

The top U.S. transportation safety investigator has criticized companies such as Intel investing in in-car information technology, saying they're slowing efforts to reduce hazards from distracted driving. "If the technology producers focused more on what is safe (...) we'd see highway fatalities go down," National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Deborah Hersman said last week as she convened a distracted-driving forum in Washington.



Distracted driving caused by in-car use of electronics in cars has been the top safety priority of Ray LaHood since he became U.S. Transportation Secretary in 2009.

"We have got to dispel the myth of multitasking," Hersman said at the forum. "We are still learning what the human brain can handle. What is the price of our desire to be mobile and connected at the same time?"

Intel, the world's largest maker of semiconductors and computer chips, said last month they are expanding development of in-vehicle infotainment using Intel technology and their capital unit is creating a \$100m connected-car fund.

John Lee, a University of Wisconsin professor who has studied distracted driving, cited the Intel announcement at the forum as an example of companies focusing on selling gadgetry rather than improving safety.

Intel's work on automotive technologies will include finding ways to make such systems safer, said Laura Anderson, an Intel spokeswoman. The Transportation Department last month issued voluntary guidelines for automakers for built-in systems used for infotainment and navigation. The guidelines recommend that no task for drivers take longer than two seconds and that cars be stopped and immobilised (e.g., shifted into Park) before drivers can enter navigation commands or use social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

In 2010, more than 3,000 people, or 9% of road fatalities, were killed in crashes related to driver distraction, according to NHTSA.