

United States Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood says NHTSA aren't looking at new regulations to address distracted driving, but rather wants automakers to make voluntary efforts with new technology and education to combat risks.

LaHood says he's met with the CEOs of various automakers and "they're committed to safety." He also urged the US Congress to enact stricter laws on distracted driving and possibly a nationwide ban on cell phone use, though he offered no specifics, saying only it is his personal preference.



LaHood's comments came as his department unveiled a new "blueprint" to end distracted driving and announced \$2.4m in federal funding for California and Delaware to help with enforcement in those states. The funding builds on the department's previous efforts to reduce driver distraction: three years ago, LaHood launched a campaign to raise awareness about the dangers of distracted driving. He's even gone as far to label it an "epidemic" and says deaths due to distracted driving are "100 percent preventable".

In 2010 there were officially over 3,000 such fatalities. NHTSA believe the total could well be higher because drivers are often unwilling to admit to the behaviour and many crashes lack witnesses.

In December, the independent NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board) Chairwoman Deborah Hersman called for a ban on all phone use while driving, even with hands-free devices. In February, NHTSA proposed the agency's first-ever set of voluntary guidelines on distracted driving. These cover inbuilt vehicle equipment only, not standalone phone, and call for automakers to consider disabling apps like Facebook, Twitter and internet browsers unless a car is pulled over.

Automakers have pushed back, saying the guidelines are too restrictive and need to give more leeway for certain features, such as images and moving maps.