



The Lipid A 1-Phosphatase, LpxE, Functionally Connects Multiple Layers of Bacterial Envelope Biogenesis

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ABSTRACT Although distinct lipid phosphatases are thought to be required for processing lipid A (component of the outer leaflet of the outer membrane), glycerophospholipid (component of the inner membrane and the inner leaflet of the outer membrane), and undecaprenyl pyrophosphate (C₅₅-PP; precursors of peptidoglycan and O antigens of lipopolysaccharide) in Gram-negative bacteria, we report that the lipid A 1-phosphatases, LpxEs, functionally connect multiple layers of cell envelope biogenesis in Gram-negative bacteria. We found that *Aquifex aeolicus* LpxE structurally resembles YodM in *Bacillus subtilis*, a phosphatase for phosphatidylglycerol phosphate (PGP) with a weak *in vitro* activity on C₅₅-PP, and rescues *Escherichia coli* deficient in PGP and C₅₅-PP phosphatase activities; deletion of *lpxE* in *Francisella novicida* reduces the MIC value of bacitracin, indicating a significant contribution of LpxE to the native bacterial C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity. Suppression of plasmid-borne *lpxE* in *F. novicida* deficient in chromosomally encoded C₅₅-PP phosphatase activities results in cell enlargement, loss of O-antigen repeats of lipopolysaccharide, and ultimately cell death. These discoveries implicate LpxE as the first example of a multifunctional regulatory enzyme that orchestrates lipid A modification, O-antigen production, and peptidoglycan biogenesis to remodel multiple layers of the Gram-negative bacterial envelope.

IMPORTANCE Dephosphorylation of the lipid A 1-phosphate by LpxE in Gram-negative bacteria plays important roles in antibiotic resistance, bacterial virulence, and modulation of the host immune system. Our results demonstrate that in addition to removing the 1-phosphate from lipid A, LpxEs also dephosphorylate undecaprenyl pyrophosphate, an important metabolite for the synthesis of the essential envelope components, peptidoglycan and O-antigen. Therefore, LpxEs participate in multiple layers of biogenesis of the Gram-negative bacterial envelope and increase antibiotic resistance. This discovery marks an important step toward understanding the regulation and biogenesis of the Gram-negative bacterial envelope.

KEYWORDS bacterial cell envelope biogenesis, lipid A 1-phosphate phosphatase, phosphatidylglycerol phosphate phosphatase, type 2 phosphatidic acid phosphatase (PAP2) superfamily, undecaprenyl pyrophosphate phosphatase

The Gram-negative bacterial cell envelope consists of three essential molecular architectures—the inner membrane, the peptidoglycan layer, and the outer membrane—that together protect bacteria against mechanical stress, maintain cell shape, and shield these microorganisms from the damage of detergents and antibiotics. These architectures are formed by distinct molecules, with phospholipids constituting the inner membrane and inner leaflet of the outer membrane, peptide-conjugated carbohydrates constituting the peptidoglycan layer, and lipopolysaccharides (LPS) anchoring

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at the outer leaflet of the outer membrane through the hydrophobic lipid A moiety. As peptidoglycan, phospholipids, and LPS are synthesized through distinct pathways, how Gram-negative bacteria orchestrate the biogenesis and remodeling across three layers of the cell envelope for optimal bacterial growth and virulence remains incompletely understood.

As the major lipid species coating the outer surface of Gram-negative bacteria, lipid A is the predominant signaling molecule that is detected by the mammalian Toll-like receptor 4 (TLR4)/myeloid differentiation factor 2 (MD-2) innate immune receptor (1) and caspase-4/-5/-11 (2) to trigger the host innate immune response to bacterial infection. With few exceptions, Gram-negative bacteria constitutively synthesize the 1,4'-bisphosphorylated tetra-acyl-lipid A intermediate, 3-deoxy-D-manno-oct-2-ulosonic acid (Kdo)-linked lipid IV_A (Kdo₂-lipid IV_A), via the action of seven conserved enzymes in the Raetz pathway (3) (see Fig. S1A in the supplemental material), which are essential to nearly all Gram-negative bacteria and are attractive targets for novel antibiotics (4–6). Gram-negative bacteria additionally harbor modification enzymes that further process the Kdo₂-lipid IV_A intermediate to generate unique lipid A molecules in each bacterial species to adapt to environmental changes and evade the host immune response (7). For example, the lipid A 1-phosphate is a key determinant for lipid A recognition by the mammalian TLR4/MD-2 innate immune receptor (8). Removal of the lipid A 1-phosphate by the membrane-embedded phosphatase LpxE strongly protects bacteria against host cationic peptides and the last-resort antibiotic colistin (9), significantly dampens the host innate immune response, and dramatically increases colonization and survival of *Helicobacter pylori* in the gastric mucosa (10).

In order to gain molecular insights into the structure and function of the lipid A 1-phosphatase LpxE, we identified the previously uncharacterized gene *aq_1706* from *Aquifex aeolicus* as the gene for the thermophilic LpxE enzyme (LpxE_{AA}). Our structural analysis of LpxE_{AA} shows distinct features between LpxE_{AA} and *Escherichia coli* PgpB (PgpB_{EC}) enzymes but reveals a surprising structural similarity to YodM, a phosphatase of phosphatidylglycerol phosphate (PGP) in the Gram-positive bacterium *Bacillus subtilis* with a weak *in vitro* activity on undecaprenyl pyrophosphate (C₅₅-PP). Consistent with our structural analysis, we found that LpxE_{AA} possesses substantial *in vitro* activities toward Kdo₂-lipid A/lipid IV_A, C₅₅-PP, and PGP and complements *E. coli* strains deficient in C₅₅-PP phosphatase and PGP phosphatase activities. In addition to the LpxE enzyme from *A. aeolicus*, distant LpxE orthologs from *Francisella*, *Helicobacter*, and *Rhizobium* also complement *E. coli* strains deficient in the C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity, supporting the notion that the multifunctional lipid phosphatase activity is a general feature of LpxE enzymes. Significantly, deletion of the native *lpxE* gene sensitizes *Francisella novicida* to bacitracin, an antibiotic that sequesters C₅₅-PP to disrupt peptidoglycan synthesis; furthermore, suppression of plasmid-encoded *lpxE* in the *F. novicida* strain deficient in the endogenous C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity results in noticeable changes in cell morphology, profound reduction of O-antigen repeats in LPS, and loss of cell viability. Taken together, these observations reveal a previously unappreciated contribution of LpxE to peptidoglycan biogenesis and LPS O-antigen modification beyond its well-recognized role as the lipid A 1-phosphatase to orchestrate the remodeling of multiple layers of the Gram-negative bacterial envelope to respond to environmental changes, evade host immune surveillance, and promote bacterial viability and virulence.

RESULTS

A distant ortholog of LpxE_{FN} in *A. aeolicus*. LpxE is a member of the lipid phosphatase/phosphotransferase (LPT) family, a well-distributed family of lipid-processing enzymes also known as the integral transmembrane branch of the type II phosphatidic acid phosphatase (PAP2) superfamily (11, 12). This family is characterized by a conserved tripartite active site motif of KX₆RP---PSGH---SRX₅HX₃D and activity independent of Mg²⁺ or other cations (13). The LPT family includes enzymes responsible for processing several types of lipids in Gram-negative bacteria, including the

membrane-embedded PgpB, which dephosphorylates PGP and C₅₅-PP (14) (Fig. S2). Even though PgpB and LpxE are both members of the LPT family, they have been reported to have distinct substrate specificities: PgpB is unable to utilize lipid A as a substrate (15), whereas purified LpxE from *Rhizobium leguminosarum* (LpxE_{RL}) utilizes PGP ~1,000 times less efficiently than lipid A species as a substrate *in vitro* (16).

In order to gain a molecular understanding of the LpxE structure and function, we searched for a thermophilic LpxE enzyme from *Aquificae* to facilitate structural analysis. The lipid A of *Aquifex pyrophilus* LPS contains D-galacturonic acid in place of phosphates at the 1- and 4'-positions (17) (Fig. S1B). As the 1,4'-bisphosphorylated lipid IV_A is a common lipid A intermediate before further modification (18, 19) and as *Aquificae* has the conserved biosynthetic enzymes to make 1,4'-bisphosphorylated lipid IV_A, incorporation of the D-galacturonic acid moiety requires the removal of 1-phosphate from lipid A, indicating the presence of the lipid A 1-phosphatase activity in *Aquificae*. Such a rationale led us to search for the gene responsible for the lipid A 1-phosphatase activity in *A. aeolicus* VF5, as no lipid A 1-phosphatase has been reported in any *Aquifex* species.

A Position-Specific Iterated Basic Local Alignment Search Tool (PSI-BLAST) (20) search revealed a distant ortholog of *F. novicida* LpxE (LpxE_{FN}) (15), Aq_1706 (E value, 0.81; sequence identity, 13.84%), in the genome of *A. aeolicus* VF5. Aq_1706 shares little sequence identity with other LpxE enzymes (sequence identities of Aq_1706 with LpxE of *Helicobacter* and *Rhizobium* are 16.58% and 14.57%, respectively), except for the well-conserved tripartite active-site motif of KX₆RP---PSGH---SRX₅HX₃D (Fig. S3). In order to determine if *aq_1706* encodes the lipid A 1-phosphatase activity *in vivo*, we overexpressed Aq_1706 in the heptose transferase-deficient *E. coli* strain WBB06, which produces Kdo₂-lipid A instead of full-length LPS, to facilitate mass spectrometry analysis of lipid A modifications (21). Since *E. coli* does not encode LpxE activity, mass spectrometry analysis of the extracted lipids showed normal lipid A containing 1-phosphate with an *m/z* of 1,117.633 for the [M-2H]²⁻ ion species (calculated *m/z*, 1,117.661 for the exact mass of 2,237.336 of Kdo₂-lipid A) from *E. coli* cells expressing a control vector; in contrast, overexpression of Aq_1706 in *E. coli* led to the disappearance of the intact lipid A species and significant accumulation of lipid A molecules lacking the 1-phosphate group, with an *m/z* of 1,077.647 for the [M-2H]²⁻ ion species (calculated *m/z*, 1,077.678 for the exact mass of 2,157.370 of 1-dephospho Kdo₂-lipid A), consistent with the anticipated lipid A 1-phosphatase activity (Fig. 1A). In order to verify that the loss of phosphate occurred at the 1-position, but not at the 4'-position, we further tested the ability of LpxE to dephosphorylate 4'-³²P-labeled Kdo₂-lipid IV_A, which was previously shown to be an efficient substrate for LpxE enzymes with specific activity comparable to that for the substrate Kdo₂-lipid A (16). We found that treatment of Kdo₂-[4'-³²P] lipid IV_A with membrane extracts from *E. coli* overexpressing Aq_1706, but not those carrying a control vector, resulted in time-dependent reduction of the Kdo₂-lipid IV_A band and accumulation of an upper-shifted band on the thin-layer chromatography (TLC) plate (Fig. 1B), reflecting the removal of 1-phosphate but retention of the ³²P-labeled 4'-phosphate group. Taken together, these observations verify *aq_1706* in *A. aeolicus* as the gene that encodes the thermophilic lipid A 1-phosphatase LpxE (LpxE_{AA}).

Structural analysis of LpxE_{AA} reveals a striking similarity to YodM in *B. subtilis*. After verifying the lipid A 1-phosphatase activity of LpxE_{AA}, we cloned and purified LpxE_{AA}. Consistent with the TMHMM analysis (<http://www.cbs.dtu.dk/services/TMHMM/>), high-yield expression of LpxE_{AA} was achieved in a maltose-binding protein (MBP) fusion construct containing an N-terminal PelB secretion signal (22), suggesting that the N terminus of LpxE_{AA} is located at the periplasmic side of the inner membrane. The crystal structure of LpxE_{AA} containing an I63M mutation was determined at 2.38 Å (Fig. 2A; statistics shown in Table S1). The selenomethionine substitution of the nonconserved I63 residue (I63M) was designed to enhance the selenium single anomalous dispersion (Se-SAD) signal for *de novo* phasing. The overall structure of LpxE_{AA} contains seven α-helices, including an N-terminal amphiphilic helix lying at

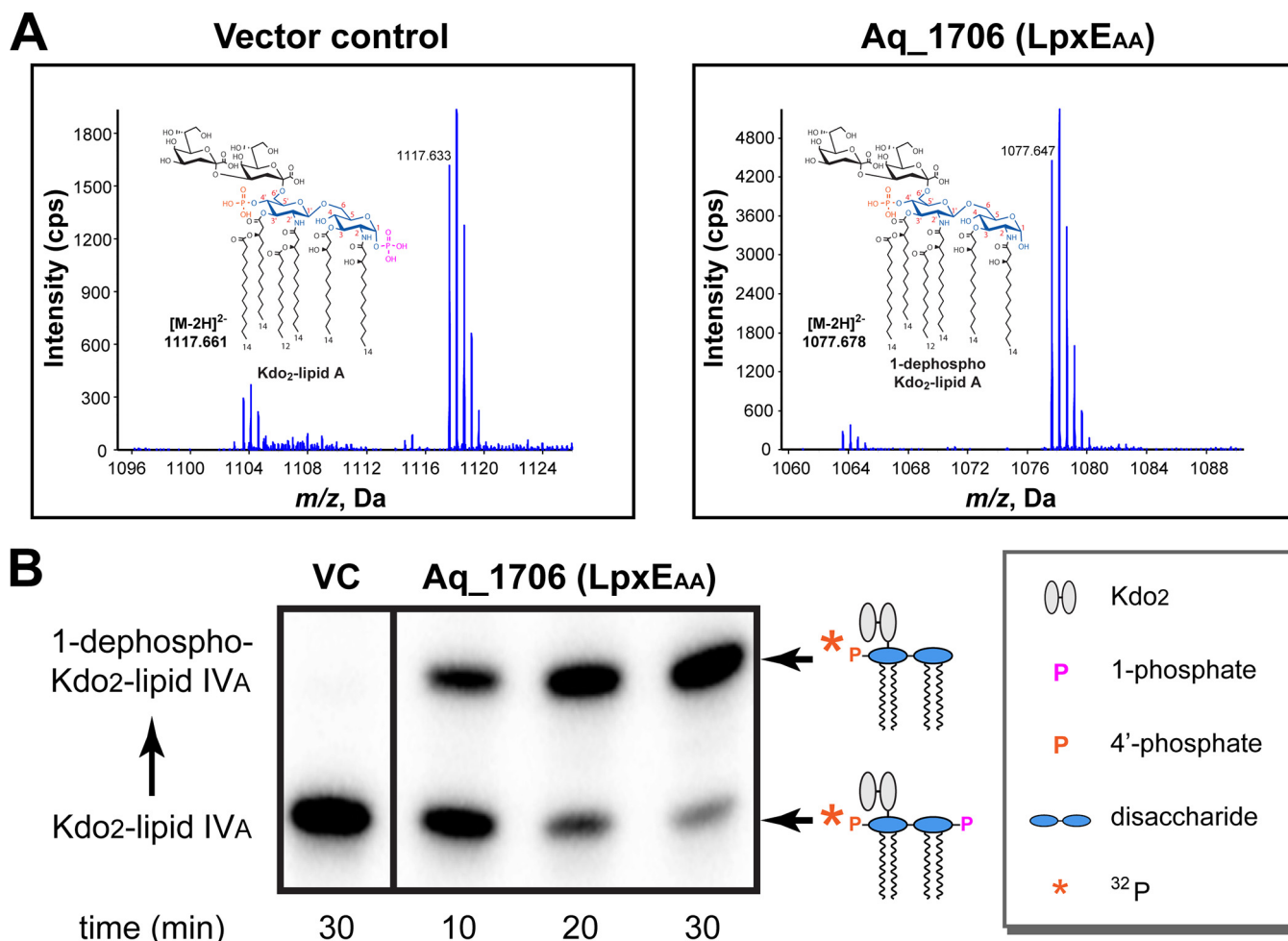


FIG 1 Characterization of Aq_1706 from *A. aeolicus* as the lipid A 1-phosphatase LpxE_{AA}. (A) Mass spectrometry analysis of lipid A species in the heptose-deficient *E. coli* strain WBB06 (left) and the WBB06 strain overexpressing LpxE_{AA} (right). (B) ³²P-autoradiographic TLC-based Kdo₂-lipid IV_A 1-dephosphorylation assay of the membrane extract of the C41(DE3) strain overexpressing LpxE_{AA}.

the periplasmic surface of the inner membrane and five tightly packed transmembrane helices ($\alpha 3$ to $\alpha 7$). Apart from $\alpha 2$, which originates from the periplasmic surface and penetrates halfway across the inner membrane at an $\sim 45^\circ$ angle and immediately connects to transmembrane helix $\alpha 3$, the remaining helices are oriented largely in parallel or antiparallel with each other and perpendicularly to the membrane plane. Looking from the periplasmic surface, helix 5 ($\alpha 5$) is located at the center, which is surrounded by $\alpha 2$, $\alpha 3$, $\alpha 4$, $\alpha 7$, and $\alpha 6$ in a counterclockwise fashion (Fig. 2B).

The active site of LpxE is located at the periplasmic surface of the inner membrane and is defined by conserved motifs specific to the PAP2 enzymes ($K^{73}X_6R^{80}P---R^{137}X_5H^{143}X_3D^{147}$) located at the C-terminal end of $\alpha 4$, the $\alpha 4$ - $\alpha 5$ loop, $\alpha 6$, the $\alpha 6$ - $\alpha 7$ loop, and the N terminus of $\alpha 7$ (Fig. 2C). Fortuitously, a sulfate molecule is found in the active site, which is a structural analog of the 1-phosphate group of lipid A. The sulfate group is extensively recognized by K73 and R80 of the $K^{73}X_6R^{80}P$ motif and R137 of the $R^{137}X_5H^{143}X_3D^{147}$ motif. The catalytically important H143 is located 3.3 Å away from the sulfur atom of the sulfate group, ready to carry out inline attack to remove the phosphate group of the lipid substrate. D147, the last residue of the $R^{137}X_5H^{143}X_3D^{147}$ motif, forms a hydrogen bond with H143. Although the corresponding aspartate residue is found in most LpxE enzymes (Fig. S3), it is absent in the LpxE ortholog from *H. pylori* (LpxE_{Hp}), suggesting that it is not absolutely required for catalysis. The first three residues of the PSGH motif are conserved in LpxE_{AA}, with the central serine

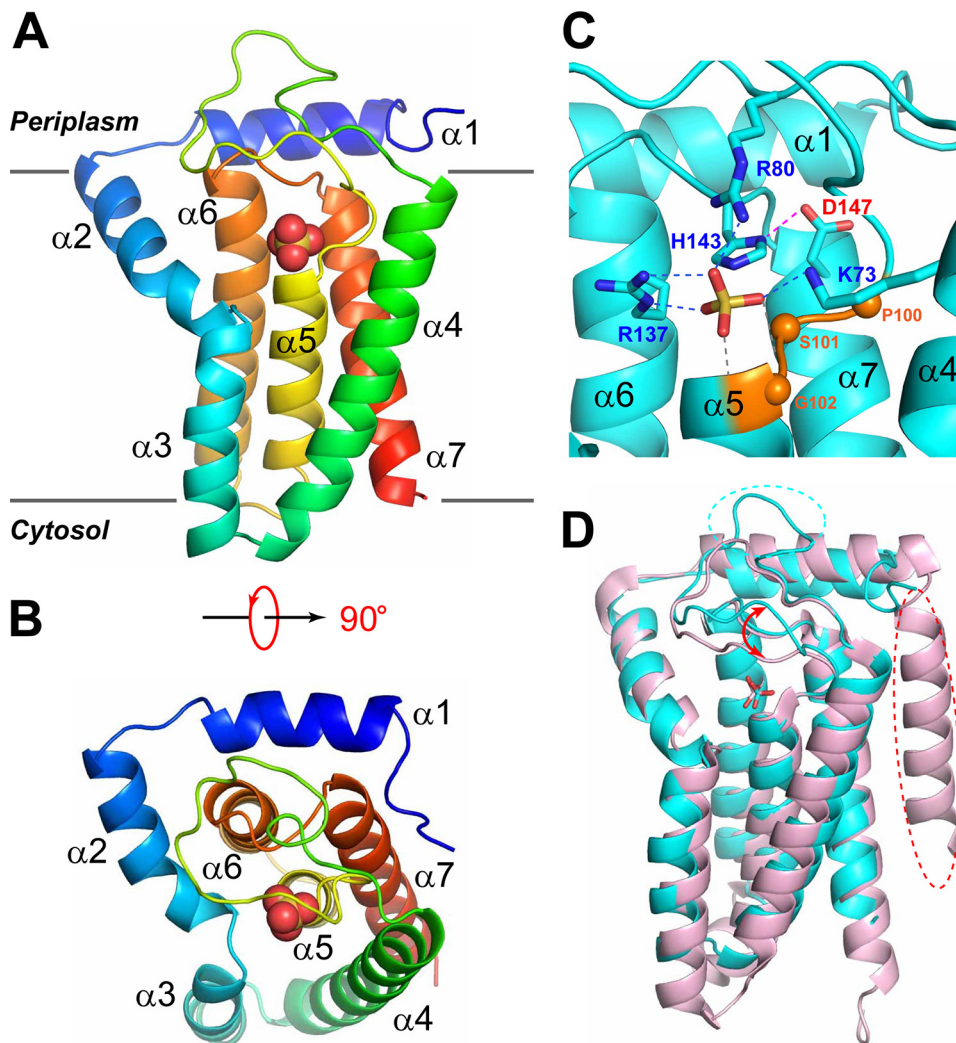


FIG 2 Crystal structure of LpxE_{AA}. (A) Ribbon representation of LpxE_{AA}, with blue to red colors corresponding to the N to C termini. The sulfate molecule is shown in the space-filling model. Individual helices and membrane locations are labeled. (B) Top view of LpxE_{AA}. (C) The active site of LpxE_{AA}. The sulfate molecule is shown in the stick model. Side chains of H143 and D147 from the RX₅HX₃D motif and conserved residues coordinating the sulfate molecule, including K73 and R80 from the KX₆RP motif and R137 of the RX₅HX₃D motif, are shown in the stick model. Hydrogen bonds are shown by dashed lines. The sulfate group is additionally stabilized by the interaction with the electrical dipole of helix $\alpha 5$ (indicated by gray hydrogen bonds). The conserved PSG motif is colored in coral, with C α atoms shown in spheres. (D) Superimposition of LpxE_{AA} (cyan) with YodM_{BS} (PDB code 5JKI; pink), revealing striking structural similarities. The major differences between the two structures are highlighted, with dashed circles indicating missing structural features (helix or loop) and arrows indicating conformational discrepancy.

residue (S101) serving as a helix cap to stabilize helix $\alpha 5$, but the histidine residue is replaced with an aspartate residue in LpxE_{AA} (Fig. 2C).

The LpxE_{AA} structure shows noticeable conformational discrepancy with the previously reported structures of PgpB_{EC} (PDB codes 4PX7 and 5JWY) (23, 24), another PAP2 family enzyme, with overall backbone root mean square deviations (RMSDs) of ~ 4.5 Å (Fig. S4); surprisingly, LpxE_{AA} is structurally similar to the recently reported YodM in *B. subtilis* (PDB code 5JKI) (25), a PGP phosphatase with a weak *in vitro* activity on C₅₅-PP, with an overall backbone RMSD of 1.2 Å (Fig. 2D). The major differences of these two enzymes are the absence of an N-terminal transmembrane helix in LpxE_{AA} in comparison with YodM, a longer $\alpha 4$ - $\alpha 5$ loop in LpxE_{AA}, and a significant conformational variation of the $\alpha 4$ - $\alpha 5$ loop surrounding the active site.

LpxE_{AA} is a trifunctional lipid phosphatase *in vitro* and functionally complements *E. coli* mutants deficient in C₅₅-PP or PGP phosphatase activities. Surprised

TABLE 1 Specific activities of enzymes in this study

Enzyme	Specific activity ($\mu\text{mol}/\text{mg}/\text{min}$)		
	Kdo ₂ -lipid A	C ₅₅ -PP	PGP
LpxE _{AA}	2.04 \pm 0.46	3.58 \pm 0.47	0.75 \pm 0.11
LpxE _{FN}	3.25 \pm 0.21	2.99 \pm 0.45	0.038 \pm 0.009
UppP _{FN}	0.010 \pm 0.005	22.71 \pm 2.62	0.031 \pm 0.007

by the structural similarity between LpxE_{AA} and YodM_{BS}, we asked whether LpxE_{AA} could function as a C₅₅-PP and PGP phosphatase. To address this question, we compared the specific activities of purified LpxE_{AA} toward Kdo₂-lipid A, PGP, and C₅₅-PP using the malachite green assay to detect the release of inorganic phosphate. As expected, LpxE_{AA} efficiently catalyzed the hydrolysis of 1-phosphate from Kdo₂-lipid A, with a specific activity of 2.04 \pm 0.46 $\mu\text{mol}/\text{mg}/\text{min}$. Moreover, LpxE_{AA} catalyzed C₅₅-PP more efficiently than it catalyzed Kdo₂-lipid A, with a specific activity of 3.58 \pm 0.47 $\mu\text{mol}/\text{mg}/\text{min}$ —a value that is \sim 1.8-fold higher than that toward Kdo₂-lipid A. Finally, LpxE_{AA} also displayed significant activity toward PGP, with a specific activity of 0.75 \pm 0.11 $\mu\text{mol}/\text{mg}/\text{min}$, \sim 40% of its activity toward Kdo₂-lipid A (Table 1). Taken together, our biochemical assays validate LpxE_{AA} as a trifunctional LPT enzyme that efficiently dephosphorylates chemically diverse Kdo₂-lipid A (glycolipids), PGP (phosphoglycerol lipid), and C₅₅-PP (isoprenyl lipid) *in vitro*.

In order to obtain further evidence of the trifunctional role of LpxE_{AA} in cells, we examined whether LpxE_{AA} could functionally rescue lethal *E. coli* mutants lacking C₅₅-PP phosphatase or PGP phosphatase activities. *E. coli* contains four C₅₅-PP phosphatases, BacA, PgpB, YbjG, and LpxT. A deletion mutant, $\Delta ybjG \Delta bacA \Delta pgpB::kan$, in *E. coli* is lethal unless rescued by a plasmid expressing BacA, PgpB, or YbjG (26). To examine if LpxE_{AA} could function as a C₅₅-PP phosphatase in cells, we set up complementation of the lethal $\Delta ybjG \Delta pgpB \Delta bacA::kan$ *E. coli* mutant carrying *lpxE_{AA}* on a low-copy-number, temperature-sensitive pMAK705 vector (pMAK-*lpxE_{AA}*). The *E. coli* *bacA* gene, encoding the C₅₅-PP phosphatase, was used as the positive control (pMAK-*bacA_{EC}*). We found that overexpression of LpxE_{AA} and BacA_{EC} from pMAK705-derived plasmids complemented the lethal phenotype of the $\Delta ybjG \Delta pgpB \Delta bacA::kan$ triple knockout in *E. coli* on an LB agar plate at 30°C; such a complementation effect was lost when cells were grown at 42°C, consistent with the loss of the temperature-sensitive pMAK705 plasmid encoding LpxE_{AA} or BacA_{EC} and confirming that LpxE_{AA} functionally complements the loss of C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity in *E. coli* (Fig. 3A).

We similarly tested whether LpxE_{AA} functionally complements the loss of PGP phosphatase activity in *E. coli*. *E. coli* has three PGP phosphatases, PgpA, PgpB, and PgpC (27). A $\Delta pgpA \Delta pgpB \Delta pgpC::kan$ triple-knockout mutant is lethal unless it is rescued by a plasmid harboring an active PGP phosphatase (27). Overexpression of LpxE_{AA} or the positive control PgpA_{EC} from the temperature-sensitive pMAK705 plasmid supported the growth of the $\Delta pgpA \Delta pgpB \Delta pgpC::kan$ triple-knockout mutant strains at 30°C but not at 42°C. In contrast, the control strain (W3110/pMAK705) grew well at both temperatures (Fig. 3B). These observations confirm that LpxE_{AA} is a functional PGP phosphatase in *E. coli*.

While the pMAK705 vector-encoded LpxE_{AA} complemented *E. coli* triple knockouts lacking C₅₅-PP phosphatase or PGP phosphatase activities, pMAK705 has a higher copy number (pSC101 origin, \sim 5 copies/cell) than that of the chromosome in *E. coli* (single copy/cell). In order to mitigate the concern that the observed genetic complementation was caused by multiple copies of the *lpxE_{AA}* gene, we replaced the *pgpB* gene in the chromosome of *E. coli* (BW25113) $\Delta ybjG \Delta bacA$ with a gene cassette (*P_L-lpxE_{AA}-FRT-kan-FRT*) containing *lpxE_{AA}* and a kanamycin resistance gene under the control of the *P_L* promoter (28). The resulting *E. coli* strain (*E. coli* BW25113 $\Delta ybjG \Delta bacA \Delta pgpB::P_L-lpxE_{AA}-FRT-kan-FRT) grew on an LB agar plate, and the proper knockouts of *bacA*, *ybjG*, and *pgpB* were verified by PCR (Fig. 3C), confirming that the chromosomal copy of *lpxE_{AA}* complemented the loss of C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity. Using a similar approach,$

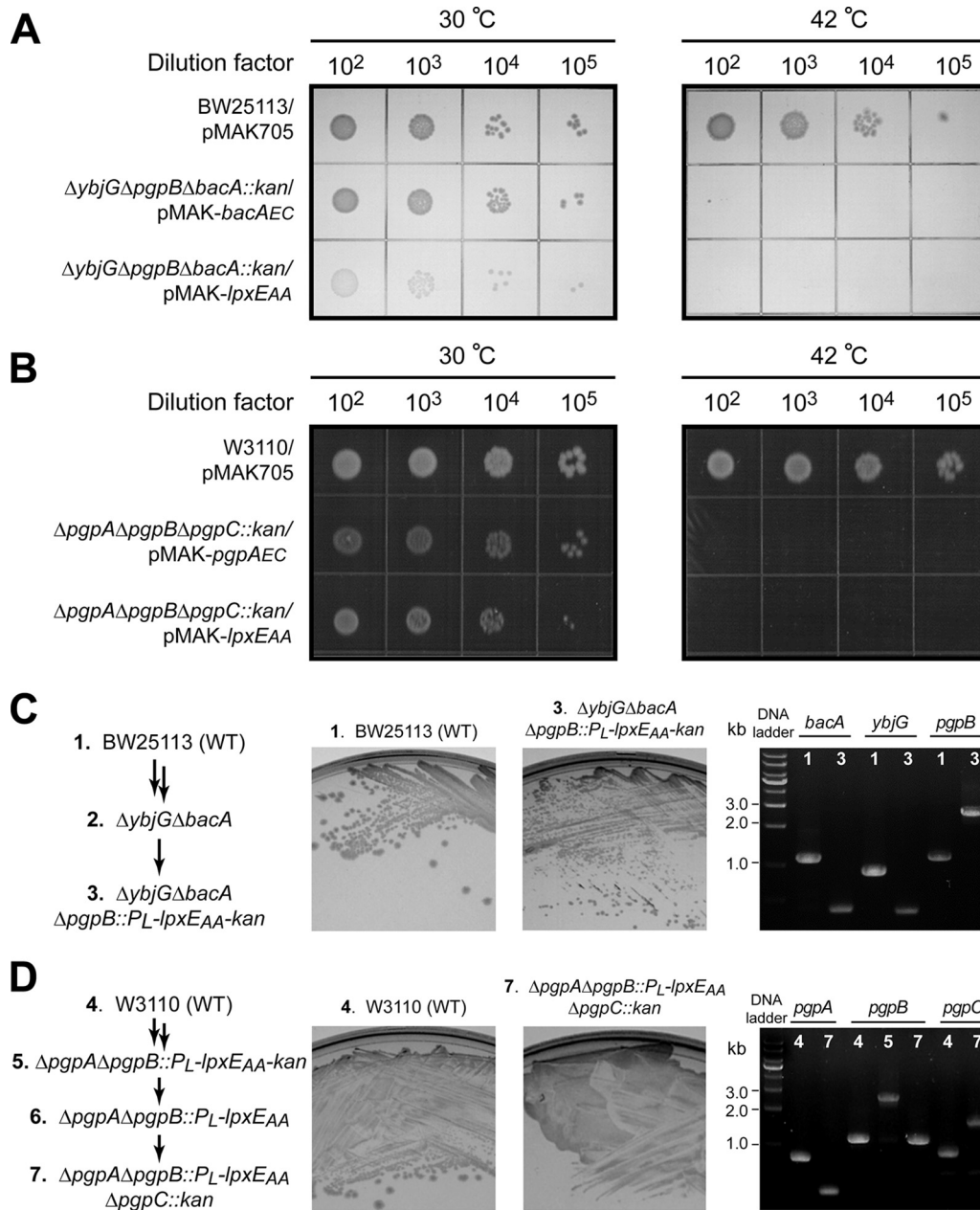


FIG 3 LpxE_{AA} complements *E. coli* strains deficient in C₅₅-PP phosphatase or PGP phosphatase activities. (A) Complementation of the C₅₅-PP phosphatase-deficient *E. coli* strain (BW25113 $\Delta ybjG \Delta pgpB \Delta bacA::kan$) by the temperature-sensitive pMAK705 plasmid harboring *bacA_{EC}* (positive control, pMAK-*bacA_{EC}*) or *lpxE_{AA}* (pMAK-*lpxE_{AA}*). WT *E. coli* cells carrying pMAK705 or C₅₅-PP phosphatase-deficient *E. coli* cells carrying pMAK-*bacA_{EC}* or pMAK-*lpxE_{AA}* were grown at 30°C or 42°C. From left to right are spots of 10-fold serial dilutions from 10² to 10⁵. (B) Complementation of the PGP phosphatase-deficient *E. coli* strain (W3110 $\Delta pgpA \Delta pgpB \Delta pgpC::kan$) by the temperature-sensitive pMAK705 plasmid harboring *pgpA_{EC}* (positive control, pMAK-*pgpA_{EC}*) or *lpxE_{AA}* (pMAK-*lpxE_{AA}*). WT *E. coli* cells carrying pMAK705 or PGP phosphatase-deficient *E. coli* cells carrying pMAK-*pgpA_{EC}* or pMAK-*lpxE_{AA}* were grown at 30°C or 42°C. From left to right are spots of 10-fold serial dilutions from 10² to 10⁵. (C) Chromosomal complementation of C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity-deficient *E. coli* with *lpxE_{AA}*. The left, middle, and right images show the construction of different *E. coli* C₅₅-PP phosphatase gene deletion mutants, the growth of WT *E. coli* cells and C₅₅-PP phosphatase-deficient cells complemented by a chromosomal copy of *lpxE_{AA}*, and the PCR verification of *ybjG*, *bacA*, and *pgpB* knockouts of the target mutant strain, respectively. (D) Chromosomal complementation of PGP phosphatase activity-deficient *E. coli* with *lpxE_{AA}*. The left, middle, and right images show the construction of different *E. coli* PGP phosphatase gene deletion mutants, the growth of WT *E. coli* cells and PGP phosphatase-deficient cells complemented by a chromosomal copy of *lpxE_{AA}*, and PCR verification of *pgpA*, *pgpC*, and *pgpB* knockouts of the target mutant strain, respectively. Since the expected sizes of *pgpB* (1,106 bp) and *pgpB::P_L-lpxE_{AA}* (1,093 bp) are similar using primers flanking *pgpB* in the final strain, the knockout of *pgpB* was established by also verifying the PCR result of the mother strain (strain 5: W3110 $\Delta pgpA \Delta pgpB::P_L-lpxE_{AA}-frt-kan-frt$).

we also replaced the *pgpB* gene of *E. coli* (W3110) Δ *pgpA* with P_L -*lpxE_{AA}*-FRT-kan-FRT, removed the kanamycin resistance cassette (29), and then knocked out *pgpC*. The resulting strain (*E. coli* W3110 Δ *pgpA* Δ *pgpB*:: P_L -*lpxE_{AA}* Δ *pgpC*::kan) also grew on an LB agar plate, and knockouts of *pgpA*, *pgpB*, and *pgpC* were verified by PCR (Fig. 3D), confirming that the chromosomal copy of *lpxE_{AA}* similarly complemented the loss of PGP phosphatase activity.

Altogether, the substantial phosphatase activities of LpxE_{AA} toward Kdo₂-lipid A, C₅₅-PP, and PGP *in vitro* and its ability to complement the loss of C₅₅-PP and PGP phosphatase activities in *E. coli*—both via the plasmid-borne gene and via chromosomal knock-in—strongly support the multifunctionality of LpxE_{AA} in Gram-negative bacterial envelope biogenesis.

LpxE_{FN} is a bifunctional lipid phosphatase *in vitro* and functionally complements an *E. coli* mutant deficient in the C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity. Despite the intriguing observation of the multifunctionality of LpxE_{AA}, it is challenging to establish the biological consequence in its native host due to the difficulty of culturing and genetic manipulation of *A. aeolicus*. Therefore, we asked if other LpxE enzymes from genetically trackable bacteria similarly display multifunctional lipid phosphatase activities. In order to answer this question, we chose LpxE_{FN}, a distant ortholog of LpxE_{AA}, for further characterization. The ability of LpxE_{FN} to dephosphorylate lipid A at the 1-position was previously reported (15), but its activity toward other lipid substrates has not been thoroughly investigated. We first conducted similar complementation experiments using *E. coli* strains deficient in either the C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity or PGP phosphatase activity carrying the temperature-sensitive pMAK-*lpxE_{FN}*. We found that LpxE_{FN} complemented the loss of C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity of *E. coli* (Δ *ybjG* Δ *pgpB* Δ *bacA*::kan) at 30°C but not at 42°C, indicating that LpxE_{FN} is a functional C₅₅-PP phosphatase in *E. coli* (Fig. 4A). However, we were unable to complement *E. coli* deficient in the PGP activity (Δ *pgpA* Δ *pgpB* Δ *pgpC*::kan) with a plasmid encoding LpxE_{FN} (pMAK-*lpxE_{FN}*). Consistently, we found that purified LpxE_{FN} displayed significant phosphatase activity toward both Kdo₂-lipid A and C₅₅-PP and processed these two substrates with similar efficiencies (specific activities of 3.25 ± 0.21 μ mol/mg/min for Kdo₂-lipid A and 2.99 ± 0.45 μ mol/mg/min for C₅₅-PP), but its activity toward PGP was ~100-fold lower (specific activity of 0.038 ± 0.009 μ mol/mg/min) (Table 1), confirming that LpxE_{FN} is a bifunctional lipid phosphatase.

***F. novicida* harbors two C₅₅-PP phosphatases: LpxE_{FN} and FTN_1552.** It is important to note that the lipid A 1-phosphatase activity is not essential in bacteria but the C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity is. Prior to this study, no enzyme encoding the C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity had been identified in *F. novicida*. As the transposon mutant of *lpxE_{FN}* is not lethal in *F. novicida* (30), we reasoned that there must exist another enzyme encoding the C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity in *F. novicida*. By searching for *F. novicida* proteins homologous to *E. coli* enzymes containing C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity (i.e., BacA_{EC}, YbjG_{EC}, PgpB_{EC}, and LpxT_{EC}) using PSI-BLAST (20), we have identified a PAP2 family protein of unknown function, FTN_1552, as a potential candidate of the C₅₅-PP phosphatase (PSI-BLAST of PgpB_{EC}: E value of 0.003 and sequence identity of 16.47%). We found that the temperature-sensitive pMAK705 vector harboring *ftn_1552* complemented the *E. coli* strain deficient in C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity (Δ *ybjG* Δ *pgpB* Δ *bacA*::kan), confirming *ftn_1552* as the gene encoding the C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity (Fig. 4A). FTN_1552 was subsequently renamed UppP_{FN}. Purified UppP_{FN} appears to be a specific enzyme for C₅₅-PP, with a specific activity of 22.71 ± 2.62 μ mol/mg/min, and displays little activity toward Kdo₂-lipid A and PGP (specific activities of 0.010 ± 0.005 μ mol/mg/min and 0.031 ± 0.007 μ mol/mg/min, respectively [Table 1]). Importantly, while *F. novicida* strains containing a chromosomal deletion of either *lpxE_{FN}* or *uppP_{FN}* were viable, we were unable to generate *F. novicida* strains containing both deletions (Δ *lpxE_{FN}* Δ *uppP_{FN}*) in the chromosome (Fig. 4B and C). However, *F. novicida* cells were viable in the Δ *uppP_{FN}* background when *lpxE_{FN}* was replaced with *lpxE_{AA}* (Fig. 4B and C). Furthermore, when *F. novicida* was first transformed with a

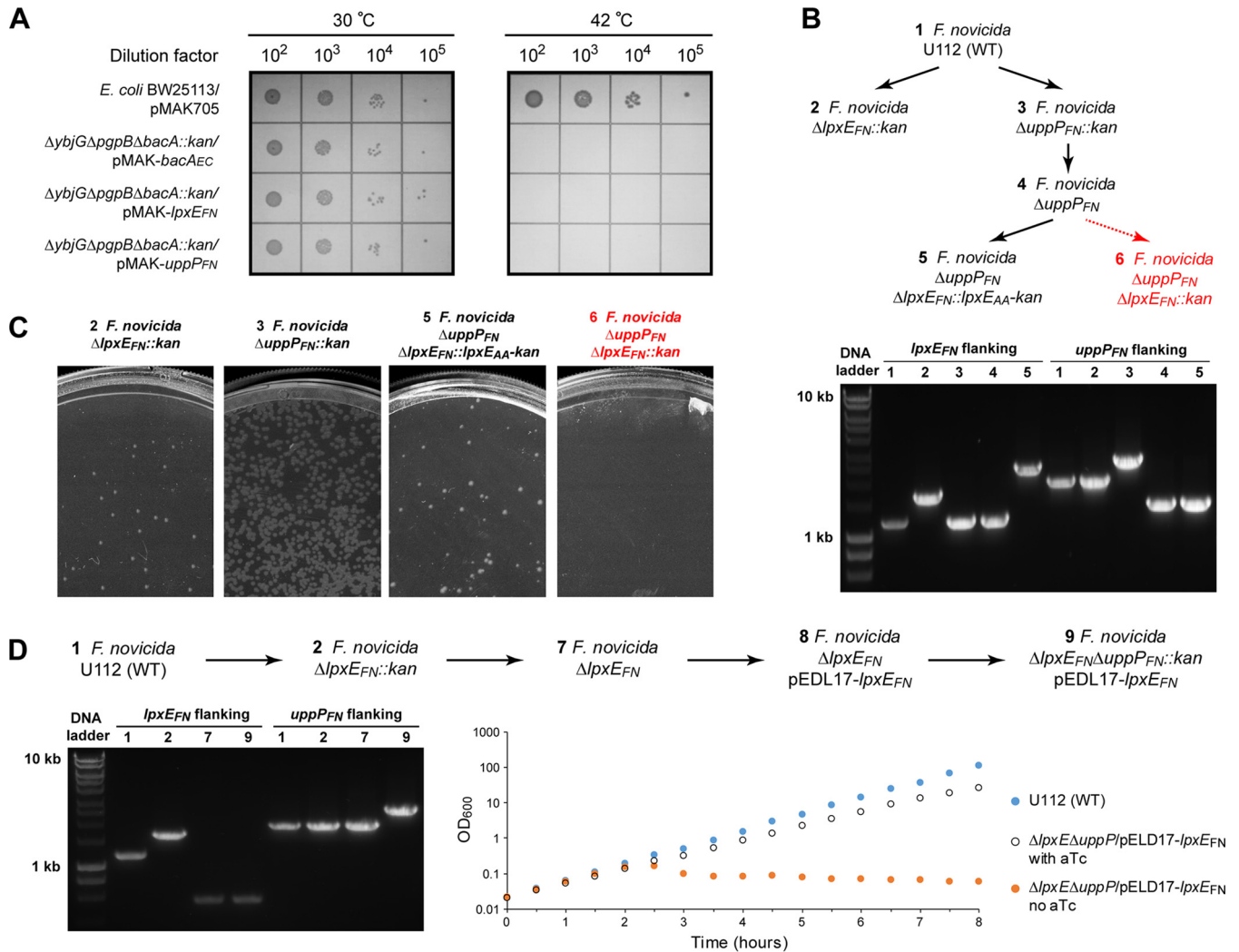


FIG 4 *F. novicida* harbors two C₅₅-PP phosphatases, LpxE_{FN} and UppP_{FN}. (A) Complementation of the C₅₅-PP phosphatase-deficient *E. coli* strain (BW25113 $\Delta ybjG \Delta bacA \Delta pgpB::kan$) by the temperature-sensitive pMAK705 plasmid harboring *bacA_{EC}* (positive control, pMAK-*bacA_{EC}*), *lpxE_{FN}* (pMAK-*lpxE_{FN}*), or *uppP_{FN}* (*ftn_1552*, pMAK-*uppP_{FN}*). WT *E. coli* cells carrying pMAK705 or C₅₅-PP phosphatase-deficient *E. coli* cells carrying pMAK-*bacA_{EC}*, pMAK-*lpxE_{FN}*, or pMAK-*uppP_{FN}* were grown at 30°C or 42°C. From left to right are spots of 10-fold serial dilutions from 10² to 10⁵. (B) Schematic illustration of the construction of different *F. novicida* gene deletion strains. Viable and lethal strains are in black and red, respectively. The presence of the proper gene deletion was verified by PCR using primers at ~0.25-kb or 0.6-kb positions flanking *lpxE* or *uppP*, respectively. (C) Viability of *F. novicida* mutants. While *F. novicida* mutants containing $\Delta lpxE_{FN}::kan$, $\Delta uppP_{FN}::kan$, or $\Delta uppP_{FN} \Delta lpxE_{FN}::lpxE_{AA}$ were viable, no colonies could be isolated for *F. novicida* mutants containing $\Delta uppP_{FN} \Delta lpxE_{FN}::kan$. (D) Construction of the conditional lethal *F. novicida* strain containing $\Delta lpxE_{FN} \Delta uppP_{FN}$ complemented by aTc-inducible pEDL17-*lpxE_{FN}*. The sequence of strain construction is shown at the top. The presence of the desired gene deletion was verified by PCR (left). Prolonged withdrawal of aTc from the growth medium resulted in a slow bactericidal phenotype (right).

plasmid (pEDL17) bearing *lpxE_{FN}* under the control of an anhydrotetracycline (aTc) promoter, we were also able to obtain viable *F. novicida* colonies containing chromosomal deletions of both *lpxE_{FN}* and *uppP_{FN}* (U112 $\Delta lpxE_{FN} \Delta uppP_{FN}::kan$ /pEDL17-*lpxE_{FN}*). The presence of proper chromosomal deletions of the *lpxE_{FN}* and *uppP_{FN}* genes was verified by PCR (Fig. 4D). As expected, the viability of such a strain depends on the expression of plasmid-encoded LpxE_{FN}: prolonged withdrawal of aTc suppressed the bacterial growth and slowly resulted in cell lysis in culture (Fig. 4D), reinforcing the notion that UppP_{FN} and LpxE_{FN} share redundant C₅₅-PP phosphatase activities in *Francisella*.

LpxE_{FN} functionally connects multiple layers of envelope biogenesis in *F. novicida*. After establishing that LpxE_{FN} shares C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity with UppP_{FN}, we further examined the biological implication of the multifunctional enzymatic activity of LpxE_{FN} in its native host, *F. novicida*. We first verified the role of LpxE_{FN}

as a lipid A 1-phosphatase. Wild-type (WT) *F. novicida* cells contain both LPS (i.e., core oligosaccharide and O-antigen-modified Kdo-lipid A3 without 1- and 4'-phosphates) and free lipid A species A1 and A2, which do not contain core oligosaccharides/Kdo or O-antigen (lipid A2 differs from lipid A1 in that it has an additional α -linked glucose moiety attached to its 6'-position; also see the schematic lipid A structures of WT *F. novicida* in Fig. 5A) (31). Both lipid A1 and lipid A2 are further modified by FlmK, which transfers galactosamine from C₅₅-P-galactosamine to the 1-phosphate of lipid A (32, 33). As the core oligosaccharide and O-antigen-modified lipid A are inefficiently extracted by the Bligh-Dyer method for mass spectrometry analysis, we examined the effect of $\Delta lpxE_{FN}$ in the *F. novicida* strain deficient in the glycosyltransferase activity ($\Delta lpcC$), which produces Kdo-lipid A3 (instead of LPS), in addition to lipids A1 and A2 found in the wild-type cells (Fig. 5A). Accumulations of Kdo-(1-phospho)-lipid A3 and Kdo-(galactosamine-1-phospho)-lipid A3, as well as the disappearance of Kdo-lipid A3, were observed in *F. novicida* when $lpxE_{FN}$ was deleted ($\Delta lpxE_{FN}$), confirming the lipid A 1-phosphatase activity of LpxE_{FN} in cells (Fig. 5A and Fig. S5).

As the C₅₅-PP phosphatase activity of LpxE_{FN} ($2.99 \pm 0.45 \mu\text{mol/mg/min}$) is only ~7-fold smaller than that of UppP_{FN} ($22.71 \pm 2.62 \mu\text{mol/mg/min}$), we asked whether LpxE_{FN} could functionally contribute to the bacterial envelope biogenesis beyond lipid A modification at the 1-phosphate position. We first compared the sensitivities of the wild-type *F. novicida* strain (U112) and mutant strains containing either the *lpxE* or *uppP* deletion to bacitracin, an antibiotic sequestering C₅₅-PP. We found that while the loss of *uppP* in *F. novicida* generated an 8.5-fold drop of MIC in comparison with that of the WT strain (0.5 μM versus 4.25 μM), as expected, the loss of *lpxE* also resulted in ~1.7-fold drop of the MIC of bacitracin (2.5 μM for *F. novicida* $\Delta lpxE$) (Fig. 5B), implicating a functional role of LpxE_{FN} in the recycling of C₅₅-PP.

In order to isolate the biological effect of LpxE_{FN}, we utilized the *F. novicida* strain containing chromosomal deletions of both *uppP_{FN}* and *lpxE_{FN}*, which is complemented by a plasmid carrying *lpxE_{FN}* under the control of an aTc promoter. We found that the loss of plasmid-mediated expression of LpxE_{FN} due to withdrawal of aTc in the growth medium resulted in cell enlargement, reflecting defective peptidoglycan biosynthesis (Fig. 5C). Strikingly, while no change of O-antigen repeats was observed in *F. novicida* cells containing the chromosomal deletion of either *lpxE* or *uppP* in comparison with WT cells (Fig. 5D), transient suppression of LpxE led to a dramatic reduction of the LPS O-antigen repeats, including both high- and low-repeat species (Fig. 5E) (34), suggesting a contribution of LpxE to the O-antigen biogenesis. These observations are consistent with the notion that the biosynthesis and transport of peptidoglycan and O-antigen depend on C₅₅-P, the product of LpxE_{FN} (and UppP_{FN}) activity, and reveal a previously unappreciated function of LpxE in the biogenesis and remodeling of multiple components across the bacterial envelope: peptidoglycan, free lipid A, and the O-antigen repeat of LPS.

DISCUSSION

LpxE enzymes are important virulence factors that promote bacterial survival, fitness, and pathogenicity. In *H. pylori* and *Rhizobium etli* CE3, the chromosomal knockout of *lpxE* resulted in increased susceptibility to positively charged antimicrobial peptides such as polymyxin B and colistin (9, 35), presumably due to the retention of 1-phosphate of lipid A. Previous studies showed that *Rhizobium* LpxE displays over a 1,000-fold preference of Kdo₂-lipid A/lipid IV_A over PGP; therefore, LpxE has been regarded as a highly specific monofunctional enzyme whose sole activity is to remove the 1-phosphate from lipid A. In this study, based on the striking structural similarity between LpxE_{AA} and YodM_{BS}, a PGP phosphatase with a weak *in vitro* activity on C₅₅-PP phosphatase, we discovered that LpxE is a multifunctional lipid phosphatase. The LpxE enzyme from *A. aeolicus* displays significant activities toward Kdo₂-lipid A/lipid IV_A, C₅₅-PP and PGP and functionally complements *E. coli* strains deficient in C₅₅-PP or PGP phosphatase activities. Likewise, the LpxE enzyme from *F. novicida* is a dual-function enzyme that processes Kdo₂-lipid A and C₅₅-PP with similar efficiencies. Strikingly,

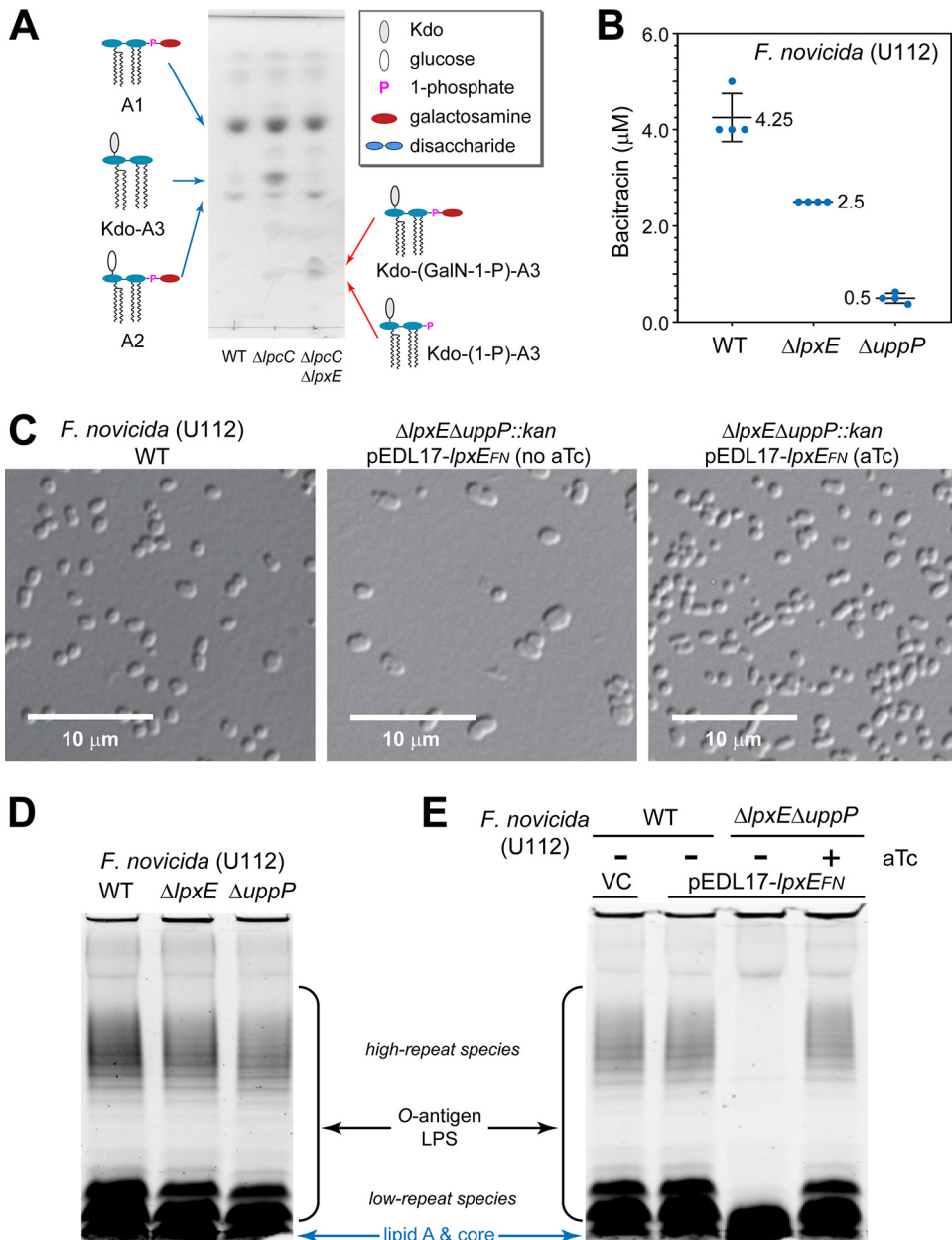


FIG 5 LpxE_{FN} functionally contributes to multiple layers of the *F. novicida* bacterial envelope biogenesis. (A) Deletion of *lpxE*_{FN} results in accumulation of 1-phosphorylated Kdo-lipid A3 species. The profiles of total lipid extracts from *F. novicida* U112 WT, Δ *lpcC*, and Δ *lpcC* Δ *lpxE* strains were analyzed by TLC. Lipid A species are labeled. Abbreviations: GalN, galactosamine; A1, lipid A1; A2, lipid A2; Kdo-A3, Kdo-lipid A3; Kdo-(GalN-1-P)-A3, Kdo-(galactosamine-1-phospho)-lipid A3; Kdo-(1-P)-A3, Kdo-(1-phospho)-lipid A3. (B) Deletion of *lpxE*_{FN} sensitizes *F. novicida* to bacitracin as reflected by reduced MIC. Error bars represent standard deviations from quadruplet measurements. (C) Suppression of the plasmid-encoded LpxE_{FN} expression in the Δ *lpxE*_{FN} Δ *uppP*_{FN}::*kan* mutant of *F. novicida* causes cell deformation. Images of wild-type cells and Δ *lpxE*_{FN} Δ *uppP*_{FN}::*kan* *F. novicida* mutant cells without and with LpxE_{FN} expression are shown in the left, middle, and right images, respectively. (D) Lack of LPS phenotypes in *F. novicida* cells containing the single deletion of *lpxE*_{FN} or *uppP*_{FN}. (E) Suppression of the plasmid-encoded LpxE_{FN} expression in the Δ *lpxE*_{FN} Δ *uppP*_{FN}::*kan* mutant of *F. novicida* causes the loss of O-antigen repeats in LPS. LPS profiles from wild-type *F. novicida* cells carrying the pDEL17 vector (VC) or the C₅₅-PP phosphatase-deficient (Δ *lpxE*_{FN} Δ *uppP*_{FN}::*kan*) cells carrying the pDEL17-*lpxE*_{FN} vector without or with aTc were analyzed on SDS-PAGE gels using the Pro-Q Emerald LPS staining kit. O-antigen-containing LPS, including both high- and low-repeat species, and free lipid A/core species are labeled.

deletion of *lpxE*_{FN} in its native host *F. novicida* resulted in accumulation of phosphorylated lipid A species and increased sensitivity to bacitracin; in the C₅₅-PP phosphatase-deficient (Δ *uppP* and Δ *lpxE* double-knockout mutant) *F. novicida*, suppression of LpxE_{FN} expression from the plasmid resulted in cell deformation due to defective peptidogly-

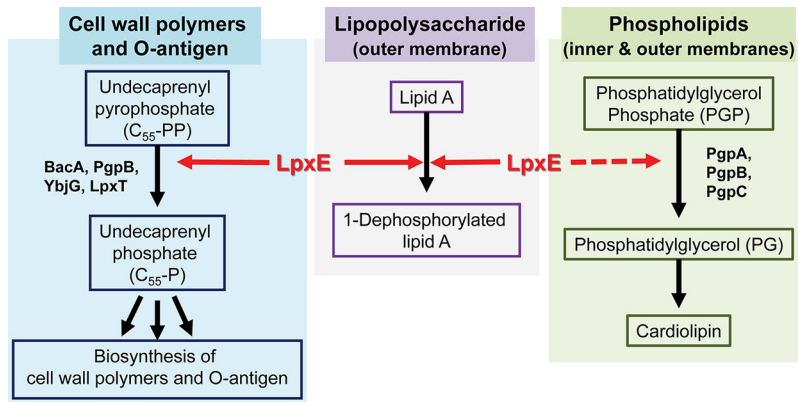


FIG 6 Multiple roles of LpxE in the biogenesis of the Gram-negative bacterial envelope. Shown is a schematic illustration of the multifunctional roles of LpxE in the biogenesis of the cell wall polymer (peptidoglycan), outer membrane (LPS), and inner membrane (PGP). Shared phosphatase activities of LpxEs from diverse bacteria, including *Aquifex* (*Aquificales*), *Francisella* (*Gammaproteobacteria*), *Rhizobium* (*Alphaproteobacteria*), and *Helicobacter* (*Epsilonproteobacteria*), toward lipid A and C_{55} -PP are indicated by solid arrows, whereas the unique PGP phosphatase activity of LpxE_{AA} is indicated by a dashed red line.

can biosynthesis and the loss of O-antigen repeats in LPS associated with reduced O-antigen transport, both of which are critically dependent on the recycling of C_{55} -PP to C_{55} -P. Taken together, these results show that LpxE enzymes from *A. aeolicus* and *F. novicida* functionally connect multiple layers of bacterial envelope biogenesis and remodeling. Such multiple functional roles are not unique to LpxE enzymes from *A. aeolicus* and *F. novicida*: we found that LpxE enzymes from *H. pylori* and *R. leguminosarum* also complemented *E. coli* deficient in C_{55} -PP phosphatase activities (Fig. S6), suggesting that these LpxE enzymes can similarly process Kdo₂-lipid A and C_{55} -PP to synchronize lipid A modification with peptidoglycan biosynthesis and O-antigen modification of LPS.

It is appropriate to ask why LpxE has evolved into a multifunctional enzyme. There are several potential explanations. First, it is conceivable that the peptidoglycan biosynthesis is such an essential process that multiple enzymes, including LpxE, are employed as the backup enzymes for the C_{55} -PP phosphatase-mediated recycling reaction for peptidoglycan charging and biosynthesis. Second, it is possible that LpxE from *Aquifex* species represents an ancestral lipid phosphatase, which, although primitive, is sufficient to conduct all lipid phosphatase activities to support the bacterial envelope biogenesis and remodeling, while other LPT family of lipid phosphatases, such as the PGP phosphatase, evolved later as specialized, highly efficient enzymes. Third, it is also likely that LpxE evolved as a multifunctional enzyme to coordinate lipid A modification and the biogenesis of other layers of bacterial envelope. As 1,4'-bisphosphorylated lipid A chelates metal ions to form a fortified layer for bacterial protection, removal of the 1-phosphate could weaken the lipid A layer and increase membrane permeability. It is conceivable that the weakened lipid A layer is compensated by the elevated peptidoglycan biosynthesis and enhanced O-antigen decoration of LPS. Thus, bestowing LpxE with the multifunctionality toward Kdo₂-lipid A and C_{55} -PP (and, in the case of *A. aeolicus*, PGP) enables LpxE to orchestrate lipid A modification with bacterial envelope remodeling at multiple layers (Fig. 6) in order to promote the optimal bacterial growth and enhance bacterial survival in nature and the human host.

The Gram-negative bacterial envelope contains three layers. How Gram-negative bacteria coordinate the biogenesis and remodeling of different layers of the bacterial envelope has remained an area of active investigation. Our study has revealed the first biological evidence of a multifunctional enzyme, LpxE in *F. novicida*, that natively couples lipid A 1-dephosphorylation with C_{55} -PP recycling to enhance peptidoglycan biogenesis and O-antigen decoration of LPS, promote cell viability against antimicrobial

peptides, evade host immune surveillance, and ultimately support bacterial pathogenesis. We suggest that such a multifunctional role represents a common but previously unappreciated mechanism for Gram-negative bacteria to coordinate bacterial envelope biogenesis across different layers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data collection and refinement statistics of LpxE_{AA} are listed in Table S1. All strains and plasmids used in this work are listed in Tables S2 and S3, respectively.

Plasmid and strain constructions and growth conditions are described in the supplemental material in detail.

Extraction of lipid A species, TLC and mass spectrometry analyses of lipid A species, and assay conditions are described in the Supplementary Methods section of the supplemental material.

Characterizations of *F. novicida* U112 mutants are described in the Supplementary Methods section of the supplemental material.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Supplemental material for this article may be found at <https://doi.org/10.1128/mBio.00886-19>.

TEXT S1, DOCX file, 0.1 MB.

FIG S1, TIF file, 2.8 MB.

FIG S2, TIF file, 2.8 MB.

FIG S3, TIF file, 2.9 MB.

FIG S4, TIF file, 2.8 MB.

FIG S5, TIF file, 2.8 MB.

FIG S6, TIF file, 2.2 MB.

TABLE S1, DOCX file, 0.01 MB.

TABLE S2, DOCX file, 0.02 MB.

TABLE S3, DOCX file, 0.02 MB.

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