

Towards a Local Minimum Time Resolution in Curved Spacetime

Priyanshu Rauth
priyanshuraut1009@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper explores the idea that spacetime may possess a minimal time interval that depends on gravitational redshift and curvature. Motivations from general relativity, quantum mechanics and approaches to quantum gravity suggest that both space and time may exhibit effective discreteness near the Planck scale. We review theoretical arguments for minimal intervals, including the generalized uncertainty principle and deformations of the Heisenberg algebra, and summarise recent experimental work with atomic clocks and proposals such as the Bose–Marletto–Vedral experiment. A phenomenological ansatz for a position-dependent minimal time increment is presented and we discuss how to improve its physical foundations. The aim is not to propose a theory of everything but to offer a conservative, focused framework that could guide future experiments.

1 Introduction

General relativity (GR) describes gravity as the curvature of spacetime, while quantum mechanics (QM) treats time as an external parameter. Reconciling these perspectives motivates the search for new physics at the Planck scale, where the classical continuum picture may break down. Thought experiments combining the Heisenberg microscope with gravity indicate that there might be a smallest measurable length: beyond a certain energy, a black hole forms and further spatial resolution is impossible[1]. This line of reasoning leads naturally to the question of whether an analogous minimal interval exists for time. The Planck time $t_P = \sqrt{\hbar G/c^5} \approx 5.39 \times 10^{-44}$ s is often taken as the scale at which quantum gravity becomes relevant.

This work surveys recent developments related to minimal time intervals and proposes a phenomenological framework for a *hypothesized local minimum effective time resolution* that depends on gravitational potential and curvature. We summarise theoretical motivations, discuss experimental constraints, and outline possible refinements to the model.

This work does not propose a complete theory of quantum gravity, but a constrained phenomenological hypothesis intended for numerical and experimental exploration.

2 Theoretical motivations

2.1 Gravitational redshift and weak-field time dilation

In the weak-field limit of GR, the spacetime metric around a static source can be written as

$$ds^2 \approx -(1 + 2\Phi/c^2)c^2 dt^2 + (1 - 2\Phi/c^2)d\mathbf{x}^2, \quad (1)$$

where Φ is the Newtonian potential. A stationary observer measures proper time increments

$$d\tau = \sqrt{1 + 2\Phi/c^2} dt. \quad (2)$$

Clocks deeper in a gravitational potential well tick more slowly than those at higher potentials. Modern optical lattice clocks have measured frequency shifts corresponding to millimetre-scale height differences and found excellent agreement with this prediction[5]. These experiments validate GR at laboratory scales but probe time differences far above t_P .

2.2 Minimum length and the generalized uncertainty principle

Various approaches to quantum gravity suggest the existence of a minimum measurable length. Heuristic arguments show that increasing the energy of a probe to resolve smaller distances eventually leads to black-hole formation; further spatial resolution becomes impossible[1]. This motivates deformations of the canonical commutation relations. In theories with a *generalized uncertainty principle* (GUP), the position-momentum commutator acquires momentum-dependent corrections, implying a nonzero minimum length. Mir Faizal and co-workers demonstrated that such deformations can also yield a minimum measurable time and that quantum systems evolve in discrete steps[2]. They introduced the concept of *time crystals* where the energy spectrum becomes periodic in time.

2.3 Minimal time scale in quantum mechanics

Recently, Domański modified commutation relations between the time operator and its conjugate frequency operator in the Page-Wootters formalism. This creates a minimal time scale and breaks continuous time-translation symmetry, leading to a discrete version of the Schrödinger equation[3]. The resulting theory retains a consistent quantum description while introducing a fundamental time lattice.

2.4 Experimental proposals: the BMV experiment

The Bose-Marletto-Vedral (BMV) experiment aims to observe quantum interference of gravitationally interacting masses. Christodoulou and Rovelli noted that the BMV experiment effectively measures phase differences proportional to proper-time intervals[4]. If the masses involved approach the Planck mass ($\sim 10^{-8}$ kg), the phase difference becomes sensitive to time intervals on the order of t_P . Discretization at this scale would manifest as quantized steps in the measured phase. Current technologies use much lighter masses, but advances in quantum control may bring the experiment closer to the required regime.

3 Phenomenological ansatz

We consider a phenomenological form for a position-dependent minimal time increment τ_{local} :

$$\tau_{\text{local}}(x) = \frac{t_P}{\sqrt{1 + 2\Phi(x)/c^2}} F(\kappa(x)), \quad (3)$$

where $\Phi(x)$ is the Newtonian potential and κ is a dimensionless curvature measure formed from the Kretschmann scalar $K = R_{abcd}R^{abcd}$ via $\kappa = K \ell_P^4$ with ℓ_P the Planck length. The function $F(\kappa)$ encodes how curvature amplifies the minimal time increment; simple choices include a linear form $F(\kappa) = 1 + \gamma\kappa$ or an exponential form $F(\kappa) = \exp(\gamma\kappa)$. In flat spacetime, $\Phi \rightarrow 0$ and $\kappa \rightarrow 0$, so $\tau_{\text{local}} \rightarrow t_P$.

This ansatz combines the well-tested redshift factor with a speculative curvature-dependent term. To make the model predictive, one should derive $F(\kappa)$ from an underlying theory or from deformations of the commutation relations rather than choosing it arbitrarily.

4 Discussion and improvements

The existence of a minimal time interval remains speculative, but several lines of reasoning lend it credibility. Atomic clock experiments confirm gravitational redshift with astounding precision[5], though they do not yet probe Planck-scale times. Deformations of the Heisenberg algebra motivated by quantum gravity can lead to discrete time evolution and break continuous time-translation symmetry[2, 3]. The BMV proposal offers a potential route toward measuring Planck-scale time differences, though it remains technologically challenging[4].

Future work should seek to derive τ_{local} from a specific microscopic theory, such as a curvature-dependent generalized uncertainty principle or a covariant formalism like the q -metric introduced by Rossi, Cacciatori and Pesci[1]. Such derivations would relate the parameter γ appearing in $F(\kappa)$ to fundamental constants or couplings and clarify whether Lorentz invariance is broken at small scales or restored in the continuum limit. Numerical simulations of quantum systems evolving with a discretised time step could reveal phenomenological signatures and guide experimental searches.

5 Conclusion

This paper has surveyed theoretical motivations and experimental prospects for a local minimum time resolution in curved spacetime. By combining weak-field time dilation with a phenomenological curvature term, we obtain a simple ansatz for a position-dependent minimal time increment. Connections to generalized uncertainty principles, deformations of the Heisenberg algebra, and the BMV proposal suggest that discrete time may be a natural feature of quantum gravity. However, the model presented here remains speculative. Strengthening its foundations requires deriving τ_{local} from more fundamental principles and connecting it to measurable phenomena. With continued advances in quantum control and precision metrology, experimental tests of time at the Planck scale may eventually become feasible.

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