Laser channeling in mm-scale underdense plasmas of fast ignition targets\textsuperscript{1} C. REN, G. LI, R. YAN, University of Rochester, T.-L. WANG, J. TONGE, W.B. MORI, UCLA — In the fast ignition approach to laser fusion, nonlinear laser-plasma interactions could cause significant energy loss for an ignition laser in an underdense plasma. One way to avoid this is to use a channeling pulse to create a low-density channel for the ignition pulse. Two dimensional Particle-in-cell simulations show that laser channeling in mm-scale underdense plasmas has many new phenomena that are not present in previous short-scale experiments and simulations, including plasma buildup to $n_c$ in front of the laser, laser hosing/refraction, channel bifurcation, and self-correction and electron heating to relativistic temperatures. The channeling speed is much less than the linear group velocity of the laser. The simulations find that low-intensity channeling pulses are preferred to minimize the required laser energy. The channel is also shown to significantly increase the transmission of an ignition pulse.

\textsuperscript{1}This work was supported by the U.S. Department of Energy under Cooperative Agreement and Grant Nos. DE-FC52-92SF19460, DE-FC02-04ER54789, and DE-FG02-06ER54879.

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Date submitted: 10 Jan 2008 Electronic form version 1.4