

What is a Façade Access Strategy?



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There is growing interest in creating more environmentally responsive and culturally appropriate façades for tall buildings, moving beyond the “wall of glass” standard to add more texture and opacity. Whatever solution is chosen, the overall façade access strategy must be considered so that it can be properly maintained. We asked a CTBUH expert, “What is a façade access strategy, and why does a tall building need one?”

The building façade is always visible to everyone from the outside. To the occupiers, however, the façade is the barrier that keeps the external and internal environments separate. Without a clear and successful façade access strategy, the asset is in danger of not being cleaned or maintained correctly. All modern façades will have a MMR (Minimum Maintenance Requirement) to maintain the warranty for the façade, an area of the building that is highly significant and costly. Poor adherence to this MMR will invalidate the warranty and undoubtedly affect the value of the asset itself.

There are many dirty buildings in the world’s cities, but non-visible maintenance works that need to be carried out are far more significant to a building owner, including leaking, broken glass, gardening on green walls and delivery of equipment, such as MEP plant.

As tall building designs become increasingly complex, consider these questions: What is a façade access strategy? What equipment is required for the façade access strategy? What if there is no robust, economical and project-specific strategy?

A façade access strategy defines the method by which access is possible to the entire building envelope, ensuring the façade can be cleaned for aesthetic reasons and maintaining warranties. Façade warranties require that it be cleaned on a regular basis, and that fixings, gaskets and seals can be inspected and repaired, ensuring water tightness. A good strategy ensures glass and

façade panels can be replaced when damaged. An even better strategy ensures that lighting and LED video screens are maintained and that the façade enables vegetation, trees and potentially MEP equipment to be delivered to roofs.

There are many variations of equipment that need access. Roof-based Building Maintenance Units (BMUs) typically include integrated units, with hoists located in the roof car to lift the suspended platform (with personnel) vertically through the height of the façade. Roof-based equipment to support suspended platforms (with hoists fitted to the platform) includes fixed or traveling davits and monorails, and can be used for abseiling if designed appropriately. For lower areas, MEWPS (Mobile Elevating Work Platforms), aerial work platforms or scissor lifts are generally used. Fall-prevention systems such as safety lines, safety anchors and handrails are applied to unprotected edges.

In the absence of a robust project-specific strategy, access equipment is provided by a BMU contractor, typically engaged by the builder. A façade access consultant must be engaged by the design team at an early stage of the process to provide a successful and cost-effective strategy.

There are significant consequences of not clearly defining and delivering a robust façade access strategy. For one, the façade cannot be properly inspected, cleaned or maintained. A dirty building is very obvious, and can lead to occupier dissatisfaction, especially if there are leaks that are not promptly rectified. This



affects the rental or sale potential of the building and the owner’s financial returns. The cost of ad-hoc repairs or complicated delivery of glass is likely to far exceed normal ongoing costs under a robust strategy.

If a façade access strategy is not addressed during the design stage, the equipment installed could be unsuitably heavy, unable to access all areas, or have an excessive cleaning cycle. This could result in high rectification costs or higher ongoing operational costs. ■

About the Author

Peter Inglis is Director and Principal Consultant at Access Advisors, an international consultancy specialising in façade access. He is a peer reviewer of the upcoming CTBUH Technical Guide *Façade Access & Maintenance for High-Rise Buildings*. It is available for purchase at: store.ctbuh.org/facadeaccess

