

Cascading Small GTPases in Insulin Action

by

Tingting Xiong

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Alan R. Saltiel, Chair
Assistant Professor Ken Inoki
Associate Professor Jiandie Lin
Professor Jessica Schwartz
Professor John Williams

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
List of Figures.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Chapter	
1. Introduction	1
The insulin-responsive Glucose Transport Glut4.....	2
Insulin Signaling that regulates Glut4 trafficking	16
Roles and Regulations of Small GTPases in Glut4 Trafficking.....	31
Summary.....	55
References.....	57
2. Characterization of AS160 activity and its regulation by Akt	77
Introduction.....	77
Results.....	79
Discussion.....	98
Materials and Methods.....	99
References.....	104
3. Rab10 and RalA participate in a GTPase cascade	108
Introduction.....	108
Results.....	110
Discussion.....	122
Materials and Methods.....	123
References.....	126
4. Perspectives and Future Directions	130
References.....	137

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	Structure of the facilitative glucose transporters Glut1-4.....	3
Figure 1.2	Itinerary of Glut4 trafficking.....	7
Figure 1.3	The exocyst complex in Glut4 vesicle exocytosis.....	14
Figure 1.4	Insulin signaling pathways that regulate Glut4 trafficking.....	28
Figure 1.5	Biochemical features of small GTPases	35
Figure 1.6	Small GTPase cycle and regulation	37
Figure 1.7	Roles of small GTPases in Glut4 trafficking	41
Figure 2.1	AS160 preferentially interacts with Rab10 in the transition state.....	80
Figure 2.2	Development of effector pull-down assay for Rab10 activity	83
Figure 2.3	AS160 negatively regulates Rab10 activity <i>in vivo</i>	90
Figure 2.4	Akt phosphorylation negatively regulates AS160 GAP activity towards Rab10.....	95
Figure 3.1	Depletion of RGC2 and AS160 has no additive effect on glucose uptake... ..	111
Figure 3.2	Effect of Rab10 on RalA activity	113
Figure 3.3	Rab10 activates RalA in a RalGEF dependent manner	118
Figure 3.4	Rab10 activates RalA in a localization dependent manner.....	120
Figure 3.5	AS160 negatively regulates RalA activity through Rab10.....	121
Figure 4.1	Schematic of cascade activation of small GTPases in insulin-stimulated Glut4 exocytosis	136

ABSTRACT

Insulin stimulates glucose uptake into adipocytes and muscle cells by stimulating the translocation of the glucose transporter 4 Glut4 from intracellular storage vesicles to the plasma membrane. This process is tightly regulated by insulin signaling cascades in concert with vesicle transport machineries. Small GTPases such as Rab10 and RalA play important roles in insulin-stimulated Glut4 translocation by functioning at the intersection of insulin signaling and vesicle trafficking. A novel effector pull-down assay to evaluate the intracellular activity of Rab10 was developed and used to characterize Rab10 as a functional target of the Akt substrate protein AS160. AS160 contains a GAP (GTPase-activating protein) domain that directly stimulates guanosine triphosphate hydrolysis of Rab10, leading to inactivation of the small GTPase. We show that Akt-catalyzed phosphorylation of AS160 inhibits the GAP activity, as activated Akt relieves the inhibitory effect of AS160 on Rab10 activity.

Activated Rab10 promotes Glut4 translocation to the plasma membrane by recruiting downstream effector proteins. One potential downstream target of Rab10 is the RalA GTPase, which has been reported to mobilize the exocyst complex, targeting complex that guides the Glut4 vesicle to the plasma membrane. Overexpression of constitutively active Rab10 increases RalA activity, while depletion of Rab10 with siRNA-mediated knockdown significantly reduces RalA activation by insulin in adipocytes. Rab10 potentially regulates RalA activity through an as-yet-unidentified guanine-nucleotide exchange factor for RalA, which facilitates guanosine triphosphate binding to RalA, leading to activation of the small GTPase and mobilization of the exocyst complex.

Taken together, these data suggest that a small GTPase cascade of Rab10 and RalA, together with their regulatory GAP and GEF proteins, connects the insulin/Akt signaling pathway with the transport machineries in Glut4 translocation.