

JIM

This man feels more can be done to reduce the number of deaths on US roads. But finding the balance between safety and cost is the industry's ultimate balancing act

Sexy cars sell well – but safety isn't seen as a sexy subject yet. "Most people still look at styling," begins Jim Barbaresso, vice-president of ITS at HNTB in Michigan, USA, "but there is a trend toward a more environmental and safety-conscious consumer."

The 55-year-old believes manufacturers in the USA do not place enough emphasis on safety in their marketing campaigns, which bemuses him. With two teenage daughters, both of whom are now behind the wheel, safety features such as ESC, ABS, side airbags and structural integrity tick his boxes long before in-car entertainment systems, alloy wheels, and free insurance. "Admittedly," he continues, "it's hard to sell a feature that isn't visible to the consumer – until the time that they're needed."

At the time of our conversation, Barbaresso is negotiating the halls of the Detroit International Auto Show, checking out the latest technology to make its way into the 2008/2009-model vehicles. He spent a fair amount of time in the GM pavilion and was pleased to observe the amount of onboard wizardry on display.

One of the safety features that jumped out for him was Cadillac's lane departure warning system, although 'Boss' – the Chevrolet Tahoe that won the DARPA Urban Challenge in November 2007 – was perhaps the main highlight. "It may not have been

the prettiest vehicle at the show, but to my eyes it was a work of art."

DOWN TO BUSINESS

He's like a kid in a candy shop while perusing such exhibits, but Barbaresso's visit was more business than pleasure. His company, HNTB, is under contract with the Michigan DOT to provide technical and administrative support for Michigan's VII program. HNTB has been the designer and engineer of record for both the I-696 POC testbed and I-96 testbed expansion projects in Metropolitan Detroit. Additionally, it is involved with the Michigan DOT in developing a VII demonstration for the ITS Michigan Annual Meeting in May, at which up to 10 applications will be demonstrated.

HNTB is also involved in Florida's VII program as a technical advisor to the Florida DOT. But on a higher standards and national program level, HNTB is a member and key contributor to the OmniAir Consortium – which is currently developing a national 5.9GHz DSRC Certification Program under cooperative agreement with the USDOT.

Much has been written about VII in these pages, and although Barbaresso feels that many technical and institutional questions remain, market forces seem to be driving the direction of the program. "Taking advantage of this momentum is key to going forward," he says. "I am a proponent of this approach

BARBARARESSO