1886 – 1986: a century separates these two notable dates for Le Port, the only true port city of the Island of La Réunion. 1886: that of the creation of a port and its city on virgin land. 1986, the inauguration, 3km away, of a new port, the "East port" which now renders possible the mutation of a city which was born around the port, a city that was entirely and uniquely dedicated, even to its name, to the requirements of the port. Le Port is seeing today an acceleration of the change which is giving it a completely different dimension and a new identity.

"Port Réunion" a port of National Interest with a concession granted to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Reunion (CCIR) covers, on its two sites – West port (or Pointe des Galets) and the new port to the East –, all types of port activities: cargo, deep-sea fishing, Naval, yachting, cruises, ship repairs. Its position at the crossroads of the Asia/America and Europe/Africa ocean routes constitutes without any doubt an advantage towards becoming a transhipment platform for cargo in the Indian Ocean. Between competition and cooperation, the positioning of Port Réunion is a balancing game that has to be ceaselessly redefined: cooperation with the ports with them in the Association of Ports of the Islands of the Indian Ocean founded in 2007 (Madagascar, Mauritius, Mayotte,
Reunion and Seychelles) cooperation and competition with the two big neighbouring ports, Port Louis and Durban. BRL Ingenierie (a member of AIVP) were selected with Aegis Eau and MLTC to draw up the Master Plan 2015/2040. They have to look into the future to define the further economic and development prospects of Port Reunion: a port at the service of the foreign trade of Reunion and a hub to serve the secondary ports of the zone aiming at trade with Europe, a platform in competition with Port Louis and Durban also aiming at lines with Asia... the scenarios are open-ended.

However, the vocation as a transhipment platform has already been asserted with the inauguration, in September 2008, of the 5 hectare extension to the container terminal in the East port, thus doubling stacking capacity. The overall traffic of the port is constantly growing and reached 4.3 million tonnes in 2008 (+1.8% against 2007). In the second half of the year however, as in numerous ports all over the world, a slowdown commenced. The 1st half of 2009 confirmed this fall with -11%, a drop which notably affected the container traffic (-24%) whilst liquid and dry bulk maintained a small growth (+5% and +2% respectively).

Nevertheless the growth in containers had been regular up to then, going from 155 900 TEUs in 2000 to 255 371 in 2008. Programmed for 2010 and 2011, the modernisation of 3 gantries, already meeting European standards, should enable them to be ready for the recovery (costing 9 million euros, this modernisation will bring the handling rate up to 25 containers an hour).
But it is also an inversion of trend that could modify the deal. The container sector is predominately an import one and the percentage of empty containers is currently very large (60% against 30% in Durban). Several ideas are under study to identify traffics likely cause a drop in this rate: waste materials (such as scrap metal), materials connected with solar energy based on all the know-how developed in the island in the last few years, but also sugar, one of the main traffics of the island. Today sugar (130 000 tonnes) is handled in bulk, mainly shipped to Nantes and Marseille. But at 30% the refined or semi refined sugar, which generate local added value, is already handled in containers.

The necessary heavy investments on the sugar silo, at present in the old port of Pointe des Galets, should accelerate this movement towards containers. The development of these traffics, and the consequent reduction in the number of empty containers, could help to entice operators. This would doubtless be a strong card in the positioning of the port in the region.

At the same time, it would provide new opportunities on a land site close to the city. The same thing applies to the creation of a grain terminal planned by 2011 in the new port to meet the increase in the needs of the population of an island which would like to be autonomous in these agricultural sectors. Developed in a public private partnership between the CCIR and a subsidiary of the Vinci Group, it should bring the storage capacity to 60 000 tonnes in a first phase, against the 35 000 tonnes at present, with the possibility of subsequently being enlarged to 120 000 tonnes.

With these numerous projects and the evolution of the installations currently present on the Pointe des Galets site, the story is accelerating for Le Port, the story of a mutation undertaken over the last few years and which can, in the course taken and the ambitions asserted, be traced back to the very name of the initial programme “City and Port, the City is the Port”.

From a city subjected to its port towards a city open to the oceans

1886, as already stated saw the inauguration of the port of Pointe des Galets and its railway, 1895 the official birth-date of the city of Le Port, a workingman’s city of 4000 inhabitants on a small territory of 16 km². It was a single minded city, an instrumental city, entirely organised just for the economic development of the port and with a layout designed solely to ensure the requirements of the transit of goods. The years 1960’s brought about the rupture between the city, the port and the sea: the railway ceased activity, fencing was built around the docks, thus materialising the physical – and symbolic – frontier with the city, and a coast road was constructed.
The arrival of a new Municipal Council in 1971 marked the break, with a first masterplan which would be the foundation of an urban planning to fight against insalubrities, an assertion of the desire to create a green city, and the restructuring of the city by opening it to the sea. This was supported by a large campaign of land acquisition bearing on 75% of its territory. The "City and Port, City is the Port" programme was inspired by this. It led, in March 2000, to the adoption by the institutional partners (State, Region, Département, CCIR and the City) of a charter bearing on its operational implementation. It will be based on the strategic plan elaborate by Architecture Studio.

With the will to open the city to its port, it was a completely new logic that had to be engaged: to go from this instrumental city, the layout of which had been initially organised in a logic of transit, to a logic of porosity reorganising streets and traffic movements and opening spaces in order to enable the city to open itself to a sea coast itself becoming a new centre of attraction. The challenge was also at the same time to manage to increase the density of the city to correspond to its demography (from 40 000 inhabitants to a forecast 60 000 for 2020), a city with a restricted territory and extremely protective of its environment and which is multiplying initiatives to meet its objective of becoming autonomous for energy by 2030.
One of the major projects to provide an answer to this is the creation of a new axis the Mail de l’Océan – Ocean Mall - where works started last spring. By 2012 it will traverse the city from East to West over 2 km. It will be accompanied by a housing programme (400 housing units, 1300 people), in particular of medium and high class accommodation which are currently lacking.

This new axis will open onto the Pointe des Galets square, a public area designed to fit in with the "Grands Maisons – Big Mansions", colonial style houses which will be transformed into museums open to the public in a 20 000m² park looking out over the port of Pointe des Galets. Overlooking the quays, city blocks combining accommodation and shops are programmed. To respond to the principle of porosity, gaps are planned between the blocks to give views of the port from the neighbouring streets whilst the frontages of the buildings will be treated in cascade opening on the new waterfront.

The old cargo port of Pointe des Galets is also the subject of a project of change and has started to develop new relations with the city. The inhabitants of the port have been able to rediscover the sea thanks to the Nautical Base of Mascareignes and the yacht harbour which has been enlarged. With 472 moorings, it is the biggest yacht harbour of the Island of Reunion. Close to the Nautical Base, works to dig out a new dock for ocean yachting in the place of warehouse N° 80 will start in June 2010. Costing 24 million euros, it will provide 60 to 70 quayside berths. It will also enable the organisation of ocean yacht races to be envisaged but also to receive a fleet of small boats connected with tourist activities (sea-trips, diving, etc.).
At the same time, the objective is to provide an attractiveness and a tourist essence to this sector (other than the Nautical Base already created which will be supplemented by a new building on another site, shops, hotels, and a tourist and museographic equipment with regional vocation are also in the programme of a Concerted Development Zone) but also to give life to the dock basins with numerous activities. Ship repairs and the French Navy vessels (Le Port is the third biggest French naval base) are thus still present in this sector.

In the same spirit, the installation of a future passenger terminal is being studied for the inter-island traffic and, besides this, the industrial fishing activities, a booming sector, have not only been conserved but are henceforth reinforced with an enlarged dock basin and new installations operational since last July. The sector of the transformation of products of the sea should also be developed.

The movement towards the new port of the grain & cereals activities (Warehouse 90) and the sugar silos could also take place subsequently.
The time necessary for a reflexion which had to completely rethink a city in its entirety is past; the rhythm of change seems to be accelerating for Le Port and it is a completely new face which will henceforth rapidly be provided to the inhabitants of the port and to visitors; a new face, but also a completely new city – port identity in the heart of the Indian Ocean that recent creation, under the aegis of the AIVP, of the Observatory Cities Ports Indian Ocean will come to consolidate.

Members of the AIVP:

- City of Le Port
- CCI de la Réunion
- Conseil Régional de la Réunion
- Réunion Services Maritimes

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