

1 **Parker Solar Probe observations of solar wind energetic proton beams produced by**
2 **magnetic reconnection in the near-Sun heliospheric current sheet**

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24 **Abstract**

25 We report observations of reconnection exhausts and associated ion and electron separatrix layers
26 in and around the Heliospheric Current Sheet (HCS) during PSP Encounters 08 and 07, at 16 R_s
27 and 20 R_s . HCS reconnection accelerated protons to almost twice the solar wind speed and
28 increased the proton core energy by a factor of ~ 3 , due to the Alfvén speed being comparable to
29 the solar wind flow speed at these near-Sun distances. During E08, accelerated protons were found
30 to have leaked out of the exhaust along separatrix field lines, appearing as field-aligned energetic
31 proton beams in a broad region outside the HCS. Concurrent dropouts of strahl electrons,
32 indicating disconnection from the Sun, provide further evidence for the HCS being the source of
33 the beams. Around the HCS in E07, there were also proton beams but without electron strahl
34 dropouts, indicating that their origin was non-local and closer to the Sun.

35 **Plain Language summary**

36 Magnetic reconnection in current sheets is a universal plasma process that converts magnetic
37 energy into particle energy. The process is important in many laboratory, solar, and astrophysical
38 plasmas. The heliospheric current sheet (HCS), which originates from the Sun and extends
39 throughout the heliosphere, is the largest current sheet in the solar system. One of the surprises of
40 the Parker Solar Probe mission is the finding that magnetic reconnection is almost always active
41 in the near-Sun HCS, despite its enormous scales. In this paper, we report direct evidence showing
42 that reconnection in the HCS close to the Sun can be a source of energetic protons observed in the
43 solar wind. The reason protons can be accelerated to high energies (to tens of kilo-electronvolts)
44 is because the available magnetic energy per particle is high close to the Sun. This finding is
45 important because it is a mystery where energetic protons in the heliosphere come from.

46 **Key points:**

- 47 - Large available magnetic energy led to significant proton acceleration by reconnection in
- 48 the near-Sun HCS detected at 16 R_s and 20 R_s .
- 49 - Leaked exhaust protons and strahl electron dropouts in separatrices provide evidence for
- 50 HCS source of proton beams in the solar wind.
- 51 - Energetic protons beams outside the HCS also exist without strahl electron dropouts. Their
- 52 origin is likely non local and closer to the Sun.

53

54 **1. Introduction**

55 Magnetic reconnection converts magnetic energy into particle energies. In the solar wind at 1

56 AU, reconnection exhausts have been detected in Interplanetary Coronal Mass Ejections (ICME),

57 in random solar wind current sheets, and occasionally in the HCS (e.g., Gosling et al., 2005a,b;

58 2006; Phan et al., 2006; Davis et al., 2006; Huttunen et al., 2008; Eriksson et al. 2009, Ruffenach

59 et al. 2012; Lavraud et al. 2009; 2014; Mistry et al. 2015; 2017).

60 The most commonly reported in-situ signatures of reconnection in solar wind current sheets

61 are fluid signatures such as Alfvénic plasma jetting and heating (e.g., Gosling et al., 2005a; Phan

62 et al., 2006; Drake et al., 2009; Pulupa et al., 2014). Kinetic signatures of reconnection such as

63 counterstreaming ions have also been seen inside some solar wind exhausts (Gosling et al., 2005a;

64 Lavraud et al., 2021), as have electron signatures of the separatrix layers bounding the exhaust

65 (Gosling et al., 2005a,b; 2006; Lavraud et al., 2009; Phan et al., 2021). Ion separatrix signatures

66 in the form of proton beams have also been reported by Wind (Huttunen et al., 2008), and recently

67 by Solar Orbiter at a reconnecting current sheet associated with a magnetic switchback (Lavraud

68 et al., 2021).

69 In the solar wind at 1 AU, the available magnetic energy per particle, $m_i V_A^2$ (Phan et al., 2013),
70 is only ~ 25 eV (for a typical $V_A \sim 50$ km/s), where m_i is proton mass and V_A the Alfvén speed.
71 Thus, the energy increase associated with reconnection plasma jetting and heating is small
72 compared to the core solar wind flow energy of ~ 1 keV. Furthermore, the high plasma β
73 environment at 1 AU is less favorable for reconnection to be triggered in the local solar wind
74 current sheets (Swisdak et al., 2003; 2010; Phan et al., 2010). Indeed, reconnection is detected in
75 only a small fraction of solar wind current sheets at these distances, and it is therefore not
76 energetically important in terms of the evolution of heliospheric plasmas and fields (Gosling,
77 2007). Nevertheless, energetic ions up to MeV energies have been seen near some reconnecting
78 current sheets at 1 AU (e.g., Khabarova et al., 2015; 2017). The open question is whether they
79 originate from the local current sheet or at a site closer to the Sun, and whether they are associated
80 with reconnection or other processes.

81 Parker Solar Probe (PSP) provides a unique opportunity to examine this question, since as its
82 perihelion lowers, it samples the solar wind with increasing magnetic energy per particle, because
83 of the higher Alfvén speed that is found in the near-Sun solar wind. During the first several orbits,
84 PSP detected reconnection exhausts in current sheets associated with the HCS, ICMEs, magnetic
85 flux ropes (Phan et al., 2020; Szabo et al., 2020; Lavraud et al., 2020), and at the boundaries of
86 some magnetic ‘switchbacks’ (Froment et al., 2021). However, the great majority of small-scale
87 and intense current sheets associated with ‘switchbacks’ did not show reconnection signatures
88 (Phan et al., 2020; Akhavan-Tafti et al., 2021). Surprisingly, reconnection was commonly detected
89 in the large-scale HCS, despite the local HCS thickness observed by PSP typically being thousands
90 of ion inertial lengths (Phan et al., 2021).

91 In this paper, we report PSP observations of reconnection exhausts with ion and electron
92 separatrix signatures during Encounters 08 and 07 (hereafter referred to as E08 and E07) crossings
93 of the HCS. These events occurred close to perihelia, at 16 R_s and 20 R_s . The main finding reported
94 here is that near-Sun HCS reconnection can produce energetic proton beams seen in a broad region
95 outside the HCS.

96 The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the data used in this study. We first
97 describe the E08 HCS in Section 3, which helps contrast and understand the E07 HCS described
98 in Section 4. We discuss open questions in Section 5.

99 **2. Data and coordinate system**

100 We use 4 samples/s magnetic field data from the FIELDS fluxgate magnetometer (Bale et al.,
101 2016) and 0.87s-resolution proton data from the SWEAP/SPAN-ion instrument (Livi et al., 2020).
102 We also use core electron temperature moments (Halekas et al. 2020) and pitch angle information
103 of 314eV electrons measured by the SWEAP/SPAN-electron instrument (Kasper et al., 2016;
104 Whittlesey et al., 2020), and energetic ion data obtained from double coincidence time-of-flight
105 measurements by the ISOIS/EPI-Lo instrument (McComas et al., 2016).

106 For simplicity we display all data in RTN coordinates because the E07 and E08 HCS lay
107 extremely close to the **R-T** plane (see the Supporting Information section). However, for the
108 determination of the HCS thickness, we use the measured normal velocity in the spacecraft frame
109 and in the current sheet coordinate system.

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113 3. E08 HCS

114 We describe E08 before E07 because the HCS origin of the proton beams is much clearer in
115 E08. The understanding of E08 raises questions about the source of proton beams seen in E07.

116 3.1. Overview

117 Figure 1 shows the PSP crossing of the HCS on 2021 April 29, at 08:14:23-08:28:16 UT
118 (between the two black vertical dashed lines at ‘t₁’ and ‘t₂’). The HCS crossing is recognized by
119 the polarity change of B_R (Figure 1f) and switching of strahl electron pitch angle fluxes from 0° to
120 180° (Figure 1d) across the current sheet. The crossing occurred at perihelion, ~16 R_s from the
121 Sun. The magnetic field strength was ~400 nT before the HCS crossing, and ~330 nT after. From
122 08:28:16 UT (‘t₂’) to 08:51:30 UT (‘t₃’), PSP seemed to linger near the exhaust boundary while
123 dipping occasionally back into the exhaust as suggested by several strahl dropouts (panel d) and
124 radial velocity increases (panel g). Finally it reached the solar wind proper at ‘t₃’, where |**B**|
125 reached close to its pre-HCS value of 400 nT. Thus, there are some uncertainties about the true
126 location of the trailing edge of the HCS.

127 The magnetic field rotation across the current sheet was 162°, i.e., the guide field was small.
128 The HCS was bifurcated, with sharp changes in B_R at the two edges (Figure 1f). The solar wind
129 proton density was ~2400 cm⁻³ prior to the HCS, and ~4400 cm⁻³ after. The hybrid Alfvén speed
130 based on B_R and the proton mass density ρ on the two sides of the HCS, $V_{AR,hybrid} =$
131 $[B_{R1}B_{R2}(B_{R1}+B_{R2})/\mu_0(\rho_1B_{R2}+\rho_2B_{R1})]^{0.5}$ (Cassak and Shay, 2007), was ~134 km/s. The proton and
132 electron β were 0.15 and 0.32 prior to and 0.40 and 0.86 after the HCS crossing.

133 The duration of the HCS crossing (between ‘t₁’ and ‘t₂’) was ~833 seconds, which translates
134 to an exhaust width (along the current sheet normal) of 1.8×10^4 km, or ~4620 ion inertial lengths

135 (d), based on the measured normal velocity of the current sheet relative to the spacecraft of ~ 21
136 km/s (not shown).

137 **3.2. Proton bulk acceleration and bulk heating**

138 Figure 1g shows that inside the current sheet there was a proton radial flow acceleration ΔV_R
139 ~ 140 km/s (relative to the external solar wind V_R of ~ 210 km/s), with opposite δV_R - δB_R
140 correlations upon entry and exit of the bifurcated HCS, consistent with reconnection (Gosling et
141 al., 2005a). The jet speed was close to the hybrid Alfvén speed of 134 km/s, in close agreement
142 with reconnection predictions (Cassak and Shay, 2007). The positive ΔV_R jet implies an anti-
143 sunward directed exhaust, i.e., the X-line was located sunward of PSP (Figure 1k).

144 Also consistent with reconnection are density (Figure 1h) and proton temperature (Figure 1i)
145 enhancements inside the exhaust. The ~ 40 eV proton bulk heating in this event is substantially
146 higher than the 1-2 eV heating seen in previous HCS exhausts observed by PSP further ($>29 R_s$)
147 away from the Sun (Phan et al., 2021). The larger heating is roughly consistent with the expectation
148 from the scaling of reconnection proton heating with the available magnetic energy per particle,
149 $\Delta T_i \propto m_i V_A^2$ (Drake et al., 2009; Phan et al., 2014; Haggerty et al., 2015). On the other hand, there
150 was no evidence for electron heating across the exhaust boundaries (Figure 1j).

151 **3.3. Ion and electron separatrix signatures: Proton beams and strahl electron dropouts**

152 As the solar wind protons were bulk accelerated by reconnection to 1.7 times the ambient
153 solar wind speed (from 210 km/s to 350 km/s), Figure 1b shows that the solar wind proton core
154 energy nearly tripled (from ~ 320 eV outside the HCS to ~ 900 eV inside). The tail of the proton
155 spectra extended to at least 2.5 keV (Figure 1b), and data from the ISOIS/EPI-Lo instrument
156 suggests the presence of ion intensity enhancements up to ~ 40 keV/nucleon in the exhaust and in
157 the surrounding regions (Figure 1a). The energized proton population inside the exhaust is easily

158 distinguishable from the ambient solar wind, which makes it possible to unambiguously identify
159 proton beams that leaked out of the HCS, as we now describe.

160 Immediately outside and prior to the HCS, marked by the blue bar at the top of Figure 1, in a
161 region where the magnetic field B_L was already at its asymptotic value of ~ 400 nT, there was a
162 proton population at higher energies (extending to at least 2.5 keV) than the core solar wind. Figure
163 1a shows that the energy of this population extends to ~ 40 keV/nuc. The following observational
164 evidence points to the source being reconnection-energized protons that leaked out of the HCS:

- 165 1. The high-energy population had a similar upper energy spectrum profile as the
166 reconnection-accelerated proton population seen inside the HCS (Figures 1b, 2e-g).
- 167 2. There was an energy-dispersion of the low-energy cutoff of the high-energy population,
168 with higher low-energy cutoff further away from the HCS (Figure 1b). The energy
169 dispersion is consistent with velocity filter effects (e.g., Onsager et al., 1991; Lavraud et
170 al., 2002): Leaked protons on separatrix field lines further from the current sheet had
171 longer distances to travel, and could reach PSP only if they had sufficiently high energies.
172 On separatrix field lines closer to the current sheet, protons with a broader range of energy
173 could reach PSP, as observed.
- 174 3. The presence of proton beams coincided with strahl electron dropouts (Figure 1d),
175 consistent with the separatrix field lines being disconnected from the Sun and connected
176 to an exhaust anti-sunward of the X-line.

177 Further to the left of the HCS, there were intermittent detections of proton beams, also with
178 concurrent strahl electron dropouts. We interpret these as partial PSP re-entries into the separatrix
179 layer.

180 We now examine the proton distributions in and around the HCS. Figure 2g shows an example
181 of a proton velocity distribution function (VDF) inside the HCS close to the left edge. The VDF
182 was much broader than the core solar wind seen outside the current sheet (e.g., Figure 2e), and
183 consisted (in the solar wind frame) of two field-aligned counterstreaming proton populations,
184 providing evidence for magnetic connection across the exhaust (e.g., Gosling et al., 2005a; Phan
185 et al., 2007; Eastwood et al., 2018; Lavraud et al., 2021). The VDF of the core population became
186 more isotropic in the weak field region of the exhaust (Figure 2h). Outside the HCS, the VDF (in
187 Panels e and f) consisted of a narrow (cold) core population and a higher energy anti-sunward
188 (positive V_R) field-aligned component corresponding to protons that have leaked out of the HCS.
189 Further from the HCS the leaked population consists of only the highest energies and looks
190 ‘detached’ for the core (Panel e), while closer to the HCS (Panel f), a larger range of energies is
191 seen, consistent with the velocity filter effect.

192 While the ion and electron separatrix signatures were clear on the side prior to the HCS, they
193 were less clear after the HCS, partly because of the uncertainty about the location of the trailing
194 edge of the HCS. If the trailing edge was at ‘t₂’ (Figure 1), the absence of proton beams (Figure
195 1b) and 314 eV electron dropouts (Figure 1d) would imply a lack of a separatrix layer after the
196 HCS, a result that is not consistent with traditional models of reconnection exhausts. If the trailing
197 edge was at ‘t₃’, there were proton beams to the right of the boundary. There were the expected
198 simultaneous dropouts of strahl electron immediately after ‘t₃’, but no strahl dropouts in much of
199 the region with proton beams after that.

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203 4. E07 HCS

204 4.1. Overview

205 Figure 3 shows a complete crossing of the HCS during E07 at 20 R_s (between the two
206 vertical dashed lines). The HCS is characterized by a B_R reversal (Figure 3e) and concurrent
207 switching of 314 eV electrons pitch angle fluxes from being predominantly field-aligned (0°) to
208 anti-field-aligned (180°) (Figure 3c). The total field rotation across the HCS was 170° . Similar to
209 the E08 HCS (Figure 1), there were modest magnetic field and density asymmetries across the
210 HCS: $|\mathbf{B}|$ was 15% weaker (Figure 3d) and N_p was 1.5 times higher (Figure 3g) after the crossing.
211 The proton and electron β were 0.25 and 0.53 before and 0.44 and 0.83 after the HCS.

212 The HCS crossing duration was ~ 1020 s. With a measured current sheet normal velocity
213 relative to the spacecraft of ~ 39 km/s, the current sheet width was $\sim 4 \times 10^4$ km, or $\sim 8530 d_i$.

214 4.2. Proton bulk acceleration and heating

215 Proton V_R jetting was observed inside the HCS (Figure 3f). The jet speed was remarkably
216 steady throughout most of the HCS, indicating laminar outflow. V_R was more variable in the last
217 3 minutes before the exit of the HCS where there were multiple bipolar variations of B_N which
218 could indicate the presence of magnetic flux ropes (e.g., Eastwood et al., 2021). The V_R jet speed
219 (relative to the adjacent solar wind flow) was $\sim +125$ km/s, close to the hybrid Alfvén speed of
220 120 km/s based on $B_R \sim 280$ nT and $N_p \sim 1720$ cm $^{-3}$ prior to HCS, and $B_R \sim -240$ nT and $N_p \sim 2550$
221 cm $^{-3}$ after. The Alfvénic jetting is consistent with reconnection. The anti-sunward jet indicates an
222 X-line located sunward of PSP.

223 There was also density compression (Figure 3g) and a ~ 30 eV proton temperature increase
224 (Figure 3h) inside the exhaust, consistent with reconnection expectations. However, the core
225 electron temperature decreased entering the exhaust from both sides (Figure 3i). This decrease is

226 confirmed by a shift to lower energy of the peak in electron differential energy fluxes, as shown
227 by the green curve in Figure 3b. The reduction in electron temperature in the exhaust is not an
228 expected signature of reconnection (Phan et al., 2013; Pulupa et al., 2014).

229 **4.3. Proton beams outside the HCS and the lack of strahl electron dropouts**

230 The enhanced proton flow speed and heating inside the exhaust resulted in a shift to higher
231 energies of the core protons by about a factor of three compared to the core solar wind outside the
232 current sheet (Figure 3a).

233 Prior to the HCS crossing, there were bursts of anti-sunward and field-aligned energetic
234 proton beams (Figure 3a), resulting in $T_{p\parallel}$ enhancements (Figure 3h). Modest decreases in $|\mathbf{B}|$ and
235 B_L during the proton beams were likely not associated with partial entries into the reconnection
236 exhaust since the core solar wind population was not significantly accelerated (Figure 3a). Slight
237 drops in the fluxes of the 314 eV field-aligned strahl electrons were observed in conjunction with
238 these proton beams (Figure 3c), suggesting partial entries into the separatrix layer. However, the
239 strahl electron dropouts were not significant compared to those discussed for the E08 separatrix
240 layers in Section 3.3.

241 On both side of the HCS the 314 eV electrons were present all the way to the edge of the
242 current sheet (marked by the dashed lines). In the region immediately outside the HCS on both
243 sides, the proton spectra look like a core distribution with a suprathermal proton tail (Figure 3a).
244 However, inspection of the VDFs in this region (not shown) reveals the presence of anti-sunward
245 field-aligned beams, albeit at low fluxes. The upper energy of the low-flux beams is higher than
246 the exhaust population, suggesting that they did not leak out of the local exhaust. The lack of
247 leaked proton beams, coupled with no strahl dropouts, indicate the absence of separatrix layers
248 outside the exhaust, which is not consistent with conventional reconnection models.

249 Zooming out, Figure 4 shows a broad region around the full and partial crossings of the
250 HCS. Energetic proton beams (panel a) and associated temperature anisotropy $T_{p\parallel} \gg T_{p\perp}$ (Figure
251 4h) were present over a very broad region surrounding the HCS, extending all the way to the two
252 blue dashed lines ('t₁' and 't₆') in Figure 4. The ISOIS/EPI-Lo instrument detected ion intensity
253 enhancements up to ~50 keV/nucleon throughout this broad proton beam regions (Desai et al.,
254 2021). The appearance of proton beams in the vicinity of the HCS suggests that they are associated
255 with the HCS. However, in contrast to E08, there were essentially no dropouts of 314eV electrons
256 when the proton beams were observed. If these 314 eV electrons were strahl electrons from the
257 Sun, their presence would mean connection to the Sun. This would be inconsistent with the region
258 being magnetically connected to an anti-sunward HCS reconnection exhaust.

259 There may, however, be a different interpretation of the origin of the 314 eV electrons close
260 to the E07 HCS. Figure 4b shows that there was an abrupt increase in the upper electron energy
261 and a sudden broadening of the 314 eV electron pitch angle (Figure 4c) at 't₁' and 't₆', which mark
262 where the temperature became persistently anisotropic $T_{p\parallel} \gg T_{p\perp}$ (Figure 4h) due to the presence
263 of proton beams. This suggests that the broader pitch-angle electrons adjacent to the HCS came
264 from a different source than the narrower pitch-angle distributed electrons seen further away. It is
265 likely that the narrower pitch-angle electrons are the usual strahls from the solar corona. The
266 broader pitch-angle electrons, which have higher energies, could be from a different source. The
267 concurrent presence of the proton beams and the broad pitch-angle electrons suggests is that they
268 both originated from a common source sunward of PSP. The source is not likely to be the local
269 HCS because the fluxes of 314eV electrons inside the local HCS were much lower than outside.
270 On the other hand, it is unclear how electrons and protons from a remote source closer to the Sun,

271 where energization (from reconnection or from another drive mechanism) might be stronger
272 because of the higher available magnetic energy there, could penetrate to the region adjacent to
273 the reconnection exhaust. For example, the separatrix field lines that bound the exhaust should
274 divert particles produced by reconnection at a remote site away from the exhaust, just as strahl
275 electrons are diverted.

276

277 **5. Summary and Discussion**

278 During Encounters 07 and 08, PSP encountered the HCS right around perihelia. Similar to
279 previous PSP encounters where reconnection exhausts were detected at almost every complete
280 HCS crossing (Phan et al., 2021), the E07 and E08 HCS displayed classic signatures of
281 reconnection exhausts with Alfvénic outflows bounded by sharp slow-shock-like exhaust edges,
282 across which the magnetic field magnitude dropped and the proton density and temperature
283 increased (Petschek, 1964). At 16 R_s (E08) and 20 R_s (E07), the Alfvén speed of the solar wind
284 was comparable to the solar wind flow speed. As a result, the proton energy gained through
285 Alfvénic reconnection bulk acceleration was ~ 3 times that of the surrounding solar wind core
286 energy, making the exhaust proton population clearly distinguishable from the ambient solar wind
287 core protons.

288 For the E08 HCS, this has allowed the clear identification of protons leaking out of the local
289 reconnecting HCS along separatrix field lines. The leaked protons appeared as energetic proton
290 beams (with energies up to at least 2.5 keV, and possibly up to 40 keV/nucleon) clearly separated
291 from the core solar wind when detected far from the HCS (Figure 2e). Similar distributions have
292 been reported by Verniero et al. (2020), although it is not clear how far away from the HCS those
293 observations were. The interpretation of leaked proton beams is supported by the concurrent

294 dropouts of superthermal strahl electrons, consistent with the spacecraft sampling the separatrix
295 layer of an anti-sunward exhaust that is magnetically disconnected from the Sun.

296 For E07, energetic proton beams were also observed in broad regions surrounding both sides
297 of the HCS. However, in contrast to E08, there were no clear dropouts of superthermal (e.g., 314
298 eV) field-aligned electrons associated with the presence of most proton beams. The lack of 314eV
299 electron dropouts could mean the absence of separatrix layers (i.e., the exhaust boundaries were
300 tangential discontinuities), and that the source of proton beams was not the HCS exhaust. However,
301 in Section 4.3, we pointed out the possibility of a remote source for both the proton beams and the
302 field-aligned superthermal electrons. A challenge to justify any source sunward of the reconnection
303 X-line in this event is to understand how such particles can penetrate into the region close to the
304 reconnection exhaust with no discernable gap associated with separatrix field lines. Separatrix
305 signatures might, of course, be more complex when reconnection is intermittent or patchy (in 3D),
306 or when the HCS contains multiple active and non-active X-lines/flux ropes (e.g., Gosling et al.,
307 1995; Khabarova et al., 2015; Shepherd et al., 2017; Sanchez-Diaz et al., 2019; Lavraud et al.,
308 2020; Réville et al., 2020).

309 In conclusion, PSP observations have shown that reconnection in the near-Sun HCS produces
310 high-energy protons seen in a broad region outside the HCS. The leaked proton beam energy is
311 simply related to the energy of the accelerated protons inside the exhaust, which in turns depends
312 on the available magnetic energy per particle in the local solar wind. Thus, reconnection in the
313 near-Sun HCS produces beams at much higher energies than at 1 AU. Further PSP observations
314 closer to the Sun will shed more light on the relationship between reconnection and accelerated
315 proton beams in the solar wind.

316

317 **Acknowledgments**

318 We are grateful for the dedicated efforts of the entire Parker Solar Probe team. We
319 acknowledge NASA FIELDS contract NNN06AA01C and NASA SWEAP contract
320 NNN06AA01C. Data source: <http://fields.ssl.berkeley.edu/data/> and
321 <http://sweap.cfa.harvard.edu/pub/data/sci/sweap/>.

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444

445 **Figure Captions**

446 **Figure 1.** PSP crossing of a reconnecting HCS near E08 perihelion, displaying large plasma
447 acceleration in the exhaust and energetic proton beams outside the HCS. (a) Ion spectrogram from
448 ISOIS/EPI-Lo, in counts/energy bin, (b,c) proton and electron spectrograms in differential energy
449 flux ($\text{eVs}^{-1} \text{cm}^{-2} \text{ster}^{-1} \text{eV}^{-1}$), (d) pitch angle distribution of 314eV electrons, (e,f) magnitude and
450 components of the magnetic field in RTN, (g-h) proton velocity and density, (i-j) proton and
451 electron temperatures, (k) schematic illustration of the standard reconnection exhaust and
452 separatrix layers and the RTN coordinates. The slanted (black) field lines in the exhaust is due to

453 Alfvén waves propagating at higher speed on the upper side. The vertical dashed lines mark the
454 edges of the exhaust. The proton moments are in the Sun’s frame. The nearly indistinguishable
455 black and green curves in panel (c) are twice the core electron temperature and the peak in
456 differential energy fluxes.

457 **Figure 2.** Proton distributions inside in the exhaust and in the adjacent separatrix layer of the same
458 HCS as in Figure 1. (a) Magnetic field in RTN, (b-d) proton radial velocity, temperatures, and
459 spectrograms, (e-h) proton distributions summed and collapsed onto θ -plane in SPAN-I instrument
460 coordinates (see Verniero et al., 2020): (e) near the outer edge of separatrix layer, (f) in the
461 separatrix layer closer to the HCS, (g) in the exhaust near the left edge, (h) in the weak $|\mathbf{B}|$ region
462 of the exhaust, and (i) schematics of the reconnection exhaust and separatrix layers, and the
463 locations where the protons distributions e-h were sampled. The yellow arrow in panels e-h points
464 along \mathbf{B} , and its length represents the local Alfvén speed.

465 **Figure 3.** PSP crossing of a reconnecting HCS near E07 perihelion. The parameters are the same
466 as in Figure 1.

467 **Figure 4.** Zoom-out of Figure 3 showing broad regions surrounding the PSP crossing of the E07
468 HCS. The parameters are the same as in Figure 1. The black dashed lines mark the two edges of
469 the complete crossing of the HCS. The interval between the two green dashed lines is a partial
470 HCS crossing. The left and right blue dashed lines mark the outer boundaries of the regions
471 surrounding the HCS that showed persistent $T_{p\parallel} > T_{p\perp}$.

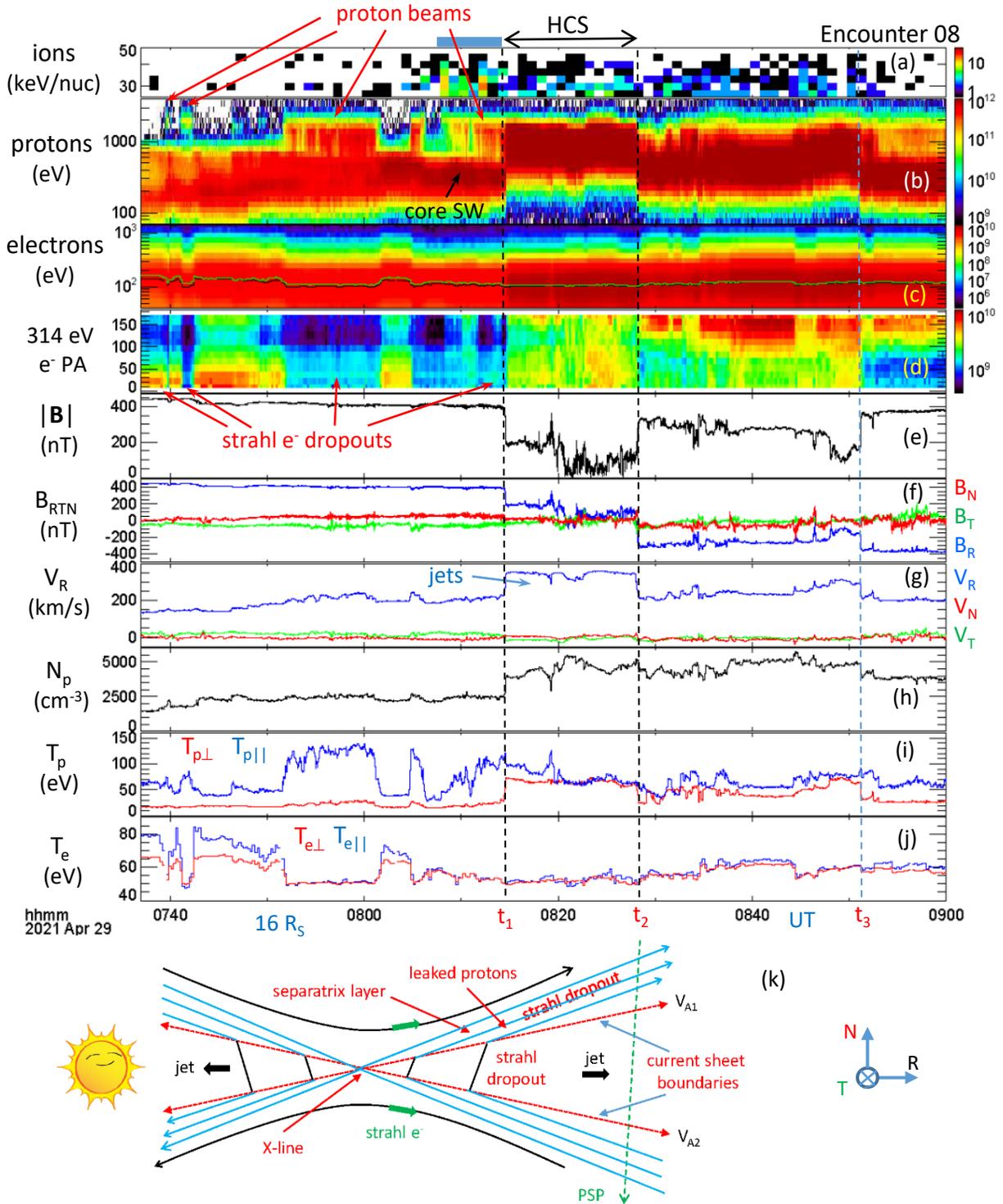


Figure 1. PSP crossing of a reconnecting HCS near E08 perihelion, displaying large plasma acceleration in the exhaust and energetic proton beams outside the HCS. (a) Ion spectrogram from ISOIS/EPI-Lo, in counts/energy bin, (b,c) proton and electron spectrograms in differential energy flux (eVs⁻¹cm⁻²ster⁻¹eV⁻¹), (d) pitch angle distribution of 314eV electrons, (e,f) magnitude and components of the magnetic field in RTN, (g-h) proton velocity and density, (i-j) proton and electron temperatures, (k) schematic illustration of the standard reconnection exhaust and separatrix layers and the RTN coordinates. The slanted (black) field lines in the exhaust is due to Alfvén waves propagating at higher speed on the upper side. The vertical dashed lines mark the edges of the exhaust. The proton moments are in the Sun’s frame. The nearly indistinguishable black and green curves in panel (c) are twice the core electron temperature and the peak in differential energy fluxes.

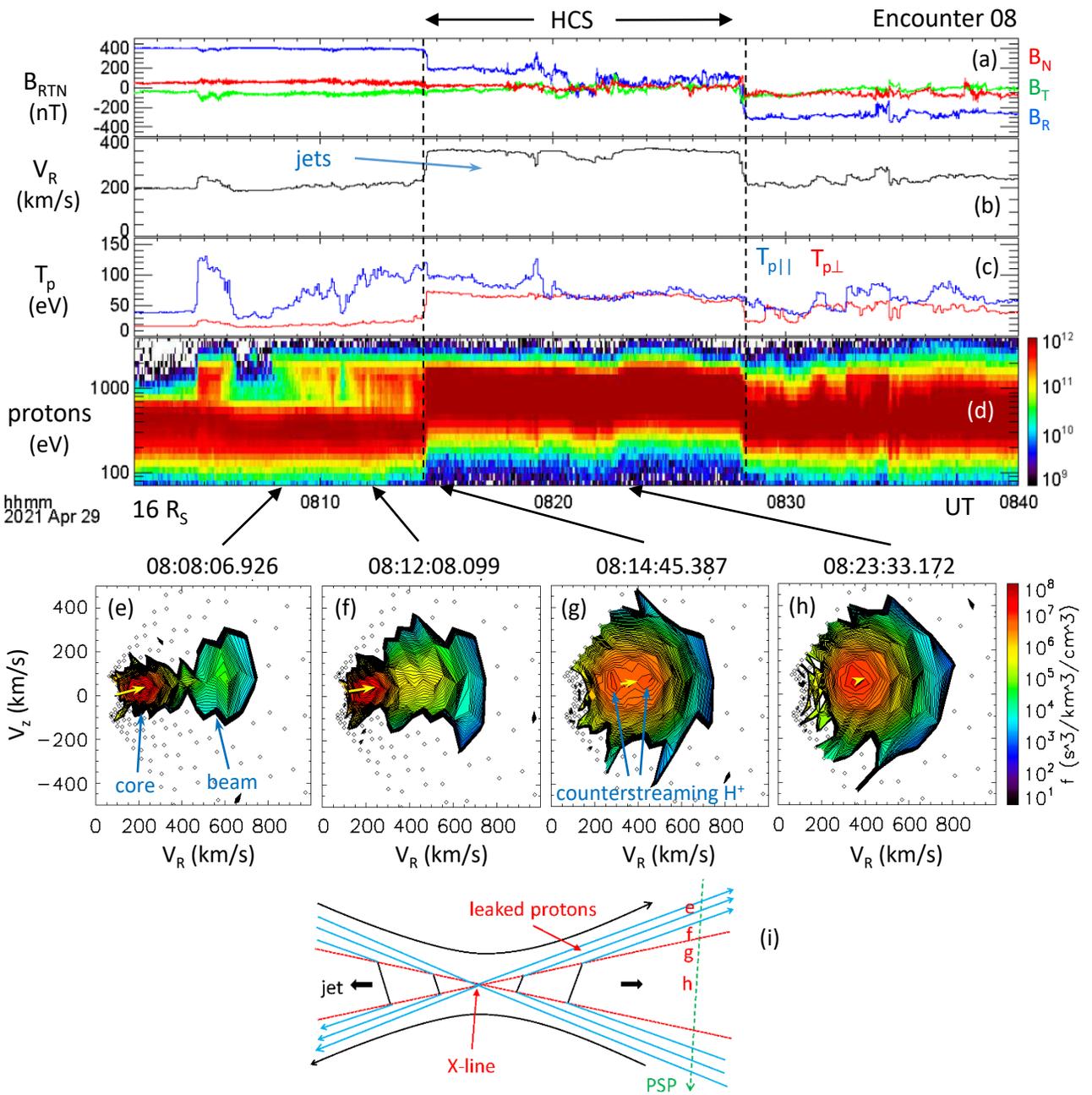


Figure 2. Proton distributions inside in the exhaust and in the adjacent separatrix layer of the same HCS as in Figure 1. (a) Magnetic field in RTN, (b-d) proton radial velocity, temperatures, and spectrograms, (e-h) proton distributions summed and collapsed onto θ -plane in SPAN-I instrument coordinates (see Verniero et al., 2020): (e) near the outer edge of separatrix layer, (f) in the separatrix layer closer to the HCS, (g) in the exhaust near the left edge, (h) in the weak $|\mathbf{B}|$ region of the exhaust, and (i) schematics of the reconnection exhaust and separatrix layers, and the locations where the protons distributions e-h were sampled. The yellow arrow in panels e-h points along \mathbf{B} , and its length represents the local Alfvén speed.

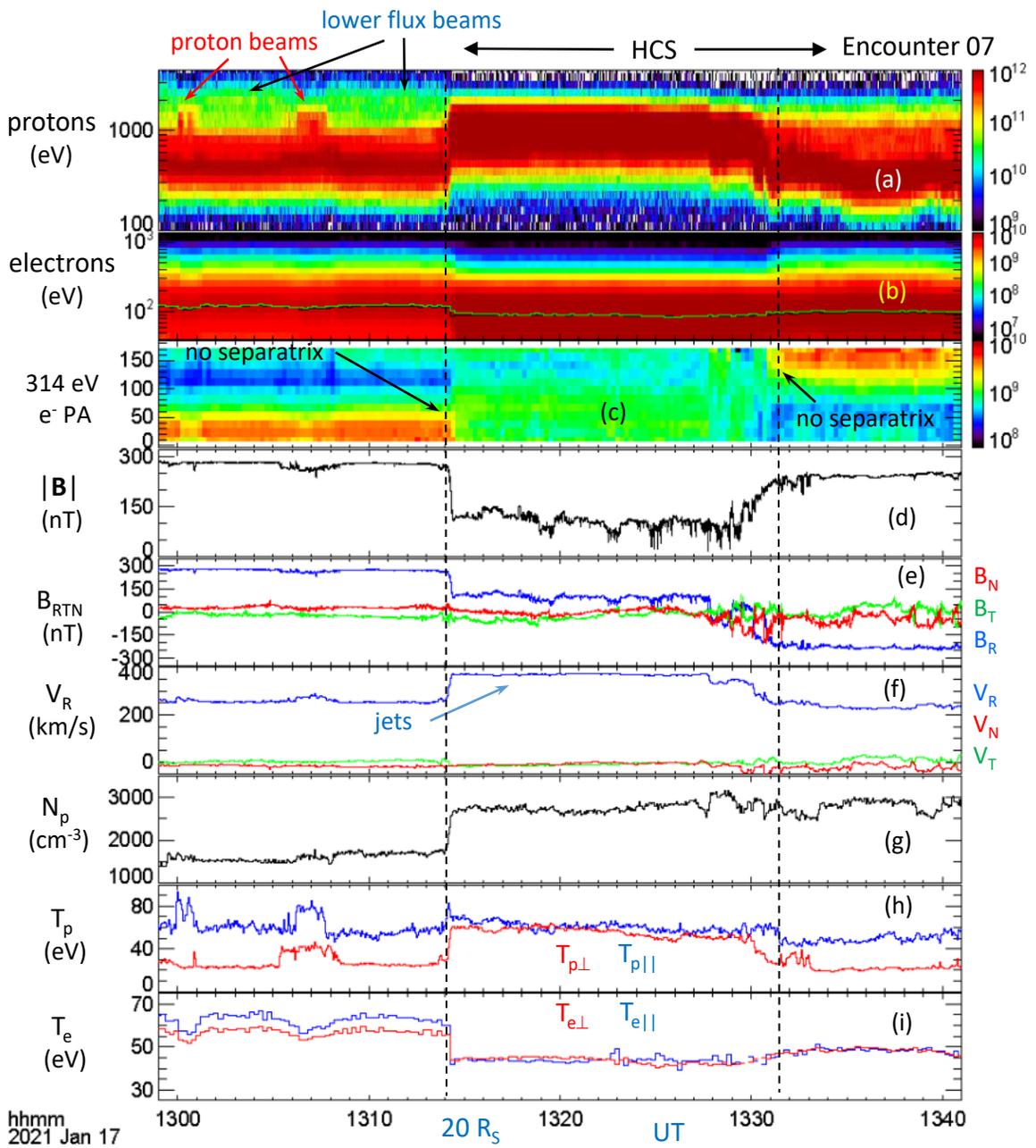


Figure 3. PSP crossing of a reconnecting HCS near E7 perihelion. The parameters are the same as in Figure 1.

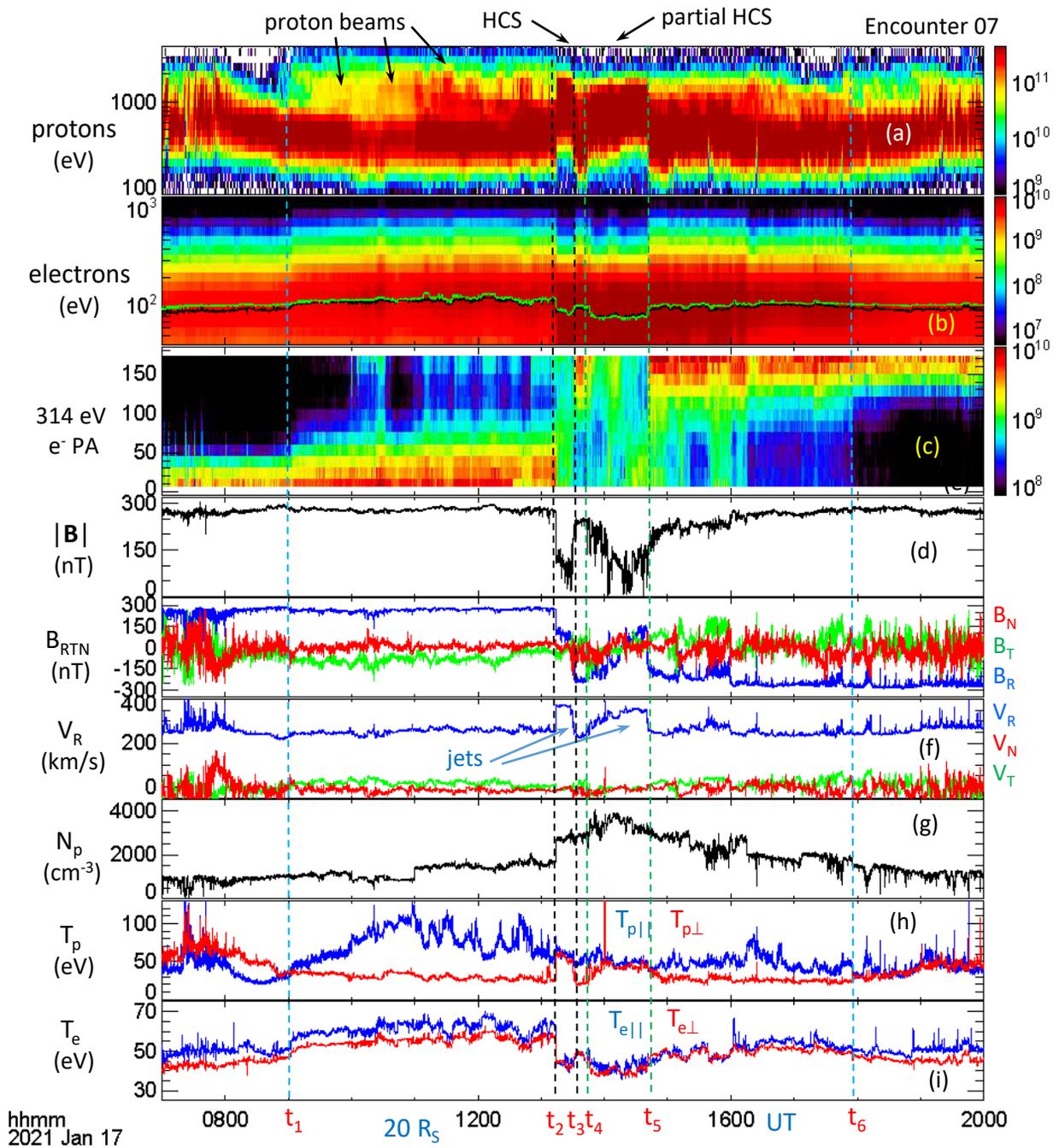


Figure 4. Zoom-out of Figure 3 showing broad regions surrounding the PSP crossing of the E07 HCS. The parameters are the same as in Figure 1. The black dashed lines mark the two edges of the complete crossing of the HCS. The interval between the two green dashed lines is a partial HCS crossing. The left and right blue dashed lines mark the outer boundaries of the regions surrounding the HCS that showed persistent $T_{p\parallel} > T_{p\perp}$.