

# Compliance-led Approach Leaves Lift Sustainability Underdelivered in FM Sector

2 months ago



With facilities managers facing increasing pressure to reduce operational carbon across estates, new research suggests that a compliance-led approach to sustainability is leaving gaps in building performance.

The research, commissioned by [PEW Electrical](#), found that more than half (57%) of FMs say that they rarely consider sustainability and carbon reduction beyond basic compliance. This gap is even more pronounced when it comes to lifts and escalators, with 74% saying that government regulation remains the primary driver of change in sustainable lift strategies.

Furthermore, over two thirds (71%) of facilities managers say that they prioritise other areas of the building, such as heating, over vertical transport when looking to reduce carbon emissions. Together, this demonstrates that lift systems are often overlooked within wider decarbonisation strategies.

The findings also point to a range of practical barriers limiting progress. Half (50%) of respondents cite budget constraints and upfront costs as the biggest challenge to improving sustainability in vertical transport, underscoring the financial pressures facing facilities teams especially as energy costs remain volatile.

However, budget constraints are not the only barrier. Other challenges include a lack of clear guidance specific to lifts (26%), limited data on long-term savings (26%), insufficient incentives from authorities (26%), and gaps in internal expertise and training (24%).

Technical challenges associated with retrofitting older systems also remain a concern, with almost a quarter (21%) identifying this as a key issue.

Jason Clark, registered engineer and Chairman at PEW Electrical, said: “Our research shows that, too often, sustainability is still being treated as a tick-box exercise rather than a performance priority. This is particularly true when it comes to vertical transport.

“On average, lifts account for 8% of a building’s overall electricity consumption<sup>[1]</sup>, yet their performance is rarely measured or prioritised in practice. That needs to change. If we’re serious about reducing carbon emissions, we need to shift towards a more performance-led approach, where systems are actively measured, managed and optimised over time.

“And, at a time when energy costs remain volatile, improving how systems perform in-use isn’t just a sustainability issue, it’s a commercial one, too.”

Eur Ing Prof Dave Cooper, CEO of [LECS UK](#) added: “There’s no doubt that there are energy efficiency gains being left on the table when it comes to lifts for both new installations and refurbishment projects. Our team of independent consulting engineers are increasingly specifying energy-efficient lift systems as standard, particularly on large-scale refurbishment projects targeting BREEAM accreditation. But the best outcomes are always achieved when we are engaged at the earliest design stage.”

Despite the challenges, the findings point to strong intent across the sector. Over 70% of FMs said that the sustainability credentials of lifts and escalators are integral to their strategy, and 51% report growing demand from clients and tenants for more sustainable systems.

Further to this, only 15% of respondents say that the options for improving lift sustainability are limited, indicating that the tools and technologies already exist within the market.

The findings therefore point to a need for greater support, clarity and capability across the sector. Facilities managers identified several key areas that would enable progress, including better access to cost-effective technologies (51%), improved energy monitoring and data analytics (50%), increased training and professional development (49%) and clearer government guidance and incentives (40%).

Clark added: “The demand is there. The technology exists. And FMs want to do the right thing. That means the opportunity is there for the taking. What’s needed now is the right support around it – better data, clearer guidance, more training and the confidence to move beyond minimum compliance.

“If we want to improve the operational performance of our buildings, lift systems need to be part of that conversation. They’re used every day, and over time, their impact adds up.”

PEW Electrical is encouraging facilities managers, managing agents and asset owners to take a proactive approach to the operational performance of lifts, supported by better data, clearer frameworks and closer collaboration with specialist suppliers.

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