. For example, selecting the residue 122, as a donor, the highest CGCM off-diagonal elements in the 122-th row is $C(122,13) = 1.39$; as an acceptor, the highest CGCM in the 122-th column is $C(13,122) = 1.52$, therefore, the CS of residue 122 is 1.52. **(b)** The CSs color-coded 3D structure of the DHFR is plotted by the software VMD, where cartoon and spheres (C_α atoms) are colored by mapping the minimal CS (dark blue) and the maximal CS to unity (dark red). The green arrows pointing from donors to acceptors

indicate signal propagation pathways, where the thickness represents the size of CS for the pair of interest.

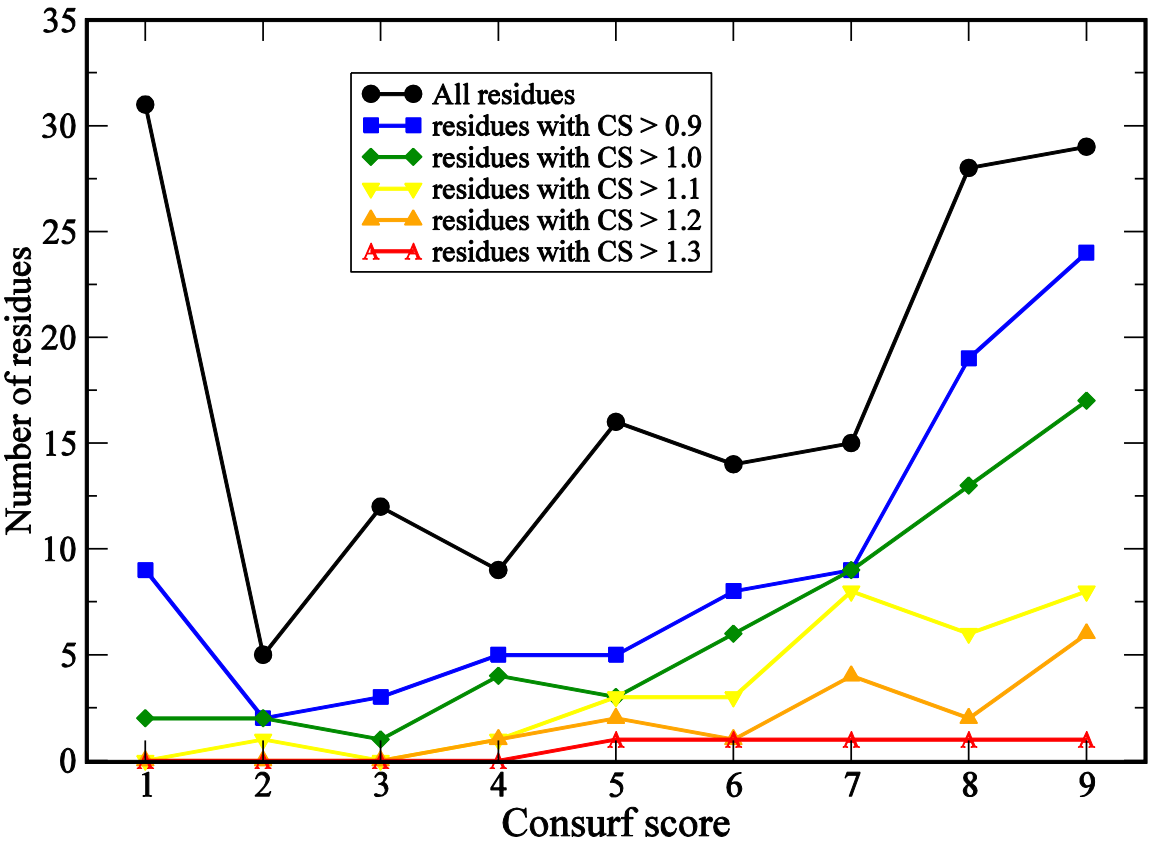


Figure 5 The histograms of conservation scores (Consurf scores; 63) for the residues of different CSs, where score 9 indicates the highest evolutionary conservation and 1 the lowest based on multiple sequence alignment results (63). The black line indicates the distribution for all 159 residues of DHFR. The blue, green, yellow, orange and red lines correspond to the residues with CSs higher than 0.9, 1.0, 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3, respectively.

Table 1. Fold reduction of hydride transfer rates, k_{WT}/k_{mut}, for mutants

WT / mutant	14	22	27	28	42	44	45	49	54	67	100	113	121	122	125	133	148
	I	W	D	L	M	R	H	S	L	G	Y	T	G	D	F	W	S
A	40							1.05					5.88[11]	55			1.4
C			79														
D																	0.69
E			3														
F		3		0.24	1.42				47.5[29]							2.6	
G	1036								33[24]		63.3						
H		130															
I									30.7[24]		27.1						
K																	1.36
L						21							1098[10]				
M															42		
N									22.6[24]					23.4			
P													500[10]				
Q							2.8										
S													62.5[11]	37.3			
V	7									1.2		5.8	166[11]				
W					41												
Y				8.7													
-⟨ΔΔG⟩	2.52	1.79	1.64	0.22	1.22	1.83	0.62	0.03	2.08	0.11	2.23	1.05	3.64	2.16	2.24	0.57	0.06
CS	1.22	0.94	0.94	0.83	1.07	1.00	1.12	0.66	1.01	0.69	1.09	1.08	1.41	1.52	1.08	0.70	0.74
D_{act} (Å)	9.5	10.7	8.9	7.5	9.3	13.6	13.0	11.5	10.1	21.0	11.6	10.4	15.4	15.6	12.7	21.3	16.1
ConSurf score	9	9	9	8	9	9	8	9	9	1	8	9	8	9	9	8	1
References	(30)	(25)	(21)	(29)	(11)	(31)	(31)	(27)	(29) (24)	(11)	(27)	(32)	(11) (10)	(22)	(28)	(28)	(23)

By surveying experimental data from the literature (see the References in the bottom row), the fold reduction (Γ) of hydride transfer rates are indexed by the amino acids in mutants at the row and the mutants' original wild-type (WT) amino acids at the columns, where $\Gamma = k_{WT}/k_{mut}$. For example, the I14A mutation causes 40 fold of hydride transfer rate reduction (the most upper left value in the table). The red and blue highlights indicate active sites and perturbation sites, respectively. $\langle \Delta\Delta G \rangle = \langle \Delta G_{WT} - \Delta G_{mutant} \rangle = \langle -RT ln(\Gamma) \rangle$ is the average of a set of changes of free energy difference in the hydride transfer rates between the wild type and its mutants at a given site (average over the rows). CS is the communication score; $\mathbf{D_{act}}$ is the distance between the middle point of N5 and C6 atoms of DHF (active site) and the C_α atom of a mutated site. The ConSurf score (63) represents the conservation of a residue, where score 9 is the most conserved and 1 is the least.

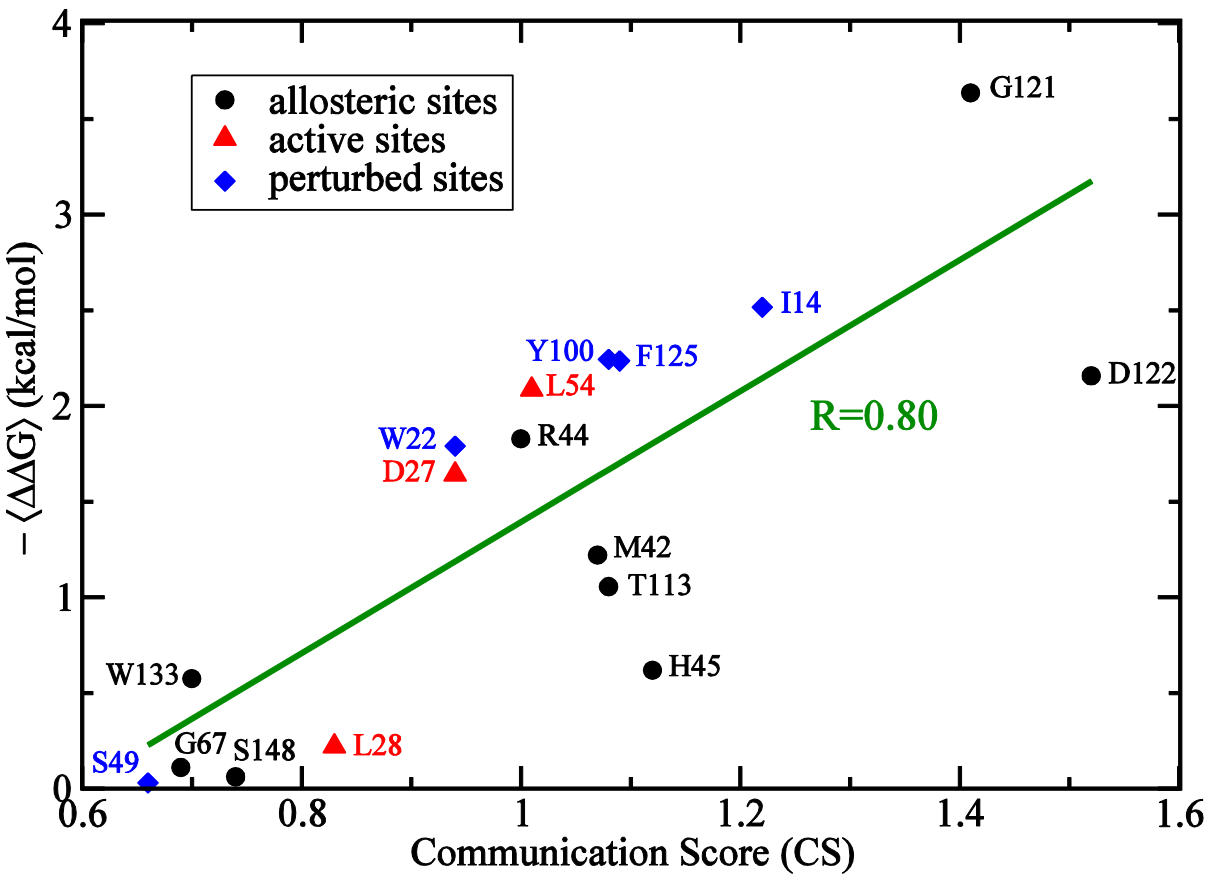


Figure 6 The averaged change in free energy difference of the hydride transfer rates between the wild type and its mutants is plotted against the communication score (CS). The averaged $\langle \Delta\Delta \mathbf{G} \rangle = \langle \Delta \boldsymbol{G}_{\boldsymbol{WT}} - \Delta \boldsymbol{G}_{\boldsymbol{mutant}} \rangle = \langle -RTln(k_{WT}/k_{mut}) \rangle$, where k_{WT} and k_{mut} are the hydride transfer rates of wild type DHFR and its mutant, respectively. $\langle ... \rangle$ denotes the average over different mutants at the same site; the data are listed in **Table 1**. The CS for each residue is determined following the method in section 2d, and CSs for all the residues in DHFR are listed in **Table S1**. The red triangles are active sites, blue diamonds are perturbed sites and black circles are allosteric sites. The dark green line shows linear regression of the data for 17 sites with a correlation coefficient of 0.80.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Movie of ICCs of DHFR

The active sites and perturbed sites

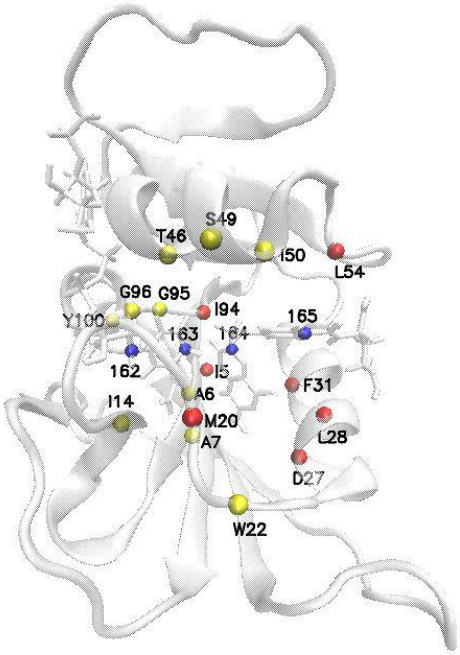

Figure S1. The 21 spheres are perturbed by impulse forces, where the red spheres are active sites: ILE5, MET20, ASP27, LEU28, PHE31, LEU54 and ILE94; yellow spheres are residues within 7 Å from the catalytic center: ALA6, ALA7, ILE14, TRP22, THR46, SER49, ILE50, GLY95, GLY96, TYR100. The four blue spheres are the perturbed sites at cofactor and substrate, which is the first Carbon (site 162) of the NADPH at the ribose close to the nicotinamide, the C4 (site 163) of the NADPH at the nicotinamide close to the donor hydride, the C6 (site 164) of the pterin group of the DHF and C15 (site 165) of the benzoyl group of the DHF.

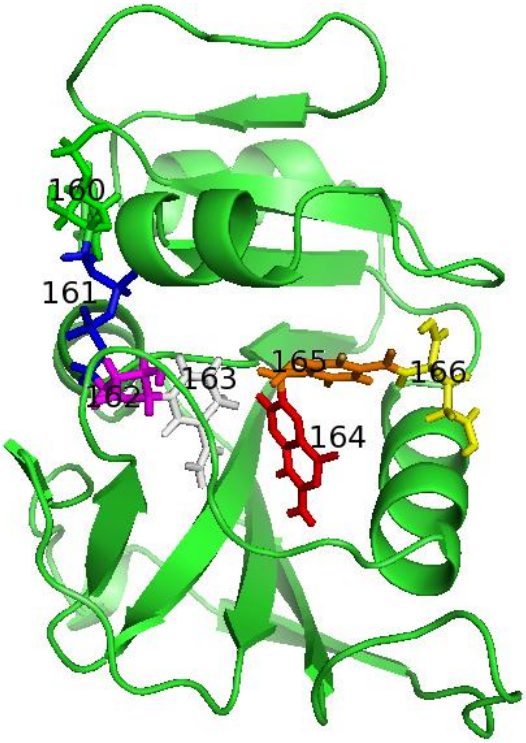

Figure S2. The coarse-grained NADPH and dihydrofolate. The NADPH is divided into four groups, 160-163, colored by green, blue, purple and white, respectively. The dihydrofolate is divided into three groups 164-166 colored by red, orange and yellow.

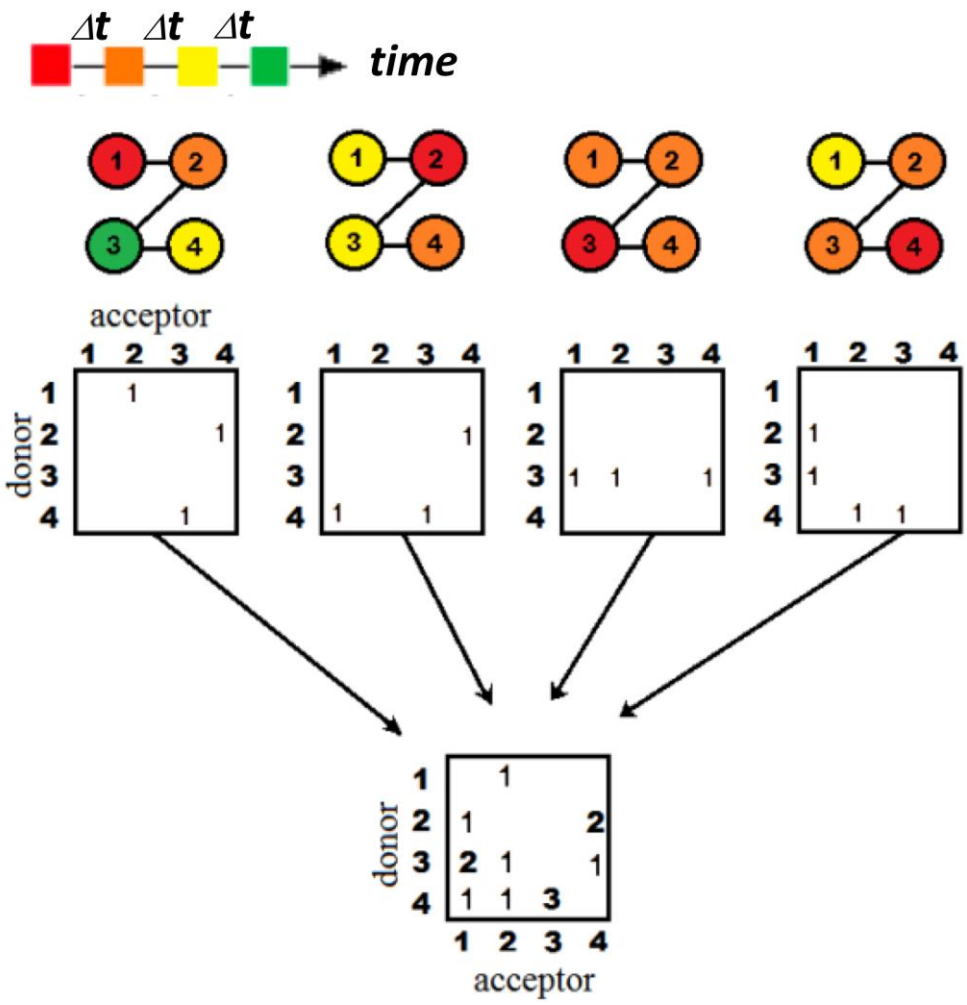

Figure S3 Recording the signals into the connection matrices. The colors indicate a time sequence of characteristic times. The circles with number linked by solid line are the model protein sequences, where the number is the atomic index. Given different perturbed forces, $\vec{k}_j$, the signals propagation pathways were varied. The squares are the matrices used to record the signals. A connected pair satisfying criteria was recorded into an element of a connection matrix by adding a count. Following eq. (2), after summation over all matrices with different $\vec{k}_j$, we have the full-atom connected matrix $F(a_d, a_r)$.

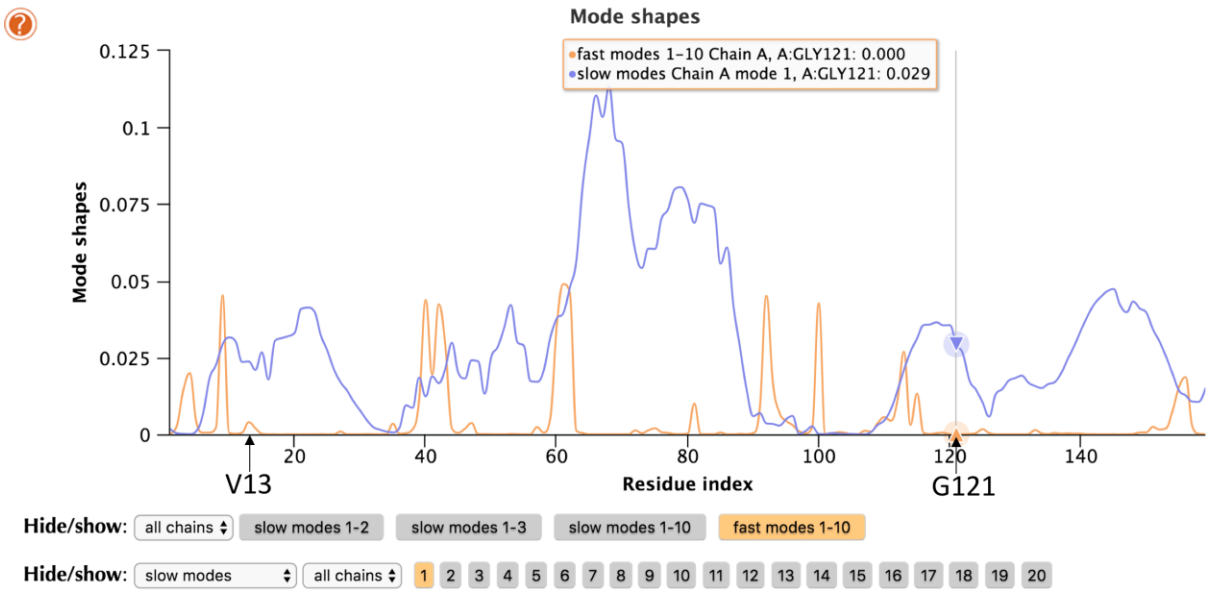

Figure S4 The ENM slowest mode (orange) and the average of the fastest 10 ENM mode (blue) for ternary DHFR complex (1RX6) are plotted against residue index. Frequent communicators V13-G121 are marked by black arrows. The analysis and resulting figure are taken from the DynOmics website (Li et al., 2017; https://dyn.life.nthu.edu.tw/oENM/).

Table S1 The communication scores (CSs) of residues in the DHFR

rid / score		rid / score		rid / score		rid / score		rid / score		rid / score		rid / score		rid / score	
1	0.72	**21**	0.73	**41**	1.14	**61**	1.18	**81**	0.88	**101**	0.96	**121**	1.41	**141**	0.39
2	0.76	**22**	0.94	**42**	1.07	**62**	1.03	**82**	0.92	**102**	0.88	**122**	1.52	**142**	0.33
3	1.04	**23**	0.81	**43**	1.02	**63**	0.96	**83**	0.84	**103**	0.85	**123**	1.29	**143**	0.49
4	1.22	**24**	0.98	**44**	1	**64**	0.88	**84**	0.81	**104**	0.79	**124**	0.86	**144**	0.33
5	1.03	**25**	1.06	**45**	1.12	**65**	0.66	**85**	0.83	**105**	0.88	**125**	1.08	**145**	0.58
6	1.1	**26**	1.31	**46**	1.14	**66**	0.59	**86**	0.76	**106**	0.92	**126**	0.93	**146**	0.54
7	1.08	**27**	0.94	**47**	1.06	**67**	0.69	**87**	0.66	**107**	1.02	**127**	0.81	**147**	0.74
8	1.03	**28**	0.83	**48**	1.12	**68**	0.68	**88**	0.72	**108**	0.7	**128**	0.64	**148**	0.74
9	0.98	**29**	1.31	**49**	0.66	**69**	0.72	**89**	0.59	**109**	0.97	**129**	0.67	**149**	0.7
10	0.93	**30**	0.85	**50**	0.73	**70**	0.69	**90**	0.94	**110**	1.22	**130**	0.54	**150**	0.87
11	1.12	**31**	1.22	**51**	0.85	**71**	0.69	**91**	1.01	**111**	1.23	**131**	0.63	**151**	0.89
12	0.91	**32**	1	**52**	0.61	**72**	0.83	**92**	1.17	**112**	0.94	**132**	0.63	**152**	0.98
13	1.52	**33**	0.78	**53**	1.06	**73**	1.07	**93**	1.11	**113**	1.08	**133**	0.7	**153**	0.94
14	1.22	**34**	1.12	**54**	1.01	**74**	0.87	**94**	1.18	**114**	0.98	**134**	0.72	**154**	0.85
15	1.29	**35**	1.21	**55**	0.81	**75**	0.95	**95**	1.21	**115**	0.98	**135**	0.84	**155**	1.23
16	1.01	**36**	0.79	**56**	1.03	**76**	0.7	**96**	1.14	**116**	0.9	**136**	0.61	**156**	0.9
17	1.17	**37**	1.05	**57**	1.03	**77**	0.84	**97**	1.07	**117**	0.9	**137**	0.68	**157**	0.85
18	0.92	**38**	1.12	**58**	1.08	**78**	0.82	**98**	0.97	**118**	0.71	**138**	1.02	**158**	0.64
19	0.97	**39**	1.18	**59**	0.89	**79**	0.92	**99**	1.02	**119**	0.78	**139**	0.71	**159**	0.72
20	0.97	**40**	1.21	**60**	1.07	**80**	0.95	**100**	1.09	**120**	0.67	**140**	0.65		

The bold texts indicate the residue indices (rid).

Table S2 The ConSurf scores of residues in DHFR

ind / score		ind / score		ind/ score		ind / score		ind / score		ind / score		ind / score		ind / score	
1	7	**21**	8	**41**	6	**61**	8	**81**	8	**101**	1	**121**	8	**141**	7
2	7	**22**	9	**42**	9	**62**	4	**82**	3	**102**	5	**122**	9	**142**	1
3	8	**23**	6	**43**	9	**63**	8	**83**	1	**103**	3	**123**	8	**143**	5
4	4	**24**	9	**44**	9	**64**	8	**84**	1	**104**	6	**124**	1	**144**	8
5	8	**25**	9	**45**	8	**65**	3	**85**	4	**105**	6	**125**	9	**145**	5
6	7	**26**	6	**46**	9	**66**	1	**86**	1	**106**	1	**126**	9	**146**	3
7	9	**27**	9	**47**	1	**67**	1	**87**	1	**107**	8	**127**	3	**147**	8
8	6	**28**	8	**48**	7	**68**	1	**88**	1	**108**	5	**128**	1	**148**	1
9	8	**29**	5	**49**	9	**69**	4	**89**	1	**109**	5	**129**	2	**149**	5
10	1	**30**	6	**50**	8	**70**	1	**90**	8	**110**	7	**130**	1	**150**	1
11	8	**31**	9	**51**	9	**71**	6	**91**	4	**111**	7	**131**	1	**151**	5
12	5	**32**	9	**52**	7	**72**	5	**92**	7	**112**	6	**132**	1	**152**	3
13	7	**33**	3	**53**	9	**73**	1	**93**	6	**113**	9	**133**	8	**153**	8
14	9	**34**	2	**54**	9	**74**	6	**94**	8	**114**	1	**134**	1	**154**	1
15	9	**35**	9	**55**	9	**75**	6	**95**	9	**115**	8	**135**	3	**155**	5
16	4	**36**	5	**56**	6	**76**	3	**96**	9	**116**	4	**136**	3	**156**	5
17	5	**37**	8	**57**	9	**77**	8	**97**	8	**117**	4	**137**	5	**157**	2
18	9	**38**	7	**58**	3	**78**	2	**98**	4	**118**	1	**138**	2	**158**	9
19	1	**39**	7	**59**	9	**79**	1	**99**	6	**119**	5	**139**	7	**159**	7
20	8	**40**	7	**60**	8	**80**	1	**100**	8	**120**	3	**140**	1		

The bold texts indicate the residue indices (ind).

Table S3. Contribution per perturbation site to C(13,121) and C(13,122)

perturbed sites	C(13,121)	C(13,122)
5	0.0788	0.1015
6	0.0606	0.0415
7	0.0673	0.0757
14	0.0428	0.0265
20	0.0046	0.0114
22	0.0271	0.0134
27	0.0646	0.0836
28	0.1159	0.1455
31	0.0508	0.0252
46	0.0904	0.0837
49	0.0195	0.039
50	0.012	0.0349
54	0.0816	0.0905
94	0.0458	0.1476
95	0.0713	0.0745
96	0.0315	0.0401
100	0.1662	0.1053
162	0.1086	0.0932
163	0.1028	0.1435
164	0.1687	0.1328
165	0.0073	0.0107
Total score	1.4184	1.5201

SUPPORTING METHODS

Time-independent linear response theory

As described in our previous work (Yang et al., 2014), the time trajectory of changes in atomic position *i* can be described by the interplay between a velocity-position time correlation function and time-dependent perturbation forces summed over the atoms that are coupled with the atom *i*[1].

$$\langle \Delta\vec{\mathbf{r}}_{\mathrm{i}}(\mathrm{t})\rangle_{\mathrm{f}} = \frac{1}{k_B T}\int_0^t dt' \sum \langle \Delta\dot{\vec{r}}_j(0)\Delta\vec{r}_i(t)\rangle_0 \, f_j(t-t') \qquad \text{(S1)}$$

where $\Delta\vec{\mathbf{r}}_{\mathrm{j}}$ is the deviation from the mean of atom *j* due to the external force $\vec{\mathbf{f}}_j$; $\Delta\dot{\vec{r}}_j(0)$ is the velocity of atom *j*; k_B and *T* are the Boltzmann constant and temperature, respectively, $\langle \Delta\dot{\vec{r}}_j(0)\Delta\vec{r}_i(t)\rangle_0$ is the velocity-position time-correlation function sampled in the absence of perturbations (noted by subscript "0"), which can be expressed in the normal-mode space, where modes are treated as independent 1-D harmonic oscillators under solvent damping using the Langevin equation[2]. The detail derivation is referred to our previous work[1].

The time-dependent linear response theory using impulse forces (IF-tdLRT)

Substitute the time-dependent force $f_j(t-t')$ in eq. (S1) with an impulse force, presented by a delta function $\vec{k}_j$, the format for the IF-tdLRT is

$$\langle \Delta\vec{\mathrm{r}}_{\mathrm{i}}(\mathrm{t})\rangle_{\mathrm{f}} = \frac{1}{k_B T}\sum \langle \Delta\dot{\vec{r}}_j(0)\Delta\vec{r}_i(t)\rangle_0 \, \vec{k}_j \qquad \text{(S2)}$$

Per Chandrasekhar's description of damped harmonic oscillators[2], when $2\omega_m < \beta$, it can be derived that

$$\langle \Delta\vec{r}_i(t)\rangle_f = \frac{1}{k_B T}\sum_j \left(\sum_m \alpha_{jm}\alpha_{im}\frac{2\langle\sigma_m(0)^2\rangle\omega_m{}^2}{\beta_1} e^{-\beta t/2}\sinh\left(\frac{\beta_1 t}{2}\right)\right)\vec{k}_j \qquad \text{(S3)}$$

when $2\omega_m > \beta$ (let $\beta_1' = \beta_1 i$; note that $\sinh\theta = -i\sin i\theta$), it is

$$\langle \Delta\vec{r}_i(t)\rangle_f = \frac{1}{k_B T}\sum_j \left(\sum_m \alpha_{jm}\alpha_{im}\frac{2\langle\sigma_m(0)^2\rangle\omega_m{}^2}{\beta_1{}'} e^{-\beta t/2}\sin\left(\frac{\beta_1{}' t}{2}\right)\right)\vec{k}_j \qquad \text{(S4)}$$

SUPPORTING REFERENCE

1. L. W. Yang, A. Kitao, B. C. Huang and N. Go, *Biophys J*, 2014, 107, 1415-1425.

2. S. Chandrasekhar, *Reviews of Modern Physics*, 1943, 15, 1-89.