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## Early Forebrain Wiring: Genetic Dissection Using Conditional *Celsr3* Mutant Mice

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### Abstract

Development of axonal tracts requires interactions between growth cones and the environment. Tracts such as the anterior commissure and internal capsule are defective in mice with null mutation of *Celsr3*. We generated a conditional *Celsr3* allele, allowing regional inactivation. Inactivation in telencephalon, ventral forebrain, or cortex demonstrated essential roles for *Celsr3* in neurons that project axons to the anterior commissure and subcerebral targets, as well as in cells that guide axons through the internal capsule. When *Celsr3* was inactivated in cortex, subcerebral projections failed to grow, yet corticothalamic axons developed normally, indicating that besides guidepost cells, additional *Celsr3*-independent cues can assist their progression. These observations provide in vivo evidence that *Celsr3*-mediated interactions between axons and guidepost cells govern axonal tract formation in mammals.

Formation of axonal tracts is essential for brain wiring, and several cues, such as extracellular molecules, guidepost cells, and fiber-to-fiber interactions, guide growing axons to their targets (1). We showed previously that the anterior commissure (AC) and the internal capsule (IC) are defective in constitutive *Celsr3* mutant mice (2). *Celsr1*, *Celsr2*, *Celsr3* are homologous to *Drosophila flamingo/starry night (Fmi/stan)* (3,4), which collaborates with *Frizzled* and *Van Gogh* to regulate planar cell polarity (PCP) and neurite development. *Celsr* proteins are seven-pass transmembrane cadherins and are thought to mediate cell adhesion via homophilic

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#### Supporting Online Material

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Materials and Methods

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interactions. *Celsr3* is expressed in postmigratory neurons in cortex, ventral telencephalon, olfactory structures, and thalamus during development and progressively down-regulated during maturation (5).

To probe forebrain wiring, we generated a conditional mutant allele that allows inactivation of *Celsr3* by crosses with mice that express the Cre recombinase in region-specific manners (6). This allele was produced by flanking exons 19 to 27, deletion of which generates a null allele (2), with *loxP* sites (“floxed” allele, *Celsr3<sup>f</sup>*). Mice with regional inactivation were produced by crossing double heterozygous males (*Celsr3<sup>+/-</sup>;Cre<sup>+</sup>*) with homozygous *Celsr3<sup>ff</sup>* females. *Celsr3* inactivation requires Cre-mediated modification of one floxed allele only, thereby increasing efficiency. To facilitate reading, we use the shorthand “|”: for example, *Celsr3|Foxg1* is short for *Celsr3<sup>f/-</sup>;Foxg1-Cre<sup>+</sup>*. Cre-expressing strains were crossed with *ROSA26R* mice (7) to verify that Cre activation proceeded as described. Inactivation was further confirmed by in situ hybridization with a probe complementary to exons 19 to 27 that allows detection of intact *Celsr3* mRNA only and by Western blot (fig. S1). Control animals were double heterozygotes, e.g., *Celsr3<sup>f/+</sup>;Foxg1-Cre<sup>+</sup>*.

We first examined the role of *Celsr3* during formation of the AC. In *Celsr3|Foxg1* mice in which *Celsr3* is inactivated in the telencephalon (8), the AC was absent (Fig. 1, A, B, D, and E). It was also drastically affected in *Celsr3|Emx1* mice that express Cre in olfactory structures and neocortex (9). Diminutive bundles originating from olfactory nuclei ran caudally and turned, but never crossed the midline, as confirmed by injecting 1,1'-diiodo-3,3',3'-tetramethylindocarbocyanine perchlorate (DiI) in the olfactory bulb (Fig. 1, C and F). This phenotype could reflect the kinetics of Cre activation: Axonal growth from olfactory nuclei may be initiated before a full inactivation of *Celsr3* is achieved. In *Celsr3|Emx1* mice, *Celsr3* mRNA is absent from the olfactory and the temporal neurons of origin of the AC but present in the cells located along the pathway. Thus, normal *Celsr3* activity is likely required cell-autonomously in the neurons of origin of the AC. In all other crosses, namely *Celsr3|Gsh2*, *Celsr3|Nkx2.1*, double *Celsr3|(Gsh2 and Nkx2.1)*, and *Celsr3|Dlx5/6*, that express Cre in large sectors of basal telencephalon but not in olfactory nuclei nor temporal cortex (10,11), the AC developed normally. This suggests that *Celsr3* expression may not be required in cells along the AC pathway. Alternatively, functionally relevant cells in intermediate regions may have escaped *Celsr3* inactivation, because *Gsh2<sup>-</sup>*, *Nkx2.1<sup>-</sup>*, and *Dlx5/6-Cre* mice do not express Cre strongly in the medial region where AC axons cross the mid-line. We favor the latter interpretation because it fits with the observations on the IC described below.

We next investigated the function of *Celsr3* during development of the three components of the IC, namely corticothalamic axons (CTA), thalamocortical axons (TCA), and subcerebral projections [terminology of Molyneaux *et al.* (12)]. In *Celsr3|Foxg1* mice, despite normal *Celsr3* expression in dorsal thalamus, all three components were defective (Fig. 2, A and D). No thalamic fibers turned toward the striatum, and no thalamic neurons were labeled after DiI injection in cortex. Reciprocally, injection of DiI in thalamus did not label cortical neurons but stained thalamic axons that ran into the basal forebrain or crossed the midline ventrally, like in constitutive *Celsr3* and *Fzd3* mutants (2,13) (fig. S2). With use of focal DiI injections in the basal forebrain at embryonic day 13.5 (E13.5), we found that early thalamic fibers reached the medial ganglionic eminence in normal but not in *Celsr3<sup>-/-</sup>* mice. In contrast, in both genotypes, corticofugal fibers crossed the pallial subpallial boundary and reached the lateral ganglionic eminence at E13.5 (fig. S3). Thus, *Celsr3* is required for the early growth of TCA, but not CTA, toward ventral telencephalon.

The three components of the IC were also defective in *Celsr3|Dlx5/6* mice that express Cre in the ventral forebrain (11) (Fig. 2, B and E). A subset of TCA managed an incomplete turning at the diencephalon-telencephalon border but then ran aberrantly through the pallidum and

amygdala. Corticofugal fibers crossed the pallial-subpallial boundary and entered the lateral part of the basal forebrain. However, they failed to progress and spiraled in a disorderly manner, forming an abnormal mass that filled most of the dorsal striatum and protruded in the lateral ventricle (Fig. 2E). After DiI injections in cortex and thalamus, no labeling of thalamic or cortical cells was observed, confirming that both TCA and CTA were defective (fig. S2). Similarly, no sub-cerebral projections formed, as shown by absence of corticospinal tract (CST) (fig. S4). Thus, *Celsr3* expression by *Dlx5/6*-positive cells is required for progression of TCA, CTA, and subcerebral projections through the ventral telencephalon. Partial progression of CTA through the pallial subpial boundary in *Celsr3|Dlx5/6* but not in *Celsr3|Foxg1* mice may reflect *Celsr3*-mediated fiber-to-fiber interactions among CTA, in which *Celsr3* is expressed, or interactions between CTA and *Celsr3*-positive, *Dlx5/6*-negative cells. Similarly, the partial turning of TCA in *Celsr3|Dlx5/6* mice may reflect interactions with *Celsr3*-positive, *Dlx5/6*-negative cells.

To define which subset of *Dlx5/6*-positive cells could qualify as guidepost cells, we used *Gsh2-Cre* and *Nkx2.1-Cre* mice that express Cre in the lateral and medial ganglionic eminences, respectively. In *Celsr3|Gsh2*, *Celsr3|Nkx2.1*, and double *Celsr3|Gsh2-Nkx2.1* mice, all components of the IC developed normally (fig. S5). This showed that a sufficient number of *Celsr3*-expressing guidepost cells along the IC originate from *Nkx2.1*- and *Gsh2*-negative precursors. We compared the distribution of *Celsr3* (in situ hybridization), *Nkx2.1* and *Gsh2* (LacZ histochemistry and immunohistochemistry), *Dlx5/6* [enhanced green fluorescent protein (EGFP) reporter], and *Islet1* (immunohistochemistry) at E12.5, before any fiber growth in the ventral telencephalon, and at E14.5, when the IC begins to form. At E12.5 (Fig. 3), *Celsr3* expression was very similar to that of *Dlx5/6*, with maximal signal along the ganglionic eminences where *Islet1* was also present (compare Fig. 3, D and E, to A). Expression of *LacZ* in *ROSA26R|Nkx2.1* and *ROSA26R|Gsh2* mice was strong in large sectors of the ganglionic eminences and in the striatal mantle but low in the intermediate region where expression of *Celsr3* and *Dlx5/6* was maximal. At E14.5 (fig. S6), zones of *Gsh2* and *Nkx2.1* expression flanked axonal bundles of the incipient IC, whereas *Islet1*-expressing cells were in close contact with axonal tracts, in the region of highest *Dlx5/6* signal and minimal *Gsh2* and *Nkx2.1* signal. These observations suggest that *Celsr3* is required in basal forebrain guide-post cells that are positive for *Dlx5/6* and possibly *Islet1* and that are derived from *Nkx2.1-Cre*- and *Gsh2-Cre*-negative precursors.

To test whether *Celsr3* is required intrinsically for progression of corticofugal axons, we studied *Celsr3|Emx1* mice, in which *Celsr3* is inactivated early in the cortical anlage (9) (fig. S1). In those mice, subcerebral projections such as CST were defective. In crosses with Thy1–yellow fluorescent protein (YFP) transgenic mice (14), the CST was clearly defined in control mice but absent in *Celsr3|Emx1* mice in which the number of cortical layer 5 neurons was dramatically reduced (Fig. 4). After injections of Fluoro-Gold (Biotum, Incorporated, Haywood, CA) in the spinal cord, cells were labeled in the hindbrain, red nucleus, and layer 5 in normal mice but only in the hind-brain and red nucleus, and not in layer 5, in *Celsr3|Emx1* mice (fig. S7). Thus, *Celsr3* is required, presumably cell autonomously, in the neurons of origin of subcerebral axons, like in those of the AC.

In contrast to subcerebral projections, CTA and TCA developed normally in *Celsr3|Emx1* mice (Fig. 2). At E14.5, fibers from dorsal thalamus turned at the diencephalon-telencephalon border and progressed along the ganglionic eminences before passing the pallial subpallial boundary and growing toward the cortex, similar to fibers of control mice. Injections of DiI in the cortex and thalamus resulted in labeling of thalamic and cortical neurons, respectively (fig. S2). To assess the cortical distribution of TCA, we studied cortical barrels by using cytochrome oxidase and Nissl staining of parietal cortex. As shown in fig. S8, barrels failed to form in mice that had no TCA, such as *Celsr3|Foxg1* and *Celsr3|Dlx5/6* mice, and developed normally in

*Celsr3|Emx1* mice, indicating normal TCA mapping. Thus, inactivation of *Celsr3* in CTA did not prevent them from navigating to the thalamus, nor did it perturb the growth and cortical mapping of TCA.

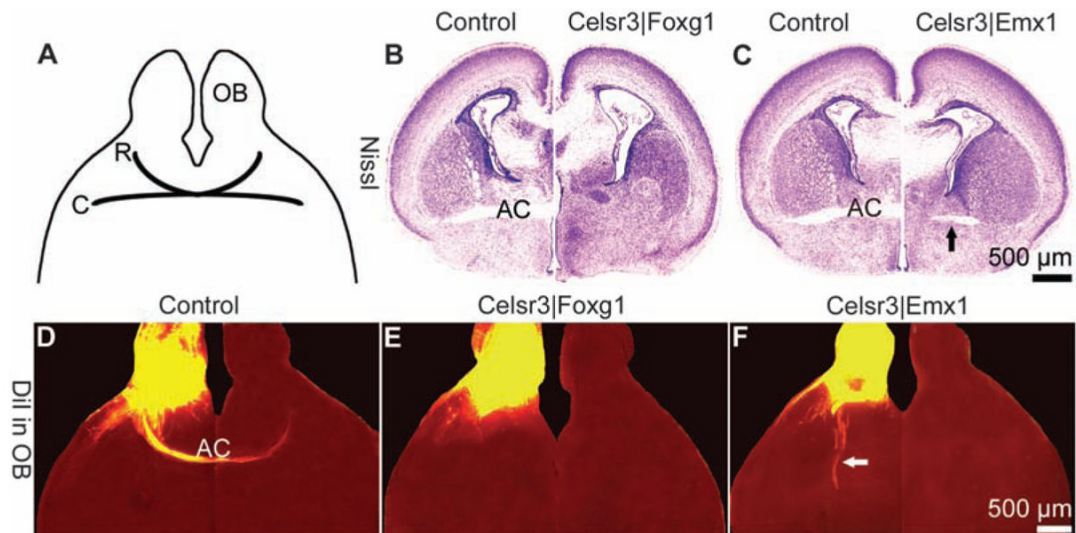
Why would *Celsr3* be required in AC and subcerebral axons but not in CTA? First, a few subplate cells could escape *Celsr3* inactivation in *Celsr3|Emx1* mice and provide pioneering axons to thalamus (15,16). However, *Celsr3* is inactivated early in the cortex in those mice (fig. S1), making this rather unlikely. Second, other *Celsr* proteins may act redundantly with *Celsr3* in CTA neurons and mediate their interactions with *Celsr3*-positive guidepost cells. Alternatively, normal *Celsr3* expression in dorsal thalamus and basal forebrain in *Celsr3|Emx1* mice allows progression of TCA, which could encounter *Celsr3*-deficient CTA and help them travel to the thalamus, as predicted by the “handshake hypothesis” (17). *Celsr3|Rora* mice were produced to inactivate *Celsr3* in dorsal thalamic nuclei and thereby assess their role in TCA growth. The IC developed normally in those mice, indicating a situation reciprocal to that in *Celsr3|Emx1* mice. However, studies of *ROSA26R|Rora* mice showed that *Cre* expression was restricted to a subset of dorsal thalamic cells. Thus being unable to test the function of *Celsr3* in thalamic neurons in vivo, we addressed the question using explant cultures. We co-cultured explants from normal or *Celsr3*-mutant thalamus that expressed the GFP transgene ubiquitously (18) with explants of normal ventral diencephalons at E13.5. As shown in fig. S9, normal dorsal thalamic axons were repelled by explants from ventral diencephalon (32/57 cases) (19). However, almost no repulsive activity was detected for *Celsr3*-defective thalamic axons (4/34 cases;  $P < 0.01$ ,  $\chi^2$ ), suggesting that *Celsr3* expression in TCA was required for their response to ventral diencephalic cues. Thus, *Celsr3* expression is probably necessary both in TCA and in cells along their pathway (*Celsr3|Dlx5/6* mice).

Our results have implications for the mechanisms of brain wiring and the function of *Celsr3*. Demonstrated in invertebrates (20), a role of guidepost cells in axonal navigation in mammals has been repeatedly proposed (21–24). Our results demonstrate that they indeed play a crucial function that requires *Celsr3* expression (the role of other molecules implicated in thalamocortical and CST fiber navigation is discussed briefly in SOM). Altogether, our data indicate that *Celsr3* is required both in axons and guidepost cells, consistent with its mediating homophilic interactions. Normal CTA development in *Celsr3|Emx1* mice indicates that *Celsr3*-independent cues are also involved in their growth. Candidate mechanisms are CTA-TCA fiber interactions like the handshake (17,21), fiber-fiber interactions between CTA and pioneer subplate axons (15,16), and adhesion of *Celsr3* in guidepost cells with other *Celsr* molecules present in growth cones. Furthermore, *Celsr3|Emx1* mice provide a unique model to study how subcerebral projections segregate from CTA when they reach the medial aspect of the IC en route to the cerebral peduncles, an important developmental event that hitherto received little attention.

In *Drosophila* wing cells, symmetrically expressed Fmi/stan proteins are thought to undergo homophilic interactions, bringing distal and proximal cell membranes in contact and thereby fostering signaling by asymmetrically located Frizzled on the distal and Van Gogh on the proximal side (25). Axonal anomalies in *Celsr3* and *Fzd3* mutant mice are similar (13), suggesting that corresponding proteins also act together in mice (25). Moreover, *Fzd3* and *Vangl2* are co-expressed with *Celsr3* in postmigratory neurons (26). Like in the fly, *Celsr3* expressed on the membranes of growth cones and guidepost cells may promote adhesion and allow *Fzd3* and *Vangl2* to interact and signal. This model predicts that the expression and action of *Fzd3* and *Vangl2* should be asymmetric, one in axons and the other in guidepost cells. Conditional *Fzd3* and *Vangl2* alleles should allow testing that model further.

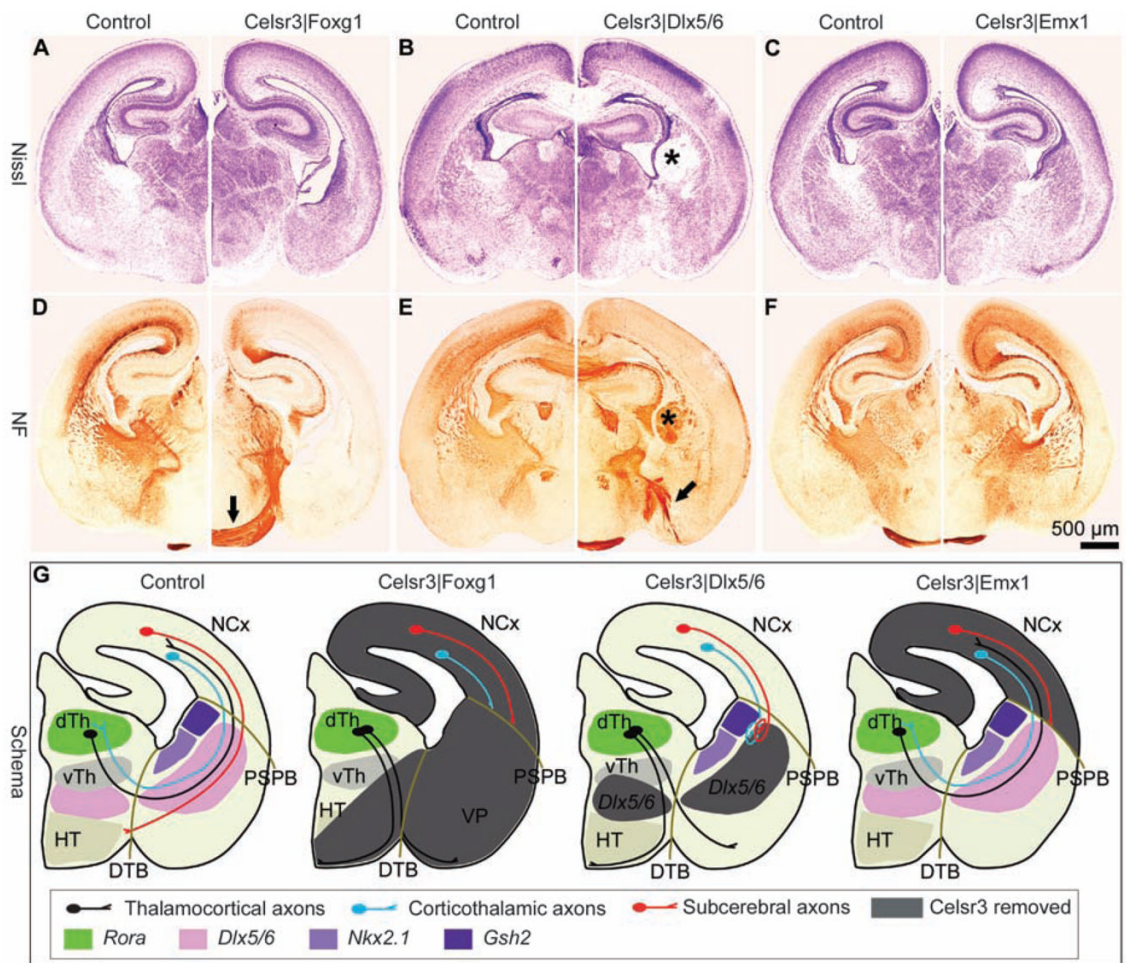
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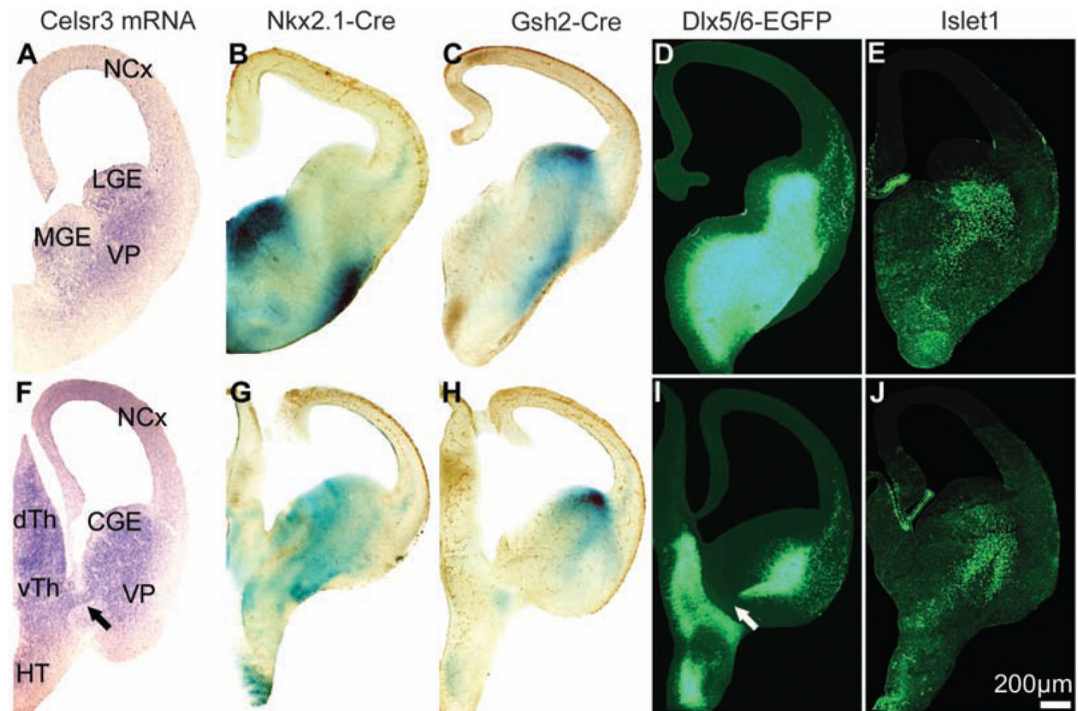


**Fig. 1.**

*Celsr3* expression is required intrinsically in neurons of origin of the AC. (A) Schematic representation of the AC, composed of a rostral component (R) that contains commissural axons connecting olfactory nuclei and a caudal component (C) made of axons that connect temporal lobes. OB indicates olfactory bulb. (B and C) Montages of coronal sections at the level of the AC in newborn animals. The control phenotype is shown on the left side, and the right side shows *Celsr3|Foxg1* (B) and *Celsr3|Emx1* (C) mice. Note the rudiment of AC in *Celsr3|Emx1* mice (arrow in C). (D to F) Horizontal sections at birth day (P0) after DiI injection in control (D), *Celsr3|Foxg1* (E), and *Celsr3|Emx1* mice (F). Arrows in (C) and (F) point to rudiments of AC that never cross the midline.



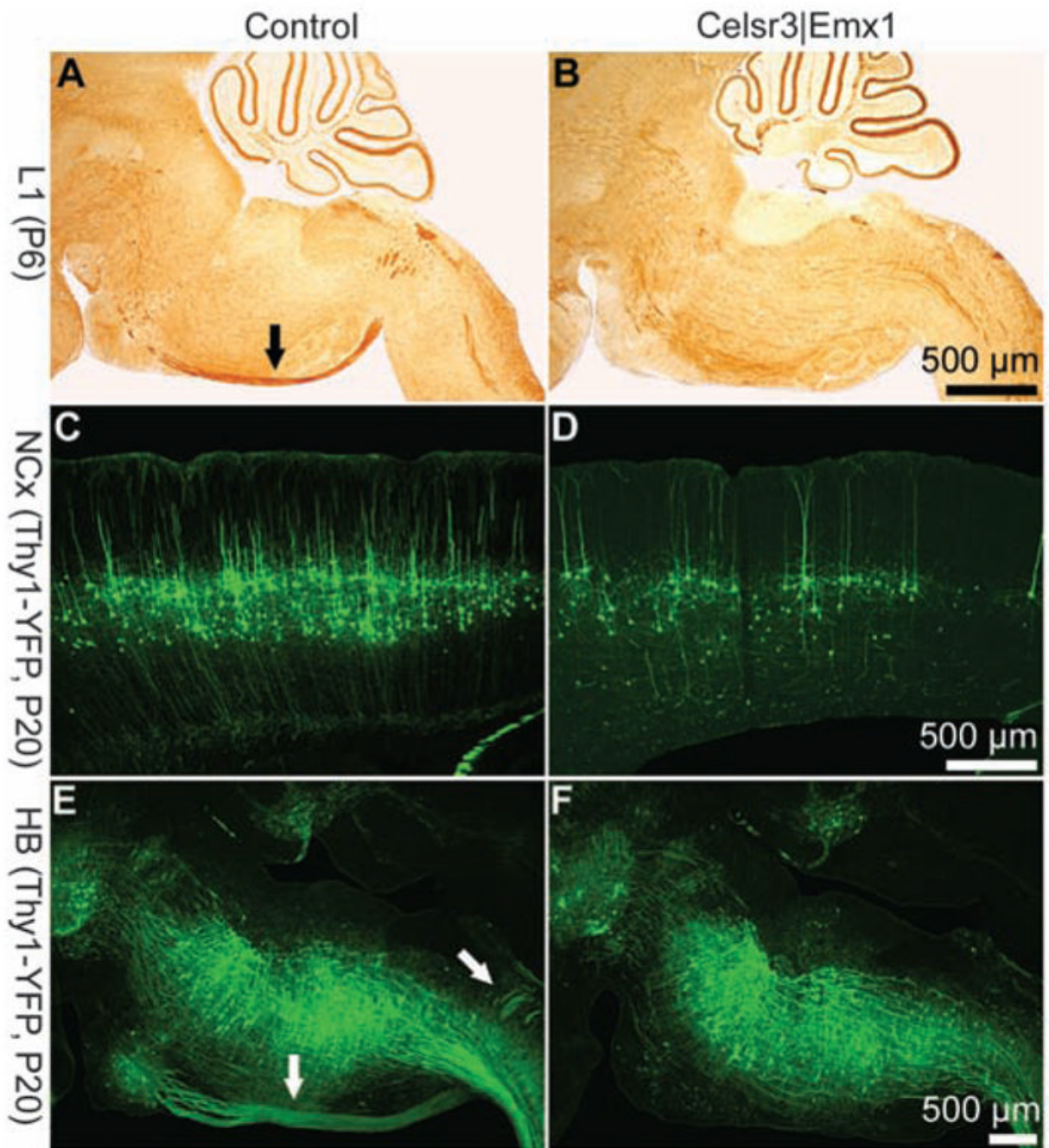
**Fig. 2.** Region-specific *Celsr3* inactivation affects development of the IC in different manners. (A to F) Montages of P0 sections stained with Cresyl violet [(A) to (C)] or neurofilament antibody (NF) [(D) to (F)]. The IC is fully defective in *Celsr3|Foxg1* mice in which some thalamic axons cross to the contralateral diencephalon [arrow in (D)]. In *Celsr3|Dlx5/6* mice, the IC does not form, but cortical axons stall and form a mass at the level of the striatum [asterisks in (B) and (E)], whereas thalamic fibers are mis-routed to the amygdala [arrow in (E)]. In *Celsr3|Emx1* mice, the IC is present and thalamocortical connections are similar to that in normal mice [(C) and (F)]. (G) Schematic summary of the IC phenotypes in the various mice used, in relation to areas of *Celsr3* inactivation (gray) and expression of markers (*Dlx5/6*, *Gsh2*, *Nkx2.1*, and *Rora*). dTh and vTh, dorsal and ventral thalamus; HT, hypothalamus; VP, ventral pallidum; NCx, neocortex; PSPB, pallial subpallial boundary; and DTB, diencephalon telencephalon border.



**Fig. 3.**

The IC corridor expresses *Celsr3*, *Dlx5/6*, and *Islet1* and is flanked with expression of *Nkx2.1* and *Gsh2*. Coronal sections at rostral (A to E) and caudal levels (F to J) of the forebrain at E12.5, showing expression of *Celsr3* [(A) and (F), in situ hybridization], activation of the LacZ reporter in *ROSA26R/Nkx2.1* mice [(B) and (G)] and *ROSA26R/Gsh2* mice [(C) and (H)], expression of *Dlx5/6* [(D) and (I), EGFP in the transgene], and expression of *Islet1* [(E) and (J), immunohistochemistry]. A central corridor is characterized by high levels of *Celsr3*, *Dlx5/6*, and *Islet1*, and low levels of LacZ. Arrows in (F) and (I) indicate a *Celsr3*-positive, *Dlx5/6*-negative zone that could explain partial growth of TCA in *Celsr3/Dlx5/6* mice. CGE, LGE, and MGE, caudal, lateral, and medial ganglionic eminences.





**Fig. 4.**

The corticospinal tract is defective in *Celsr3|Emx1* mice. Comparison of control [(A), (C), and (E)] and *Celsr3|Emx1* [(B), (D), and (F)] mice. In sagittal sections at P6 stained with an antibody against the L1 molecule (A) and (B), corticospinal axons are labeled in control [arrow in (A)] but not in the mutant ventral hindbrain. Crosses were carried out with Thy1-YFP mice, a transgene that labels neurons in cortical layer 5 and corticospinal axons (C) to (F). At P20, layer 5 is well populated in control mice (C), and the corticospinal tract is clearly defined [arrows in (E)], whereas cortical layer 5 is very diminutive (D) and no corticospinal axons are detected in the hindbrain (F) of *Celsr3|Emx1* mice.