River Bend almost ready

Gulf States Utilities' River Bend nuclear power plant is about 94 percent complete. The company now estimates the cost to be $2.72 billion, plus approximately $600 million in interest costs. If the current timetable holds up, GSU expects to begin loading radioactive fuel in April. After several months of low-power testing, the plant would get its full-power license by the end of the year and begin commercial operation.

Insulated pipes carry steam from a high-pressure turbine, then to reheating units and again through low-pressure turbines.

The top of the reactor vessel, now covered by plastic, is at the bottom of this chamber.

Cylindrical objects in foreground, called steam separators, will be placed over the fuel bundles inside the reactor.

Turbine, in background, is turned by steam from water heated by the reactor. Generator, foreground, transforms energy from the turbine into electricity.

Another view of the turbine and generator gives some idea of the size of the plant.

Cars, trucks and buses — transportation for some 5,000 people who are working on the plant — fill the parking area.