

Neil Amstutz - Comments

While current vehicles are safer and more efficient than previous generations, we will never reach a point where all traffic accidents, injuries and deaths are eliminated no matter how much technology is added to a vehicle. The premise that more technology must be added to increase safety does not take into account the additional cost that is added to a commercial vehicle in both initial acquisition and in ongoing maintenance. Between government regulations and the industry push for more data collection that would eventually allow for vehicle-to-vehicle communication, commercial vehicles are becoming so complex that they will end up spending more time in a service facility being serviced than they will out on the road delivering materials and goods that keep the economy rolling. I compare it to trying to use the space shuttle to deliver your groceries. It just will not be practical. We have to find a balance where the vehicles are cost effective and not cost prohibitive. Twenty five years ago the biggest issue in the commercial vehicle industry was tractor-trailers with brakes out of adjustment. The government mandated automatic brake adjusters. That improved the situation but didn't completely eliminate the issue. A few years later the government mandated anti-lock brakes. More regulations followed, mandating shorter stopping distances. Accidents still occur. The latest push is for roll-stability systems and disc brakes. Twenty five years ago the cost of some of the valving used to control the braking system could be purchased for under \$80. Today, a valve/ecu unit that controls anti-lock brakes and roll-stability will cost a fleet over \$1400 just for the part, and that doesn't cover the diagnostic charges to determine what the issue is. With traditional s-cam drum brakes, a brake chamber is \$40. For disc brakes the chamber is \$200. Disc brakes are definitely better than the drum brakes, but at what point would we acknowledge that we've reached a balance of the best braking system we can get for a reasonable sum of money. Fleets don't want or need a tractor trailer braking system to be a \$50,000 technological marvel that can literally stop on a dime, because it would be too expensive to operate and only so much cost can be pushed off on consumers of the goods and materials being delivered before an economical breaking point is reached. While technological advances should be investigated in controlled situations, the industry does not need further mandates that drive the cost up but have little real world impact. Unfortunately, traffic accidents will still occur regardless of how much technology is added, because there are always other factors. The weather, animals, poorly maintained roads, public infrastructure that collapses due to inadequate maintenance, and the driving public that share the roads with the commercial traffic will always contribute to commercial vehicle accidents no matter how many systems are developed and added. We can't bubble wrap everything in the world and technology, while great in some regards, is not the cure-all that will create an accident-free world. I sell parts for commercial vehicles and have for the last quarter-century, so I have seen all of the changes, including mandated emissions and fuel economy regulations, and I don't agree that more complexity is always a beneficial thing. We don't need the space shuttle to deliver our goods to the store and our building materials to the manufacturers sites. We need trucks rolling, not parked in a shop having diagnostics run because yet another technology failed.