**PassioGO: AI-Powered Transit Assistance for Kent State Students**

School of Emerging Media and Technology, Kent State University

EMAT 33310: Human-Computer Interaction

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**Abstract**

This report presents the design, prototyping, and evaluation of a redesigned campus bus app, aimed at addressing usability issues in the existing PassioGO system. Based on user need finding, the core challenges identified were difficulty in planning routes and managing daily commuting schedules. To address these pain points, I developed a mobile prototype featuring AI-based route suggestions and customizable daily scheduling with real-time notifications. This document outlines the research and design process from neat finding interviews to low fidelity prototyping and usability testing. Findings from a mini usability study informed updates to the prototype, demonstrating how AI and user-centered scheduling features can enhance the campus commuting experience.

*Keywords: usability testing, user experience, public transit, low-fidelity prototype, daily commuting, mobile UI, campus transportation*

**Problem Space**

Passio Go! It is a transit app that is widely used by university students and commuters to track buses in real time, and is the specific program used by Kent State University. While the app is generally appreciated for its live tracking and route information, there is a noticeable gap in its ability when it comes to planning and scheduling trips. Users face difficulties when trying to plan trips in advance, which can lead to confusion as well as tardiness, especially for those who rely on public transportation to commute.

This study will focus on the usability issues associated with the trip planning and scheduling features of Passio Go. The problem mostly exists in helping users choose the best routes, schedule their trips, and set up reminders or notifications for their upcoming trips. This issue is especially relevant in a university environment where students, faculty, and staff rely on the app to manage their daily commutes.

**User Types**

The user base for Passio Go is diverse amongst Kent locals, with varying needs when it comes to trip planning.

1. Commuters (Primary Users): These are daily users, such as students or staff members who use the buses to commute from their off-campus house to get to school. They need a reliable way to check the schedules to plan their trips around class or work times.
2. Students (Secondary Users): These are people who use the buses to get from their dorm or car on campus to their classrooms or other off-campus locations. They need to plan their trips to avoid being late for class.
3. Infrequent or Occasional Users: These may include users who live on campus and want to plan an occasional weekend trip home and rely on public transportation. Their needs include figuring out how to use the app for longer trips.

**Need finding Methodology**

To explore the usability issues around Passio Go, I interviewed three different types of students to get the best results. I chose these three people because they are all Kent State students and deal with the buses, and they all use them for different reasons, so I could get varied responses.

1. Participant 1: Emma – Emma is a university student who currently lives in Tallmadge and uses the PassioGo and Parta bus system to get to campus every day. She was selected because she had shared complaints with me in the past how it was difficult to catch the bus every day. I interviewed her at her house.
2. Participant 2: Christina – Christina is a commuter, but she uses the bus system and app to get from the parking lot across campus to her classes every day. Christina is one of my best friends, and she has classes in the Integrated Sciences Building and also in Oscar Ritchie Hall, and they are only 15 minutes apart, so she has to catch the bus to get there in time. I interviewed her in the Integrated Sciences Building.

A large room with a large screen

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1. Participant 3: Jenna – Jenna is a more occasional user, she lives in a dorm on campus, and uses Passio Go and the buses to take weekend trips home to Cleveland. Jenna is someone from one of my old classes, and I remember having to teach her how to figure out which bus she needed to get home. I interviewed her at the campus loop bus stop.

A bus parked at a building

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Before interviewing them, I watched people at the main bus stop in the campus loop at the front of campus. I noticed many people, not just students, growing impatient, especially in the cold weather. I also noticed people checking their phones, for what I can guess is to check the time, and track the buses.

**Interview Questions**

When interviewing, I tried to come up with about 10 questions per participant that heavily focused on their emotions towards the app. I also split them into categories.

**Emma’s questions**

Daily use and habits:

1. “Can you walk me through how you use Passio Go to get to campus?”
2. “Do you feel confident relying on Passio Go for your commute, or do you take extra precautions?”
3. “How far in advance do you check the app before heading to the bus stop?”

Frustrations:

1. “Are there certain times of day when the app is more/less reliable for planning?”
2. “Have you ever experienced inaccurate or outdated schedule information? How did it impact your trip?”
3. “Have you ever experienced issues where the app didn’t provide enough details for your trip?”

Alternative Solutions and Improvements:

1. "Do you use any other apps or resources to help plan your trip, such as Google Maps or the Kent State website?"
2. “If Passio Go could offer one feature to improve the trip planning experience, what would it be?”

Emotional and personal impact:

1. “How does it feel when you’re unsure about your bus schedule? Does it add stress to your day?”
2. “Has a scheduling issue ever made you late for something important? How did you handle it?”

**Christina’s questions**

Commuting Journey & Decision-Making:

1. "Can you describe your typical commute, from driving in to taking the bus?"
2. "How do you decide whether to take the bus or walk to class? Does Passio GO influence that decision?"
3. "When you park your car, how do you determine which bus to take and when?"

Challenges & Frustrations:

1. "Have you ever struggled to find real-time information on Passio GO when transitioning from your car to the bus?"
2. "Has the app ever given you inaccurate arrival times? What did you do in that situation?"

Alternative Solutions & Workarounds:

1. "Do you use other methods, like asking people at the bus stop or checking other apps, to confirm your travel plan?"
2. "Would you prefer a feature that allows you to input your class time and get reminders on when to leave your car?"

Impact on Your Routine:

1. "Has an issue with the bus schedule ever caused you to be late for class? How did that make you feel?"

Feature Requests & Improvements:

1. "Would a feature that predicts the best parking lot based on bus arrival times be helpful? Why or why not?"
2. "If Passio GO could integrate with Google Calendar and send you notifications about when to leave your car, would you use it?"

**Jenna’s questions**

Trip Planning for Longer Journeys

1. "Since your trips home are less frequent, how do you typically plan them?"
2. "Do you check Passio GO multiple times before a long trip, or do you rely on it once before leaving?"
3. "Have you ever had trouble finding the right schedule for a longer-distance trip?"

Challenges & Uncertainty

1. "Do delays or last-minute schedule changes make it harder for you to plan your trip?"

Alternative Solutions & Back-Up Plans

1. "Do you rely on any other tools (Google Maps, Kent State resources, friends) to help plan your trip?"
2. "If a bus schedule issue arises, what’s your backup plan? Do you wait, call someone, or look for alternative transportation?"

Emotional & Personal Impact

1. "How stressful is it when you’re uncertain about whether you’ll make it home on time?"
2. "Has an issue with the app ever made you change your travel plans completely?"

Feature Requests & Improvements

1. "Would you like an option where Passio GO helps you plan your entire trip home, including connections or alternatives?"
2. "If Passio GO could send real-time updates about delays or better route options, how useful would that be?"

**Interview Results**

From the interviews, several key themes emerged that highlight the painful points of users’ experiences when they try to plan trips using Passio Go! The common themes that I found with all three interviews were that they thought that the usability, accuracy, and the user experience were the biggest downfalls in the specific area of planning ahead on the app. The main problems were the real-time tracking issues, limited long term planning, no integration with other transit systems, and inconvenient notifications or lack thereof.

During Emma’s interview, the main things I found out from her responses were that she thought the app had inconsistent arrival predictions, a lack of route recommendations for newer users, and issues with the notifications. She said that “sometimes the app says the bus is at a location where it would be coming in five minutes, then the location jumps to somewhere else where it’s arriving right now. It’s really frustrating when I am trying to leave on time.” I noticed that Emma’s route to school from her house is almost 44 minutes, including all of the stops, making it crucial that she leaves on time. When she looks up the route on Apple Maps, it tells her one bus that is not even on the Passio Go app. She also said that when she “first used the app, I had no idea which bus stop was closest to me and I had to figure it out myself.” She shared complaints about the lack of a notification system that worked for her situation.

A screenshot of a phone

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From Christina’s interview, she shared that she had difficulty timing the bus departures from the parking lots. She stated that she “usually parks in the same place, but the bus schedule never matches up.” She said sometimes she will walk to class if the bus is taking far longer than predicted. She also complained of the lack of trip planning features and notifications. She says, “I wish there was a way to put in my class schedule and locations and have the app tell me the best bus to take every day.” She also stated that if a bus is running late, she does not find out until she is already standing there waiting. I learned from her interview that people would like a personalized feature.

In Jenna’s interview, my key findings were that it was confusing for long-term scheduling options, she had frustration with the limited weekend and evening options, and it did not integrate well into other transit options. She said that “I wish I could check the schedules further in advance, and it would be accurate, I don’t have time to watch the buses in real time.” She also explained that during her trip, she is not only on the PARTA buses at the Kent State campus, but the Passio Go app only lists them there, so she will have to go onto Apple Maps to find the other buses. She expressed her frustration with the lack of options with evening trips, stating, “It’s hard to plan a trip home when the buses don’t run as often, and the app doesn’t suggest other ways to get there.” Her interview showed me that many people rely on outside sources to find the directions to their destination, and I should find a way to integrate that.

**Analysis**

Key findings

* Users rely heavily on Passio Go for real-time tracking, but the lack of a clear scheduling feature creates frustration, especially when they need to plan in advance.
* Many users also use other apps along with PassioGo to plan their routes and check schedules, making it clear that the app could benefit from better planning tools.
* Infrequent users struggle to understand how to use the apps for long-distance trips.

Interesting and Important

* Users work around the app’s limitations. All three participants mentioned using other apps to compensate for what Passio Go lacks.
* There is a strong demand for personalization. All the participants brought up the idea of a personalized schedule based on habits and the ability to save frequent trips.
* I found it interesting that commuting is not one-size-fits-all. Although all users used the app for the same purpose, their needs differed greatly.

Initial Needs and Insights

* Trip Scheduling Feature: Users need the ability to schedule their trips in advance, set reminders, and get notifications when the buses arrive.
* Integration with Other Apps: for a better experience, Passio Go could integrate with apps like Apple Maps to provide better route planning and real-time tracking.
* Route Suggestions: The app could improve by recommending the best routes based on user preferences and current traffic.

**Summary**

Based on my findings, I want to enhance Passio Go with a dedicated trip scheduling feature. This would allow users to:

* Get route recommendations: The app will suggest the best bus routes based on time, location, and destination. Also, they will be able to input their schedule, and it will suggest routes for them.
* Set personalized alerts: Users will be able to receive reminders when it’s time for them to leave for their bus.
* Plan trips in advance: Users will be able to select a departure time and receive notifications when their bus stop is approaching.

By improving trip planning and scheduling, Passio Go could become a more comprehensive transit tool, reducing users’ need to rely on other apps. This could improve the commuting experience for staff, students, and daily riders. It will also make the app more personal and much easier to navigate, to help users better navigate their travels.

After conducting user interviews and defining the core usability challenges within the existing PassioGO system, I transitioned into the design phase of the project. Drawing from the insights gathered, particularly the need for clear route planning and daily schedule automation, I developed 2 distinct design concepts to address these issues. The following section outlines my low-fidelity prototypes and explores my interface in greater detail.

**Introduction**

Mission Statement / Value Proposition

Navigating public transportation efficiently is a challenge for many Kent State students, especially for commuters and first-time bus riders. This project aims to simplify the experience of using Passio GO, with an AI-powered transit assistant that provides optimized routes, real-time updates, and the ability to create a schedule for rides and notifications.

Problem / Solution Overview

Many students struggle with unreliable bus schedules, route confusion, and the inefficiencies in the Passio GO app. The proposed solution is a redesigned mobile interface that incorporates AI to recommend the best route based on user preferences, and allows students to set a recurring daily route for their convenience. This will help students and staff save time, reduce stress, and increase confidence in travelling with public transportation.

**Sketches**

Overview of Initial Concept Sketches

The initial concept sketches explore two distinct design directions:

1. AI-Powered Route Optimization: Focuses on using AI to generate the best transit route based on user input, such as time constraints and other preferences. (See figure 1, page 2)
2. Gamified Transit and Productivity Tracker: Uses a reward system where users earn points for using public transportation efficiently, encouraging more engagement with the app. (See figure 2, page 2)

A group of cell phones

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Figure 1: The initial design for idea #1.

A few notes on a whiteboard

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Figure 2: The initial sketch for idea #2.

UI Sketches

To visualize how users interact with the interface, I designed storyboards for each design concept, showcasing how the user navigates through the proposed application.

Storyboard 1: AI-Powered Route Optimization (See figure 3, page 3)

1. Home Screen: Users can choose to search for a route using voice control or search, and they can see their saved routes.
2. AI Chat: Users can interact with the suggested routes by selecting one or asking another question to the AI Chatbot.
3. Route Details: Displays bus stops, walk times, ETA, and live tracking.
4. Live Map: Users can track their bus with live bus tracking, and they receive notifications on how close the bus is.

Interactions and Transitions:

* Selecting the search bar or using voice search brings the user to AI chat.
* Selecting a route triggers the route information screen.
* Selecting track bus brings users to live tracking.

A drawing of a smartphone

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Figure 3: The detailed UI sketch for idea #1.

Storyboard 2: Gamified Transit and Productivity Tracker (See figure 4, page 5)

1. Home Screen: Displays live bus schedule, bus riding streak, Kent State leaderboard, and tasks.
2. Task Screen: Shows a list of daily goals as well as goals for the week. Also displays an option to see the map.
3. Bus Tracker: displays all of the buses on the campus, as well as how far they are from the user’s current location. Also gives the option to change the mode of the app.
4. Focus Mode: User is in focus mode, intended for bus rides for users to focus on their set tasks. Has the streak button as well.
5. Streaks/Leaderboard: Displays the user’s current bus ride streak, leaderboard, achievements, and different ways to earn points.

Interactions and Transitions:

* Selecting the add task brings the user to the task screen.
* Selecting focus mode pauses all notifications on the user’s phone.
* Users can view past achievements in the rewards screen.

A drawing of a phone and a note

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Figure 4: The detailed UI sketch for idea #2.

**Selected Interface Design**

Design Choice and Rationale

After evaluating both design ideas, the AI-powered route optimization approach was selected for further development.

AI-Powered Planner:

* Pros:
  + Very simple, AI suggests routes automatically
  + Real-time AI can improve navigation accuracy
  + Can adjust notification preferences
* Cons
  + Passive (user just follows route suggestions)

Gamified Transit Tracker:

* Pros:
  + More interactive and fun
  + Users can set their own goal
* Cons:
  + More complex, requires setting goals
  + Gamification may not appeal to all users

Functionality table:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Feature** | **Description** | **User Benefit** |
| **Find Best Route** | AI generates the most efficient transit route based on real-time bus locations and user input. | Ensures users take the fastest, most reliable option. |
| **Live Bus Tracking** | Users see real-time updates for their bus, including delays or changes. | Reduces uncertainty and improves planning. |
| **Step-by-Step Navigation** | Provides clear walking and transit directions, updating dynamically as the user moves. | Helps first-time users and commuters unfamiliar with certain stops. |
| **Set Daily Routine** | Users input their routine schedule, and the app saves their preferred route. | Automates transit planning and sends daily notifications. |
| **Notifications and Reminders** | Users receive alerts before their bus arrives and updates on delays. | Prevents missed buses and optimizes time management. |

Storyboards

* Task 1: Using AI to Find the Best Route (See Figure 5, page 6)
  + Users select their destination
  + AI suggests the best few routes
  + The user selects the route they like most
  + Live maps display the buses and also show the walk to the bus stop
  + Users get directions to stop, and the app notifies them when the bus gets closer

A few different types of mobile phones

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Figure 5: The UI storyboard for task 1.

Task 2: Setting a Daily Route (See figure 6, page 7)

* The user selects a set daily route
* User inputs their information, such as location, destination, and time
* AI suggests the best recurring schedule
* Notifications are sent to the user each morning informing them of the best route that day
* User receives notifications of bus tracking, delays, etc.

A diagram of a cell phone

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Figure 6: The UI storyboard for task 2

**Prototype**

Overview of Low-Fidelity Prototype

The prototype comprises hand-drawn UI storyboard screens (see Figure 7, page 9) with arrows indicating user interactions and the flow between different states. It visually stimulates how users input trip details, receive AI-generated recommendations, confirm their routes, and receive transit notifications.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Screen Number** | **Screen Name** | **Function** | **User Interaction** |
| **1** | **Home Page** | Provides quick-access buttons: "Plan Route," "Daily Schedule," and "Bus Tracker." | Tap a button to start a task (e.g., "Plan Route" to find transit options). |
| **2** | **Plan Route Input Screen** | Users enter trip details (start location, destination, time). | Type input and tap "Ask AI" to proceed. |
| **3** | **AI Chat Route Suggestions** | AI recommends the best route based on buses and walking times. | View suggested route and confirm selection. |
| **4** | **Route Confirmation** | Users can save their AI-generated route for future reference. | Tap "Save Route" to store it for later use. |
| **2b** | **View Daily Routes** | |  | | --- | |  |  |  | | --- | | Displays saved daily transit routes. | | Tap "Add Daily Route" to create a new recurring route. |
| **3b** | **Set Daily Route Input** | Users configure a repeating transit schedule (e.g., home to work on weekdays). | Select start and end points, time, and notification settings. |
| **4b** | **Daily Route Confirmation and Management** | Confirms the saved route and allows users to edit/delete it. | Tap "Edit" to modify or "Remove" to delete the saved route. |
| **5** | **Notification Screen** | Sends users real-time alerts about bus arrival updates. | Read notification and adjust schedule if necessary. |

A group of notes with green and black writing

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Figure 7: The final prototype of the interface carries out both tasks.

Key Interaction Ideas and User Flow

* Touch Input: Users navigate through button taps and text input fields.
* AI-powered route suggestions: The system automatically calculates and presents the most efficient transit route.
* Real-time notifications: users receive alerts when buses change schedule or arrive earlier/later.
* Route customization: Users can set and edit recurring daily trips.

How users operate the prototype:

1. Task 1: Finding the best route with AI
   1. The user taps “plan route” on the home screen.
   2. Enter trip details on the planned route input screen and tap “ask AI.”
   3. AI suggests the best route on the AI chat route suggestion screen.
   4. The user confirms the route on the route confirmation screen and saves it.
2. Task 2: Setting a daily route
   1. User taps “daily schedule” on the home screen.
   2. View previously saved routes or tap “add daily route" on the View Daily Routes screen.
   3. Enter route details on the set detail route screen (e.g., home to work, Monday-Friday at 8:00 AM).
   4. The daily route confirmation screen appears, allowing users to save, edit, or delete routes.
   5. The system sends a real-time notification if there are changes to their scheduled bus.

This prototype effectively demonstrates the concept of an AI-powered transit assistant, allowing users to find optimal routes, manage their daily transit schedule, and receive real-time updates.

With initial prototypes developed, I moved into the evaluation phase to better understand how users interacted with the new system. By conducting a mini-usability study using the thinking-aloud method, I aimed to test the clarity and effectiveness of our interface, particularly the features related to route creation and daily schedule setup. The insights collected here directly informed our final iteration.

**The Prototype:**

The prototype being tested is a low-fidelity interface for a redesigned version of the Passio GO transit app. Based on the need finding research conducted during Project 1, the top usability issues centered around real-time reliability and the lack of personalization incorporated in the route planning process. Users expressed frustration with inaccurate bus timing, as well as shining a light on the difficulty in planning regular daily routes or getting specific route suggestions. This prototype introduces two major functionalities: AI-powered route planning and daily route scheduling. The AI-powered route planning suggests the best route based on user input. The daily route scheduling allows users to set and save regular trips and receive live notifications if bus timing changes. The interface is navigated via touch, with standard tap interactions used to move between different screens. It features a clean, vertical layout and distinct buttons for major tasks such as “Plan Route,” “Ask AI,” and “Add Daily Route.”

**Method:**

Task:

The selected task for testing was: “Create a new daily route from home to work, confirm the route, and ensure notifications are enabled.”

This task was chosen because it involves the core functionality introduced in the prototype, which users specifically requested in the needfinding phase. It required the participant to explore multiple screens and confirm that the system is intuitive and clearly labeled.

Participants:

Two participants were recruited based on random selection from the Kent State public transportation systems.

* Participant 1: Male, 21, senior on-campus student. Moderate tech familiarity, occasionally uses Passio GO for visiting off-campus friends.
* Participant 2: Female, 18, senior in high school, and takes classes at Kent State. Tech-savvy and uses public transportation 4-5 days a week.

Participants were selected based on their use of public transit and unfamiliarity with the new prototype. Neither had seen nor interacted with it before.

Procedure:

Each participant was given a printed sheet with the task description. I encouraged them to talk aloud during the task, and would ask “What are you thinking now?” when necessary. The prototype was presented as a series of paper sketches laid out on a table. Participants physically “tapped” screens to navigate, with me swapping the screens accordingly. After completing the task, each participant answered 3 post-task questions:

1. On a scale of 1-5, how easy was it to complete this task?
2. What part of the interface was most confusing?
3. What feature did you like the most?

**Results:**

Participant 1:

* Time to complete: About 3.5 minutes
* Errors: Skipped selecting notification toggle. Realized it later
* Quote: “Wait, how do I know if I will get a notification?”
* Post-task survey:
  + Ease: 3/5
  + Confusing part: “The notifications weren’t super obvious.”
  + Favorite feature: “That I could set exact days and times.”

Participant 2:

* Time to complete: About 2 minutes
* Errors: None, but hesitated briefly on screen 3b (wasn’t sure if “Find Route” would save it or just preview it).
* Quote: “This part is so cool, AI planning it for me. But I didn’t expect Find Route to also save it.”
* Post-task survey:
  + Ease: 4/5
  + Confusing part: “The green button at the end could say ‘Save’ instead.”
  + Favorite feature: “The confirmation screen with ‘Edit’ and ‘Remove’ options.”

**Analysis:**

Both users were able to complete the task with minimal support, indicating that the flow of the prototype is largely intuitive. However, some usability issues were uncovered:

* The “Find Route” button on the daily schedule screen was misinterpreted as a preview-only button by one participant. Renaming it to “Save and Find Route” may make the purpose clearer.
* The notification toggle was overlooked by the first participant. It may benefit from better visual contrast or a short explanation beside it (for example, “Get alerts about delays”).

In both cases, the confirmation screen (4b) was received positively. Its inclusion of “Edit” and “Remove” gave users a sense of control, which was reassuring. Participant 1’s experience revealed that less confident users might need slightly more guidance or icon explanations. Adding tiny info icons or labels could help.

**Conclusion**:

The low-fidelity prototype successfully communicated the concept of an AI-powered, customizable route planning tool. Participants quickly grasped the purpose and navigated most of the interface without assistance. However, subtle interface tweaks could resolve usability concerns:

* Rename “Find Route” to something more final, like “Save and Find.”
* Emphasize the notification toggle with bold colors or an explanatory label.
* Possibly add a tooltip or info icon to help novice users understand each step.

These revisions will help me make the interface more accessible and intuitive to a broader range of users before moving to a high-fidelity or coded version.

**User Persona**

* Name: Sophia
* Age: 21
* Status: Senior commuter at Kent State
* Tech Comfort Level: High
* Needs: Sophia commutes 20 minutes from a nearby city and takes a campus bus to class. She needs a reliable, fast way to plan her route each day and hates dealing with changing bus times without warning.

**Scenario**

Sophia has a full day of classes starting at 9:30 AM. She opens the PassioGO app at 8:00 AM to plan her trip from home to campus. Instead of guessing which bus might get her there on time, she uses the AI-powered feature to generate the best route. It shows that bus 108 > 81 > Blue Line will get her there by 9:15. She confirms and saves the route. Later, at 8:55, she receives a notification that the first bus is 5 minutes early – she adjusts and makes it to class with no stress.

**Design Suggestions Based on Usability Study**

* Change button labels for clarity: Users misinterpreted “Find Route” as a preview instead of a confirmation. I suggest changing it to “Save and Start” or “Confirm Route.”
* Make notification toggle more prominent: A colored toggle paired with a label like “Remind me if this changes,” would prevent users from missing the alert feature.
* Add visual hierarchy to guide actions: A more defined button order and slight shading around the “Next Step” actions would reinforce user flow.

**Updated Prototype Summary**

If I were to iterate further, our updates would include:

* Revised button language and consistent terminology throughout the flow
* Higher visual contrast for notification-related items
* A new tooltip style help icon next to key screens like “ask AI” and “Set Daily Route” for less confident users

These updates would increase the app's accessibility while preserving its main value: allowing students to easily plan, adjust, and manage their campus commutes.