Purpose	Explore alternatives to conventional gravimetric weighing for ultra high performance
Circulation	Internal

CiP White Paper: Photon-Based Gravimetry for High-Throughput Tablet Weighing: A Technical Assessment

Wednesday 27 August 2025

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Executive summary

This paper evaluates whether interactions between photons and matter can be exploited to weigh oral solid dosage (OSD) units at extreme throughput (≥60,000 tablets/hour) with accuracy of ±0.1 mg across a 1 mg–2 g mass range. We analyse three photon routes — gravitational red/blue-shift, radiation pressure/momentum transfer, and photothermal (energy-absorption) calorimetry — and compare them to viable mechanical/electromechanical methods. Conclusion: photon-based gravimetry is not a practical path to the stated specification. The only credible route is parallelization of fast electromagnetic-force-restoration (EMFR) weighing cells, optionally combined with dynamic inertial/resonant techniques and model-based signal processing.

1 Problem statement

Target:

Mass measurement of individual tablets at ≥60,000 units/hour with ±0.1 mg accuracy over 1 mg–2 g.

Constraint:

Methods must be suitable for pharmaceutical QC/QA (non-destructive, repeatable, calibratable, compliant).

Question:

Can photon–matter interactions (GR effects, radiation pressure, photothermal absorption) be engineered to deliver this performance?

2 Photon-matter routes considered

2.1 General Relativity (GR) — Gravitational Redshift

Premise: Using the measure of energy loss of light to determine influencing mass.

Photons experience fractional frequency shift crossing a potential difference $\Delta\Phi$:

$$\frac{\Delta \mathrm{f}}{\mathrm{f}} \approx \frac{\Delta\Phi}{\mathrm{c}^2}$$

For a small body (mass $\boldsymbol{M}$, characteristic size $\boldsymbol{R}$),

$$\Phi = \frac{\mathrm{G\,M}}{\mathrm{R}}$$

For a 2mg tablet with R ≈ 3mm:

$$\boldsymbol{R \approx 3mm : \Phi \approx \frac{GM}{R} \approx \frac{6.67 \times 10^{-11} \cdot 2 \times 10^{-6}}{3 \times 10^{-3}} \approx 4.4 \times 10^{-14}} \text{ J/kg},$$

$$\Rightarrow \quad \boldsymbol{\frac{\Delta f}{f} \sim \frac{4.4 \times 10^{-14}}{c^2} \approx 5 \times 10^{-31}}$$

State-of-the-art optical clocks resolve ~10^{-18} fractional shifts; the tablet signal is ~13 orders smaller. Not measurable, even ideally.

2.2 Radiation Pressure & Photon Momentum (Recoil)

Premise: Using the momentum of a photon and the measure of its transference to an object by radiation pressure causing recoil.

Photon momentum:

$$p = \frac{\mathrm{E}}{\mathrm{c}} = \frac{\mathrm{h}}{\lambda}$$

Radiation pressure on a perfectly reflecting surface:

$$F = \frac{2\mathrm{P}}{\mathrm{c}}$$

To levitate a mass:

$$P = \frac{\mathrm{M\,g\,c}}{2}$$

Examples:

$1mg \rightarrow P \approx 1.5\,kW;\ 2g \rightarrow P \approx 3\,MW$

Even far below levitation, useful recoil metrology demands ultra-low-friction mounts, vacuum, interferometric velocimetry, and remains impractical for mg–g objects at line speed.

2.3 Photothermal (Energy-Absorption) Calorimetry

Premise: Measuring heat-flow and transference of energy in the form of heat to infer material properties.

Deposit known absorbed optical energy E_{abs}; infer mass via temperature rise:

$$M\ = \frac{E_a bs}{(c_p \Delta T)}$$

To achieve +/- 0.1mg on a 1g tablet (1 x 10^{-4} relative), the combined relative uncertainties in E_{abs}, c_p and ΔT must be $\lesssim 10^{-4}$. That implies ~ 0.01% accuracy in delivery/absorbed energy and ~0.1 mK resolution on a ~1 K transient in milliseconds, with negligible heat loss and uniform absorption – conditions incompatible with typical OSD variability (porosity, coat, moisture) and QC throughput.

Material dependence (unknown/variable absorptivity and heat capacity), heat losses, non-uniform heating, and risk of product alternations make this a proxy for heat capacity x absorption rather than a universal mass measurement.

3 Quantitative feasibility checks (order of magnitude)

3.1 GR Shift vs Clock Sensitivity

Tablet:
$\Delta f/f \sim 10^{-31}$

Best optical lattice clocks: ~10^{-18} uncertainty over long averaging times. Gap: ~ 10^{13} too small.

3.2 Recoil / impulse method

532 nm photons ($E \approx 3.7 \times 10^{-19} J, p \approx 1.2 \times 10^{-27} kg \cdot m \cdot s^{-1}$). To impart $\Delta v = 1\,\mu m/s$: $J\ =\ M\,\Delta v;\ N \approx J/p$.

1mg: $J = 10^{-12},\ N \sim 8 \times 10^{14}\ photons \Rightarrow E \sim 0.3\,J$

2g: $J = 2 \times 10^{-9}, N \sim 1.7 \times 10^{18} \Rightarrow E \sim 600\,J$

These energies are large for line operation, while mechanical isolation and metrology requirements are prohibitive.

3.3 Photothermal Calorimetry

Assume $E_{abs} = 1\,\mathrm{J}, c_p \approx 1000\,\mathrm{J{\cdot}cdotpkg}^{-1\cdot}$ $\backslash cdotpkg - 1, M = 1\,g\ \Delta T = 1\,K$. To reach 10^{-4} relative mass accuracy: $\delta E/E, \delta cp/cp, \delta(\Delta T)/\Delta T \lesssim 10^{-4}$. This requires vacuum-like isolation, integrated reflectance/transmittance metrology per unit, standardised surfaces, and per-product calibration – incompatible with general OSD QC at 60k/h.

4 Practical barriers to photon-based gravimetry

Signal scale mismatch: Fundamental photon/gravity effects are minuscule for mg–g masses.

Environmental dominance: Earth's gravity and ambient noise swamp GR signals; air currents/electrostatics swamp recoil and photothermal transients.

Material variability: Absorptivity and heat capacity vary with formulation, moisture, and coating; you measure thermophysical properties, not pure mass.

Throughput constraints: Millisecond-scale, sub-mK calorimetry with per-unit optical energy accounting is complex and fragile; recoil methods demand vacuum and interferometry.

Validation burden: Reproducibility, calibration traceability, and non-destructive testing requirements conflict with energetic optical excitation.

5 Viable high-throughput paths (≥ 60k/h @ ±0.1mg)

5.1 Parallel Electromagnetic Force Restoration (EMFR)

- Mulitiple isolated weigh cells
- Per-lane throughput 5-8k/h with 20 to 40 ms effective settle using oversampling and model based deconvolution and active isolation (LAF, vibration isolation, static elimination)
- Continuous auto-zero and periodic in-process cal-check
- Aggregate by channel count

5.2 Impulse-Response Inertial Weighing

Apply a controlled force-time profile (voice-coil "tap"), measure tablet kinematics (laser vibrometry or high-bandwidth displacement), compute mass from $M = \int F\ dt/\Delta v\ or\ M = F/a$ with fixture dynamics identified and subtracted. Achieve **5–10 ms** per impulse; 3–5 impulses/averages per unit yield **<50 ms** decision time.

5.3 Resonant Micro-weighing

Place the unit on a flexural resonator; infer mass from frequency shift $\Delta f/f \approx 1/2\Delta m/M_{eff}$. Use broadband excitation and parametric ID to avoid long ring-down; best for 50–500 mg ranges with controlled seating.

5.4 Hybrid "Virtual Weighing" (Screening)

Combine 3D optical volume with ultrasound or dual-energy X-ray for density proxy; train models against reference weights to reduce the burden on EMFR lanes. Good for pre-sort, not for absolute ±0.1 mg across 1 mg–2 g.

6 Reference architecture for a 60k/h line

Mechanics:

Multi-lane modular sorter; each lane has singulation, short-settle EMFR cell, accept/reject/grade diverter; lanes mechanically isolated.

Cycle timing (per lane):

Singulate 5 ms → place 5 ms → acquire 25 ms (oversample 20-40 kHz, denoise) → classify 5 ms → eject 5 ms.

Approx. 45 ms/unit to approx. 80 units/s across 10 lanes = 288 k/h headroom; de-rate to 60-100 k/h for real-world variances and environmental effects.

Controls & DSP:

Transient model fit (step response deconvolution), Bayesian averaging of multiple short windows, outlier detection, per-lot drift tracking.

Metrology:

Traceable calibration artifacts injected every N units; auto-zero every M cycles; SPC charts; GR&R live.

Environment:

Enclosure with laminar flow (<0.2 m/s), vibration isolation (<10^{-3} g RMS), temperature control (±0.5 °C), static elimination.

7 Regulatory and validation considerations

Data integrity:

21 CFR Part 11 / EU Annex 11 compliance audit trails, electronic signatures, role-based access.

Calibration and traceability

ISO/IEC 17025 traceable standards; in-process checks with control charts.

Risk management:

Non-destructive testing; thermal/optical exposure of tablets minimised; documented effect of weighing process on product CQAs.

Process:

GMP and PIC/S process compliance and best practice.

8 Conclusions

Photon-based approaches (GR, recoil, photothermal) are fundamentally mis-scaled for mg-g masses and operationally fragile for pharma QC at ≥ 60 k/h and ±0.1 mg.

Mechanical/electromechanical routes – parallel EMFR and dynamic inertial/resonant augmentation and advanced DSP are the only credible path to the spec.

Investment – focus needs to be on modular or multi-lane architecture, short transient signal processing and robust environmental control, not exotic photon physics.

9 Appendix

9.1 GR Redshift of a 2 mg tablet

$$Given\ M = 2 \times 10^{-6}\,\text{kg}.\ R = 3 \times 10^{-3}\,\text{m}.\ G = 6.67 \times 10^{-11};\ \Phi = GM/R = 4.4 \times 10^{-14}\,\text{J/kg};\ \Delta f/f = \Phi/c^2 \approx 4.9 \times 10^{-3}\ .$$

9.2 Radiation pressure power to counteract weight

$$F = Mg, F = 2P/c(perfect\ reflector) \Rightarrow P = Mgc/2$$
$$M = 1\,mg: P \approx 1.5\,kW$$
$$M = 2\,g: P \approx 3\,MW$$

Photohermal Mass via Calorimetry

$$M = E_{abs}/(c_p\,\Delta T)\; With\; E_{abs} = 1\,\mathrm{J} Eabs = 1J, cp = 1000, M = 1\,g \Rightarrow \Delta T = 1\,K\; For\; \delta M/M \le 10^{-4}: require\; \delta(\Delta T) \le 0.1\,mK\; if energy\; and\; c_p\; are\; known\; to\; 10^{-4}.$$

10 References (selected)

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Document Control

Author	PR
Reference	CiP White Paper: Photon-Based Gravimetry for High-Throughput Tablet Weighing: A Technical Assessment

10.1 Amendments

Issue Number	Date	Details	Sections
0.1	27Aug2025	First draft	All
1.0	08Sep2025	Issue	All

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