

Theoretical Studies on the Gas-phase Reaction of Methyl Formate with Anions¹

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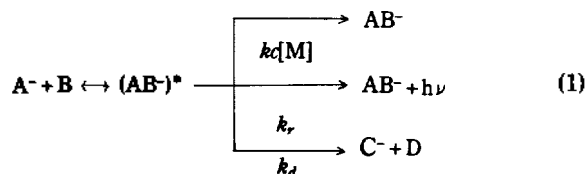
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The gas-phase reactions of methyl formate with anions, $^{-}\text{NH}_2$, ^{-}OH , $^{-}\text{CH}_2\text{CN}$, are studied theoretically using the AM1 method. Stationary points are located by the reaction coordinate method, refined by the gradient norm minimization and characterized by the determination of Hessian matrix. Potential energy profiles and the stationary point structures are presented for all conceivable processes. Four reaction paths are found to be possible: formyl proton and methyl proton abstractions, carbonyl addition, and S_N2 process. For the most basic anion $^{-}\text{NH}_2$ the proton abstraction path is favored, while in other case, ^{-}OH and $^{-}\text{CH}_2\text{CN}$, the carbonyl addition paths are favored. In all cases the S_N2 process is the most exothermic, but due to the relatively high activation barrier the process can be ruled out.

Introduction

Nucleophilic substitutions at the carbonyl carbon atom have been studied extensively in organic chemistry.¹ These reactions are of great importance, especially in solution-phase, because of their role in biochemistry. Despite the considerable activity in the mechanistic study of reactions of carbonyl groups in solution, the intrinsic factors controlling the reactivity and mechanism of carbonyl substitution have been elusive due to attendant complications of the solvent system. A number of gas phase studies of ionic nucleophilic displacement reactions at carbonyl centers using ion cyclotron resonance(ICR) spectroscopy,² flowing afterglow(FA) technique and fourier transform mass spectrometry(FT-MS) have been reported.³

The results of these gas-phase studies have shown that the reactivity and mechanism of the carbonyl substitution are substantially different from those of the solution-phase; effects of the nucleophile, leaving group and alkyl substrate on the rate are found to be inconsistent with the single minimum potential surface postulated from solution phase studies and many reaction paths are found to be possible.⁴ However, the product distribution in the gas-phase reaction is strongly dependent upon the reaction condition, and this complication inherent to the gas-phase studies presented difficulties in the complete understanding. The product distribution is primarily determined by how the excess energies of the product complexes or intermediates are lost to reach equilibrium as shown in eq.(1), where k_c , k_r , and k_d are the rate constants for



the energy loss of $(\text{AB}^{-})^*$ by collision with a neutral gas molecule M, by radiation and by decomposition, respectively.

The gas phase reactions of methyl formate with various anions have been reported with varying product ratios depending upon the reaction conditions.⁵ In order to understand and clarify the intrinsic factors determining the reaction

mechanism we have carried out theoretical investigations of the gas-phase reactions of methyl formate with anions of different thermodynamic properties, $^{-}\text{NH}_2$, ^{-}OH , $^{-}\text{CH}_2\text{CN}$, using the AM1 method

Calculations

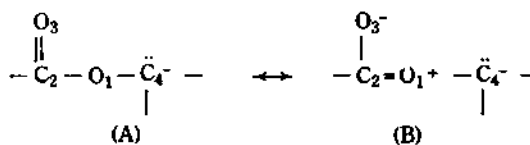
The AM1 method⁶ was used for geometries and reaction paths calculations throughout in this work. Locations and geometries of the stationary points on the potential energy surfaces were obtained by the reaction coordinate method,⁷ refined by the gradient norm minimization⁸ and characterized by the force constant matrix calculation. The transition state(TS) was confirmed by only one negative eigenvalue in the Hessian matrix.⁹ All geometries were fully optimized without any assumption.

Results and Discussion

Structures of Methyl Formate and Carbonions. Of the four conformers of methyl formate, the staggered-cis form is the most stable conformer as expected from favorable π -nonbonded interaction ($6\pi/5$),¹⁰ Figure 1.

This is in agreement with the *ab initio* results of Wennerström¹¹ and with explanations offered by Epitotis *et al.*¹² The staggered-cis form is more stable by 5.6 and 0.6 kcal/mol than the staggered-trans and eclipsed-cis, respectively, which is in accord with the experimental results. In this work, we used the staggered-cis form as the ground state of methyl formate.

The carbonions(A) formed by the elimination of a methyl



proton are stabilized by an adjacent dipole¹³ as in (B), and in general, the $\text{C}_2\text{-O}_1$ bond length is shorter in the carbonions than in the ground state as can be seen in Table 1.

Due to the $\pi\text{-}\sigma^*$ interaction,¹⁰ the anti form of the lone pair with respect to $\text{C}_2\text{-O}_1$ has longer bond length of $\text{C}_2\text{-O}_1$ compared with that in the syn form. Structural parameters for the anions formed in the product complexes are summarized

¹Determination of Reactivity of MO Theory (Part, 60).

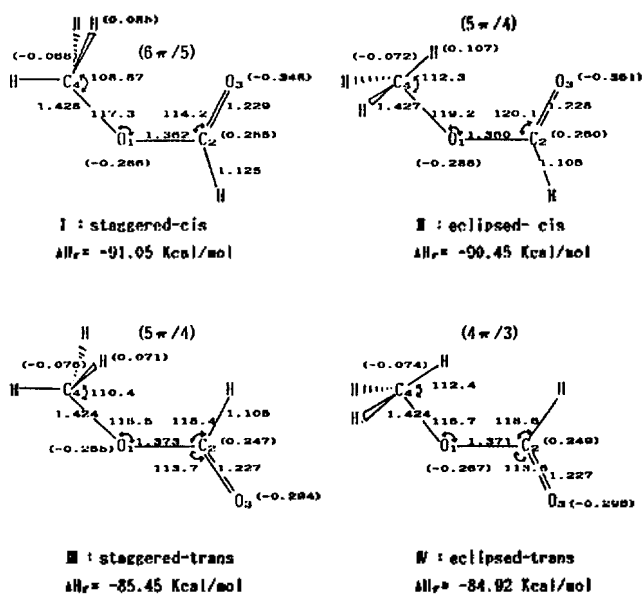


Figure 1. Structures, charges (in parentheses) and heats of formation of various conformers of methyl formate. ($n\pi/m$) denotes π -nonbonded structure with $n\pi$ electrons in m member nonbonded ring system.¹⁰

Table 1. Structural Parameter and Charges (q)

	ground state methyl formate	product complex			
		-NH ₂		-OH	
		syn-form	anti-form	syn-form	anti-form
$d(O_1-C_2)$	1.362	1.349	1.357	1.346	1.354
$d(O_1-C_4)$	1.428	1.378	1.377	1.389	1.388
$d(C_2-O_2)$	1.229	1.242	1.244	1.241	1.243
$\angle O_1C_2O_3$	119.2	123.3	117.4	122.9	117.3
$\angle C_2O_1C_4$	117.3	121.7	117.5	121.2	117.3
$q(O_1)$	-0.286	-0.178	-0.146	-0.189	-0.159
$q(C_2)$	0.255	0.160	0.175	0.175	0.187
$q(O_3)$	-0.348	-0.457	-0.458	-0.449	-0.447
$q(C_4)$	-0.068	-0.569	-0.641	-0.528	-0.588

in Table 1.

Another consequence of the $n-\sigma^*$ interaction is the stabilization of the anti form by 10 kcal/mol relative to the syn form. This AM1 result is in good agreement with a recent *ab*

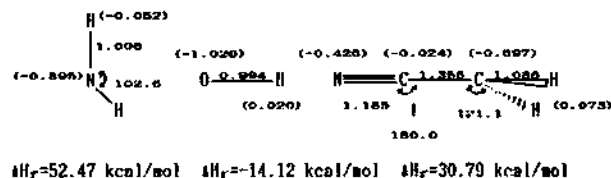


Figure 2. Structures and heats of formation of anions.

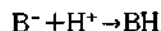
Table 2. Proton Affinities (PA) of Anions

	-NH ₂	-OH	-CH ₂ CN
Exp. value	403.7	390.8	327.1
AM1 value	403.7	391.0	377.9

initio result on the relative carbanion stability showing that the anti form is favored by 6.0 kcal/mol.¹³

The structures and heats of formation of the reactant anions are shown in Figure 2.

Proton affinity(PA) (basicity) of anion, B⁻, is defined as⁶⁴



$$PA(B^-) = \Delta H_f(H^+) + \Delta H_f(B^-) - \Delta H_f(BH) \quad (2)$$

The AM1 proton affinities calculated by eq.(2), for the three anions are presented in Table 2. Here we used the experimental $\Delta H_f(H^+)$ value of 367.2 kcal/mol instead of the unreasonably small AM1 $\Delta H_f(H^+)$ value of 314.9 kcal/mol.

Reference to Table 2 indicates that the calculated PAs as well as the relative order are remarkably in good agreement with those of the experimental values.

MO theoretical PAs reported in the literature show in general that they are not in satisfactory agreement with the experimental values unless very high level basis sets are used in the *ab initio* calculations.¹⁴

Reactivity. In the gas-phase ion-molecule reactions, the most exothermic reaction path is preferred.¹⁵ Various reaction paths conceivable in the reactions of methyl formate with anions are summarized in Table 3 together with the enthalpies of reaction. The relative exothermicities are illustrated also in Figure 3. It can be seen that for all anion reactants studied, the reaction path in which HC(=O)O⁻ is formed is the most exothermic, so that the $B_{AC}2'$ and S_N2 processes are the most favorable reaction modes considering the reaction enthalpies only. Recent experimental investigations on the gas phase reactions of methyl formate with vari-

Table 3. Reaction Modes and Heats of Reaction (ΔH_f°)

Reaction	Mode of reaction	ΔH_f° (kcal/mol) ^a		
		-MH ₂	-OH	-CH ₂ CN
-XH + CH ₃ O-C(=O)H → CH ₃ O-C(=O) ⁻ + X ₂ H	H_c^+ -ABS ^b	-57.33	-42.70	-9.09
→ CH ₂ O ⁻ -HXH + CO	CO-elim.	-24.24	-14.49	22.92
→ CH ₂ O ⁻ + XH ₂ + CO	CO-elim.	-12.88	1.75	35.36
→ CH ₂ O-C(=O)H + XH ₂	H_m^+ -ABS ^c	-27.86	-13.23	20.38
→ CH ₂ O ⁻ + HX-C(=O)H	$B_{AC}2^d$	-44.46	-30.71	12.74
→ -X-C(=O)H + CH ₂ OH	$B_{AC}2^e$	-62.21	-61.30	-33.31
→ HCO ₂ ⁻ + HXCH ₃	S_N2	-78.24	-61.30	-36.16

^a $\Delta H_f^\circ(\text{prod.}) - \Delta H_f^\circ(\text{react.})$. ^b formyl proton abstraction. ^c methyl proton abstraction. ^d carbonyl addition. ^e α -proton abstraction of attacking anions by the cleaving CH₃O⁻ ion in the $B_{AC}2$ path.

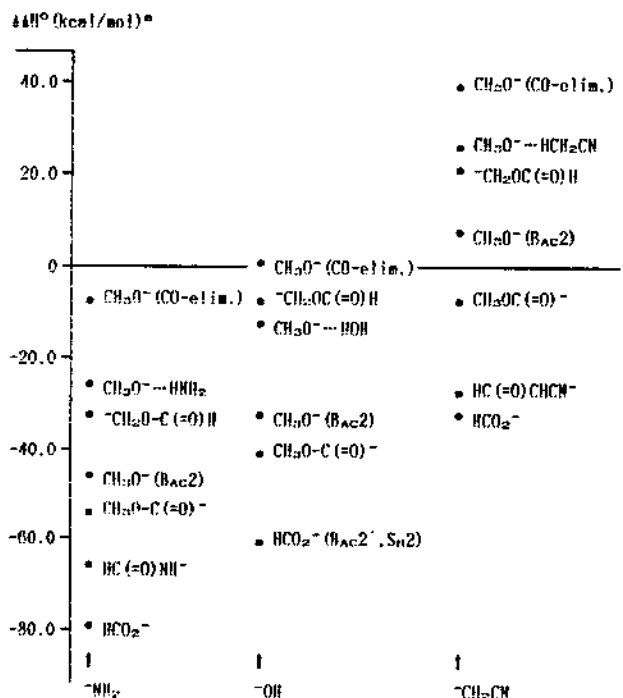


Figure 3. Heat of formation of product relative to the reactants ground state for reactions of methyl formate with anions. $^a \Delta H_f^\circ(\text{prod.}) - \Delta H_f^\circ(\text{react.})$.

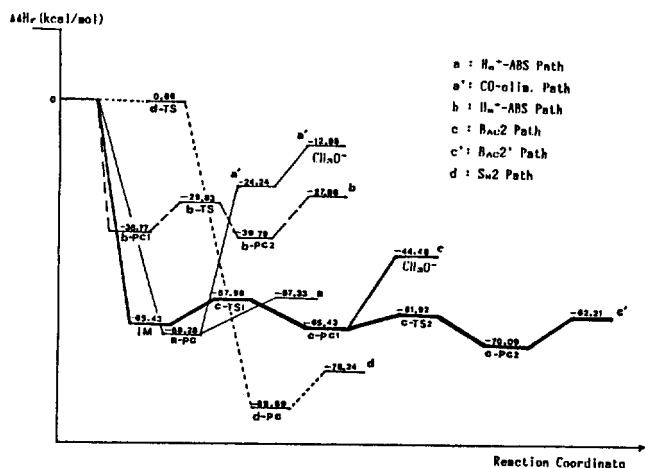


Figure 4. Potential energy profiles for the reaction of methyl formate with -NH_2 (TS: Transition state, PC: Product complex, IM: Intermediate).

ous anions⁵ have shown that the initial major products in the reaction with -NH_2 corresponded to the proton abstraction path whereas the reactions with -OH and $\text{-CH}_2\text{CN}$ gave the products from the $B_{AC}2'$ path. This indicates that the potential energy surface should play an important role in understanding the reactivity of the reactions between methyl formate and anions. We have thus searched potential energy surfaces for all possible paths with each anion.

(1) Reaction with -NH_2 Four reaction modes are allowed thermodynamically for the reaction of methyl formate with -NH_2 ; proton abstractions (a and b), Carbonyl addition (c) and S_N2 (d) processes. The potential energy profiles and stationary points structures are shown in Figure 4 and 5.

Proton abstractions are possible from either formyl H (a)

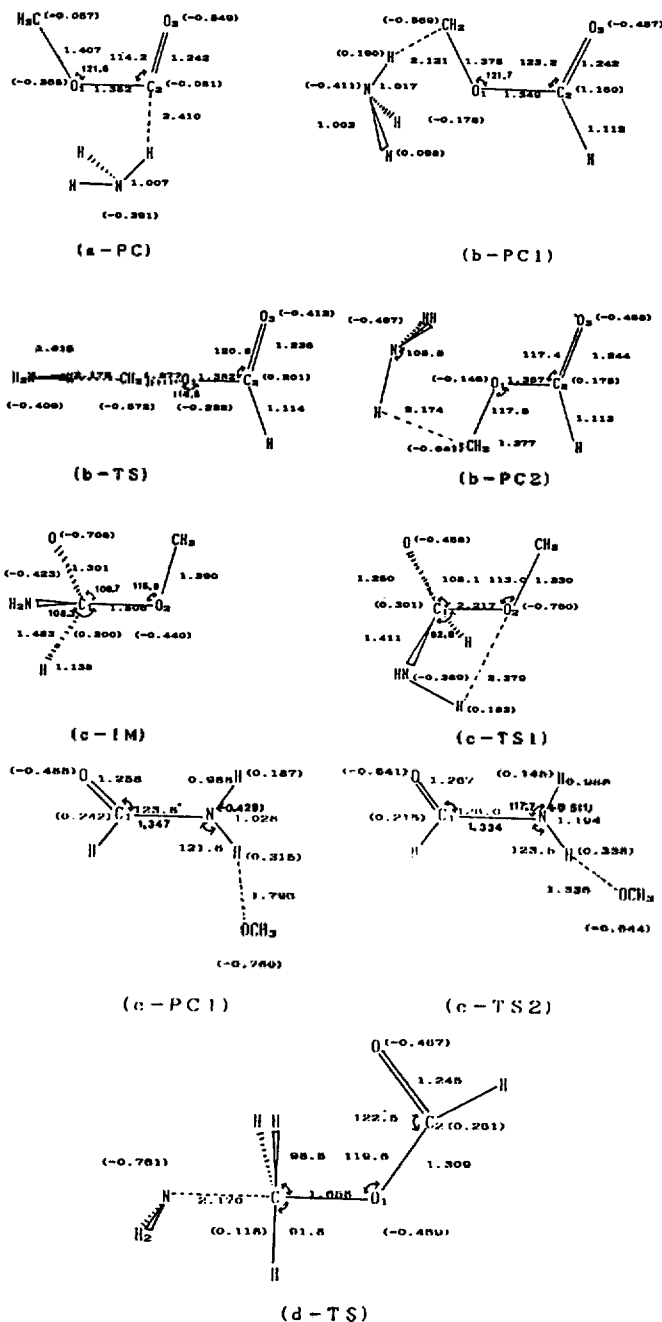
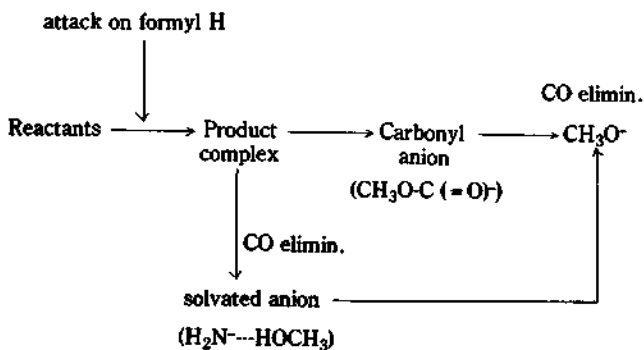


Figure 5. Stationary point structures in the reaction of methyl formate with -NH_2 .



Scheme 1

or methyl H (b), the latter being more acidic as can be seen from the potential energy profiles in Figure 4. The product complex formed by the formyl proton abstraction proceeds to CO elimination as shown in Scheme 1. The CH_3O^- ion is produced from both the solvated anion and carbonyl anion but this anion can also be obtained from the B_{AC2} path as can be seen in Figure 4. Experimentally, Riveros *et al.*¹⁶ concluded that the proton abstraction path is the exclusive source of the CH_3O^- ion production. However, Johlman *et al.*^{5a} have shown experimentally that both the proton abstraction and the B_{AC2} paths are possible CH_3O^- production sources, as we found theoretically in this work. The CH_3O^- ion can not be formed directly from the attack on the formyl H but only through carbonyl anion or solvated anion (Scheme 1); this process is feasible when the carbonyl anion formed is very unstable or the solvated anion has enough thermal energy to break a weak hydrogen bond. This shows the importance of the stability of product complexes. The excess energy can be lost in various ways as shown in eq.(1).¹⁷ If these energy dissipations were possible the reaction should proceed by the carbonyl anion formation because of its thermodynamic stability. However, in case the internal bond scission takes place in the product complex, prior to the energy loss, both the solvated anion and CH_3O^- productions are possible. The absolute product ratio should therefore largely depend on the reaction condition, but thermodynamically the formation of carbonyl anion is preferred to the formation of solvated anion and CH_3O^- ion.

In the reaction mode involving an attack on the carbonyl carbon (c), a tetrahedral intermediate (Figure 5) is formed in accordance with other theoretical studies.¹⁸ The intermediate proceeds to form either CH_3O^- or $\text{HC}(=\text{O})\text{NH}^-$ ion, many steps being involved in the latter path as can be seen in Figure 4. Recent *ab initio* MO theoretical studies by Yamabe *et al.*¹⁹ and Jorgensen *et al.*²⁰ together with experimental solution chemistry indicated that the tetrahedral structure should be regarded as an intermediate when strong nucleophiles and poor leaving groups are involved, such as in the reaction studied in this work, while a tetrahedral TS is expected in opposite cases.

In the $B_{AC2'}$ path where the $\text{HC}(=\text{O})\text{NH}^-$ ion is formed, the activation barrier of the $\text{TS1}(c\text{-TS1})$ is largely dependent upon the degree of bond breaking of the leaving group CH_3O^- . On the other hand, the barrier of the $\text{TS2}(c\text{-TS2})$ reflects the acidity of the substituted NH_2 anion.

Thus the carbonyl addition process(c) starts with a tight bond formation of the tetrahedral intermediate, which is followed by two paths leading to CH_3O^- ion and $\text{HC}(=\text{O})\text{NH}^-$ ion production with the latter being favored by the thermodynamic stability.

The S_{N2} process(d) leads to very stable products, but no reactant complex formation prior to the TS was observed (Figure 4). This is because a methyl proton abstraction occurs as the reactant anion NH_2^- approaches to the methyl carbon atom. However when the anion approaches nearer to the methyl carbon instead of the methyl hydrogens, the S_{N2} $\text{TS}(d\text{-TS})$ shown in Figure 5 was obtained. There were two negative eigenvalues in the force constant matrix (-1.83702 and -0.00048), but the normal vector analyses showed that the very small negative eigenvalue was not of the stretching mode of the reaction coordinate bond but coresponded to

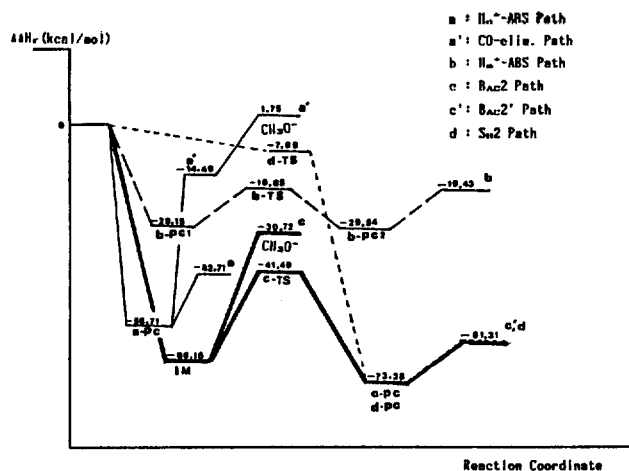


Figure 6. Potential energy profiles for the reaction of methyl formate with OH^- (TS: Transition state, PC: Product complex, IM: Intermediate).

Table 4. Semiempirical and *ab initio*^a Solvation Energies

	AM1	MNDO	3-21G	4-31G	6-31G**/4-31G
NH_3	-11.36	-11.04			
H_2O	-16.24	-7.34	-37.19	-30.47	-24.37
CH_2CN	-12.44	-8.90			

^aIn hartrees; otherwise in kcal/mol.

the bending modes of the methyl and amide hydrogens. This means that the TS shown in Figure 5 is the correct S_{N2} TS. The S_{N2} barrier in Figure 3 due to this TS ($d\text{-TS}$) is very high indeed relative to other barriers so that unless the reactants have enough energies at the initial stage of the reaction the S_{N2} process should hardly compete with other processes.

On the whole, the carbonyl anion and $\text{HC}(=\text{O})\text{NH}^-$ ion formation paths are thermodynamically favored in the reaction of methyl formate with NH_2^- , but the product stabilities in the two paths are comparable and relatively complex steps are involved in the $\text{HC}(=\text{O})\text{NH}^-$ ion path so that the carbonyl anion path may be preferred. Moreover, the product in the methyl proton abstraction $\text{CH}_2\text{OC}(=\text{O})\text{H}$, has the same mass ($m/e = 59$) as the carbonyl anion, $\text{CH}_3\text{OC}(=\text{O})^-$, and may result in an apparent increase of the proton abstraction process.

(2) Reaction with OH^- . The same four modes (a - d) of reactions are also possible with OH^- : proton abstractions (a and b), carbonyl addition (c), and S_{N2} (d) processes. Since OH^- has somewhat lower proton affinity than NH_2^- , the proton abstraction processes of OH^- are relatively less favorable compared to those of NH_2^- as can be seen from Figure 6. In the formyl proton abstraction, the product complex leads to the carbonyl anion and the solvated anion formation as we found in the corresponding reaction of NH_2^- . The AM1 and MNDO solvation energies obtained in this work are summarized in Table 4 together with those by the *ab initio* calculations. Comparison of the values in Table 4 indicates that the AM1 method is relatively better than MNDO, and the 3-21G results²¹ overestimate the solvation energy when compared with the calculations at the 6-31G**//4-13G level.²² It is interesting to note that the AM1 results are closer to those at the

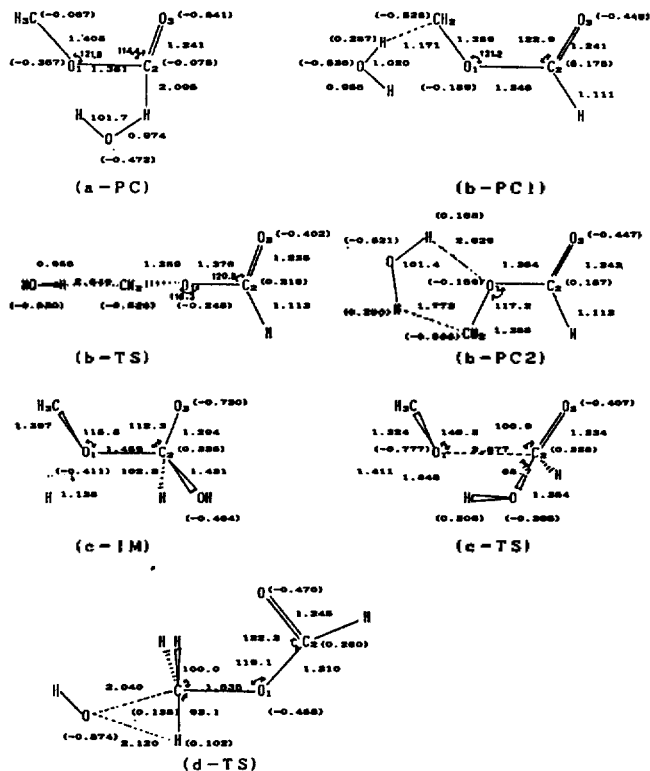


Figure 7. Stationary points structures in the reaction of methyl formate with ^-OH .

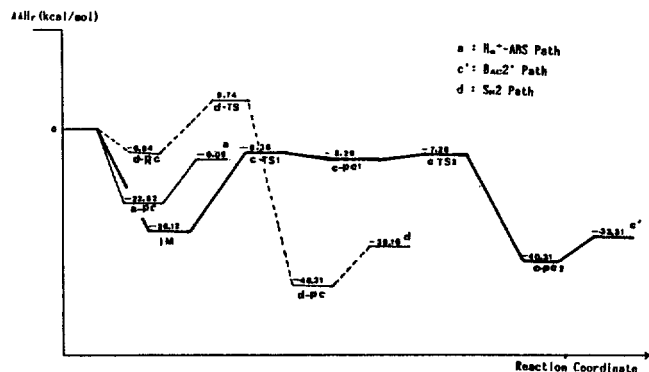


Figure 8. Potential energy profiles for the reaction of methyl formate with $^-\text{CH}_2\text{CN}$ (TS: Transition state, PC: Product complex, IM: Intermediate).

6-31G**/4-31G level than the lower level *ab initio* results using 3-21G basis set.

The potential energy profiles and the stationary points structures are presented in Figures 6 and 7. The CH_3O^- ion formation after the formyl proton abstraction is shown to be an endothermic process in Figure 6 in contrast to the exothermic (-3.7 kcal/mol) nature of the process experimentally. However even this exothermicity is unfavorable compared to the CH_3O^- ion formation in the $B_{AC}2'$ process. Again with ^-OH , the solvated ion and carbonyl ion ($\text{CH}_3\text{OC}(=\text{O})^-$) formations are possible after the formyl proton abstraction as they were with $^-\text{NH}_2$. Here also the mode of excess energy dissipation of the product complex will affect the ratio of the ions produced. The carbonyl anion formation is thermodynamically more favored than the solvated anion formation so that the carbonyl anion formation will be more facile.

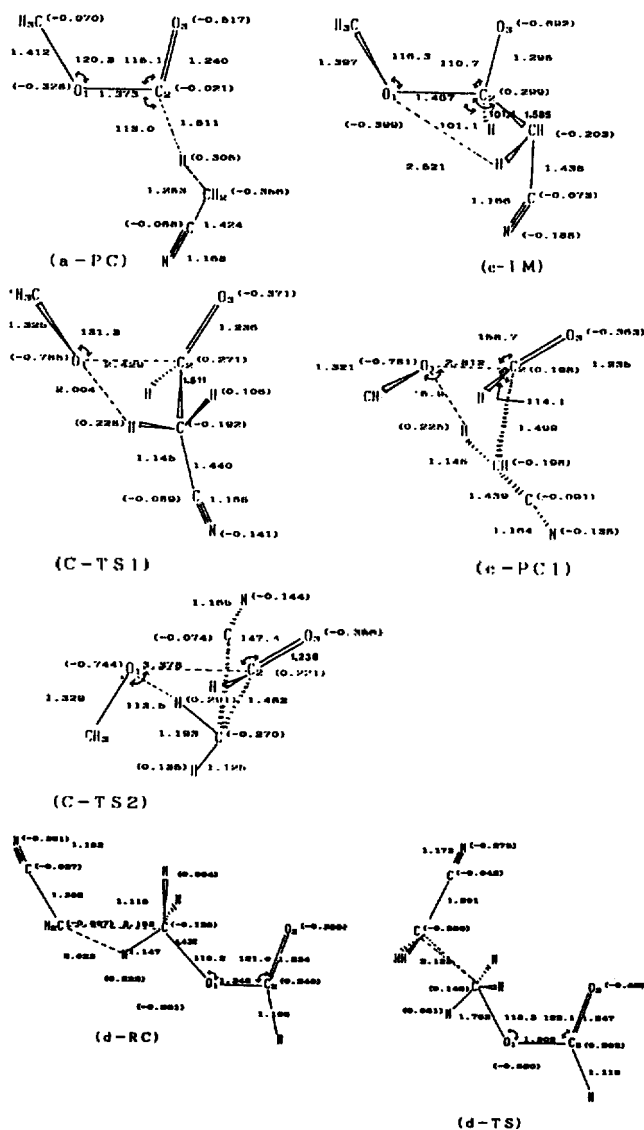


Figure 9. Stationary points structures in the reaction of methyl formate with $^-\text{CH}_2\text{CN}$.

In the carbonyl addition process, a tetrahedral intermediate is formed in the first step and subsequent CH_3O^- and HCO_2^- ion formations ($B_{AC}2'$) follow, as can be seen Figures 6 and 7. HCO_2^- ion formation is thermodynamically favored relative to the CH_3O^- formation. The barrier height in the $B_{AC}2'$ path reflects both the nucleophilicity of the ^-OH ion and the acidity of the substituted ^-OH ; thus the nucleophilicity of ^-OH appears to be weaker than that of $^-\text{NH}_2$ qualitatively judging by the barrier heights, while the acidity of ^-OH seems to be greater since no barrier exists in the case of ^-OH reaction.

In the S_{N2} process there is no reactant complex but a TS is obtained as shown in Figures 6 and 7. The HCO_2^- ion formation should result solely through the $B_{AC}2'$ process, since the S_{N2} TS constitutes a high energy barrier in the overall potential energy profile.

On the whole, in the reaction with ^-OH the proton abstraction process is less favorable than in the reaction with $^-\text{NH}_2$ due to somewhat weaker proton affinity. However the $B_{AC}2'$ process is greatly favored compared with the formyl proton

abstraction thermodynamically. The activation barrier in the $B_{AC2'}$ process is comparable to the energy for the product formation in the formyl proton abstraction process. These trends indicate that the $B_{AC2'}$ process is favored over the proton abstraction in the reaction of methyl formate with NH_2^- .

(iii) Reaction with CH_2CN^- ion. The CH_2CN^- ion has considerably weaker proton affinity compared to the NH_2^- and OH^- ions, making the proton abstraction process more difficult accordingly. The methyl proton abstraction path is not allowed thermodynamically (Table 3) and in the formyl proton abstraction the solvated anion formation is not possible from the product complex as can be seen in Figure 8 and 9 in contrast to the reactions with NH_2^- and OH^- .

The carbonyl addition process proceeds through an intermediate formation producing HC(=O)CHCN^- ion ($B_{AC2'}$ process), since the B_{AC2} process is unfavorable thermodynamically (Figures 8 and 9). The activation barrier in the $B_{AC2'}$ path ($c\text{-TS1}$) is a measure of the nucleophilicity of the CH_2CN^- ion and the barrier height of the $\text{TS2}(c\text{-TS2})$ reflects the acidity of the CH_2CN^- ion. The barrier height of the $\text{TS1}(c\text{-TS1})$ is higher than the corresponding barrier height for the NH_2^- ion, while that of the $\text{TS2}(c\text{-TS2})$ is lower than that for the NH_2^- ion; this indicates that the nucleophilicity is weaker while the acidity is stronger for CH_2CN^- than for the NH_2^- . The acidity of the substituted anions is in the order of $\text{OH}^- > \text{CH}_2\text{CN}^- > \text{NH}_2^-$.

In the S_N2 process, a reactant complex is formed between the methyl proton and the CH_2CN^- anion, since proton abstraction is impossible. The S_N2 TS has a positive (endothermic) barrier height so that the S_N2 process should be forbidden thermodynamically.

On the whole, the $B_{AC2'}$ process is favored compared to the formyl proton abstraction. Since the methyl proton abstraction is impossible, the $B_{AC2'}$ process will be more facile than the corresponding process in the reaction with OH^- .

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