



The moment that switched off Pay by Plate

How a strategy turned a confusing location request into a clear choice for users.

My role

Individual contributor & end to end UX ownership



About Circle K

~5202

stores across Europe

One stop for fuel, car wash and everyday essentials.

With so many stations, one confusing screen affects a huge number of drivers.

Summary

Pay by Plate is a key Circle K feature that makes fueling faster and more seamless.

But there was a problem: it required “Always” location access and this was where many users dropped off.

Research showed::

- ★ Users were surprised by the “Always” location request.
- ★ None of them understood why it was needed.
- ★ Some had already limited location access, unknowingly disabling Pay by Plate.

So I redesigned the decision, not just the screen.

People weren't refusing to share their location. They just didn't understand why we needed it.

What is Pay by Plate?

Circle K wanted to make fueling as easy as possible. They created Pay by Plate, a feature where your car's license plate is used to identify and make fueling seamlessly.



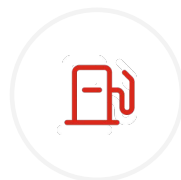
Arrive at station

Drive into a Circle K station



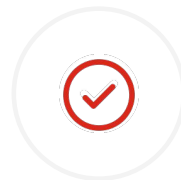
Car recognised

A camera reads your number plate



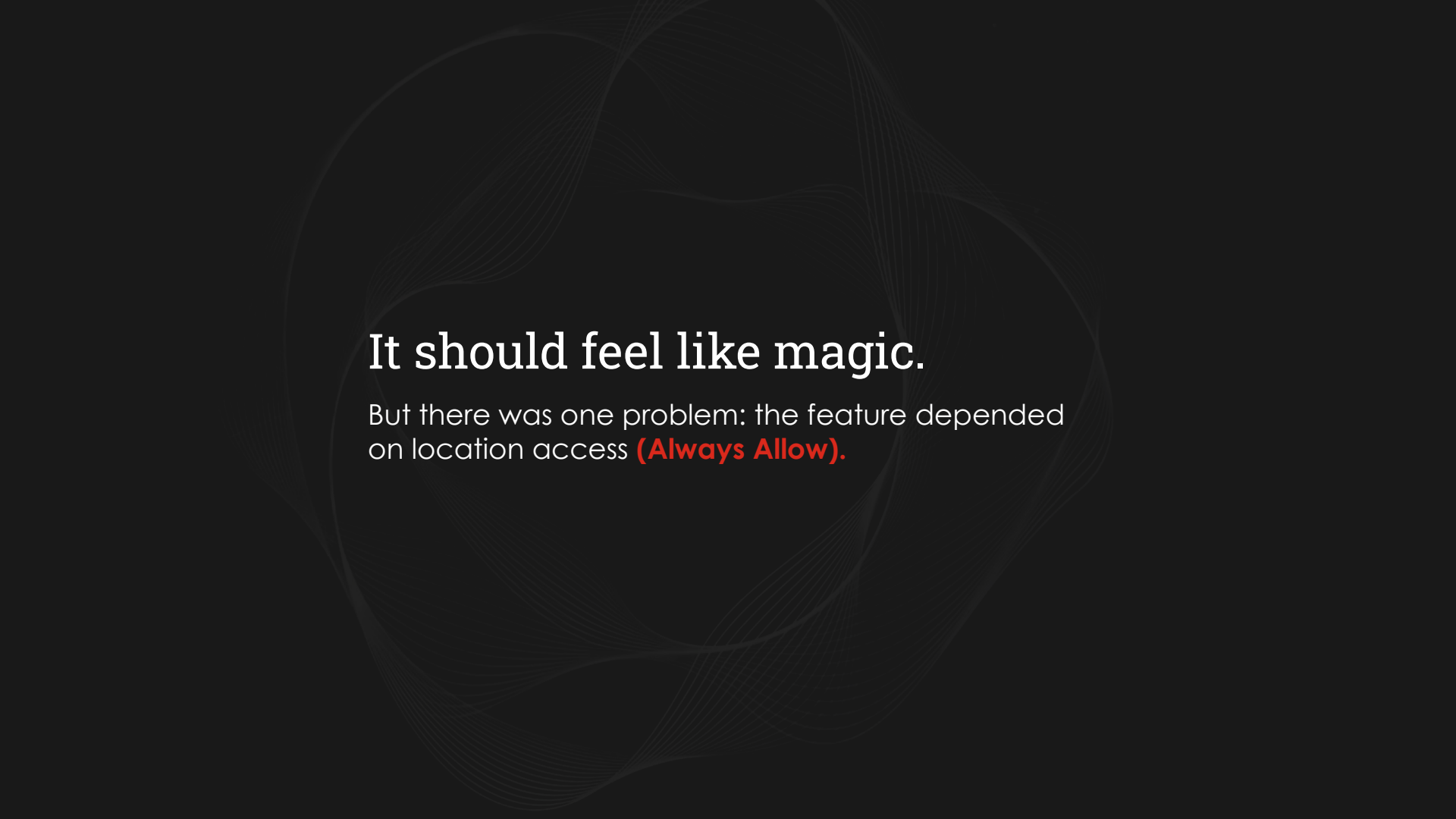
Pump unlocks

The pump is ready for you



Fill up & go

Payment happens by itself



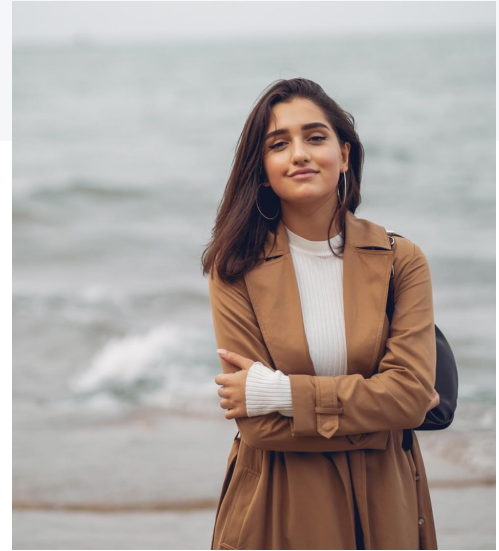
It should feel like magic.

But there was one problem: the feature depended on location access **(Always Allow)**.

Meet Sofie

Sofie wanted Pay by Plate. One screen stopped her.

Sofie drives to work every day and fills up at Circle K. She loves the idea of Pay by Plate: no card, no queue, no phone at the pump. She signs up in less than a minute. Then the app asks for her location, and everything changes.



Sofie Madsen, 34

Drives to work daily, Circle K regular

One tap and Pay by Plate stopped working.

The app tells her to set location to “Always”, but doesn’t say why. Sofie worries the app will track her everywhere, so she chooses “While Using the app”.

At the pump, nothing happens. Now she has to open the app and confirm, every time she fills up.

The app never told her why.

Location permissions

To enable frictionless experience, allow Circle K app to access your location all the time.



Location

➤ Set to Always and Precise Location

Location setting '**Always**' and '**Precise Location**' is required for frictionless experience.

Circle K app will use location in the background to verify that you're located at Circle K gas station while you proceed with your frictionless fueling. This ensures the security of the process.

ENABLE LOCATION

**Sofie wasn't alone.
Most users felt the same.**

*Without knowing it, users turned off the
feature they had just signed up for.*

9 in10

paused at "Always Allow"
because of privacy worries

6 in10

didn't know this choice stopped
Pay by Plate from working

70%

chose "While Using" and
thought the feature would
still work

65%

asked why location was needed
and worried about battery and
notifications

75%

were happy to share their location once the benefit was clearly explained.

So people weren't saying no to sharing location.

- ★ They said no because nobody explained why.
- ★ **6 in 10** wanted to try the feature first, before giving full access.

Three reasons the screen failed

It said what to do, not why

"Set to Always and Precise Location." An order, with no reason.

WHY: The text was written for the system, not for the user.

Proof: 9 in 10 paused

Safety words made people more scared

"Verify that you're located" and "background location" sounded like tracking.

WHY: Words meant to build trust made the fear worse.

Proof: 65% asked why

There was no way back

Choose "While Using" and nothing tells you the feature stopped working.

WHY: Too much text, no reminder to switch later, and no way to change your mind.

Proof: 6 in 10 didn't know

How other apps ask for location



- ★ First ask for "While Using"
- ★ Ask for "Always" only when needed
- ★ Explain why, and show where to change it



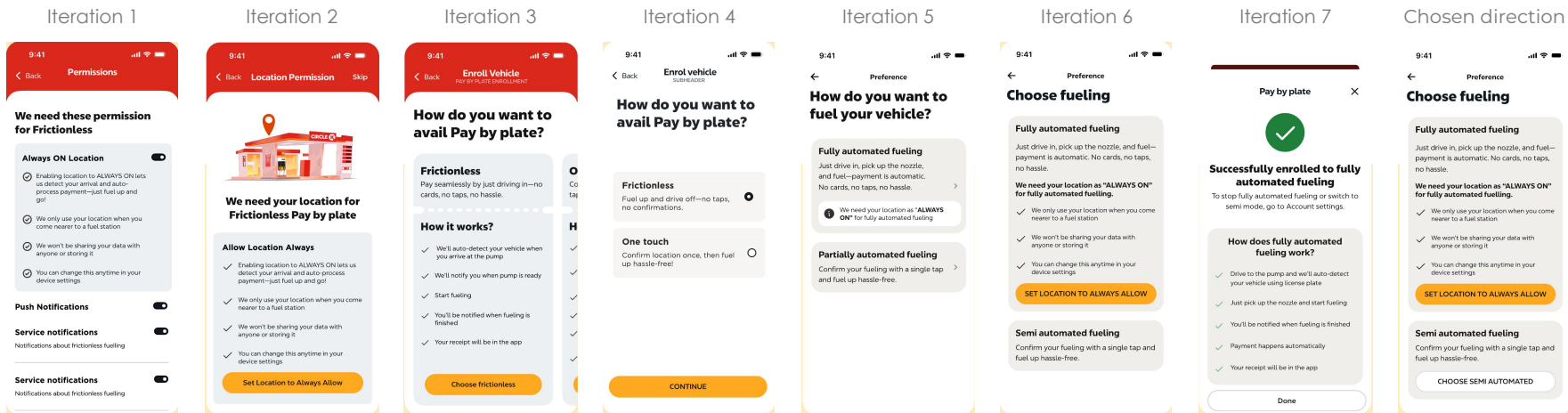
- ★ Ask at the right time
- ★ Only ask when it's useful
- ★ Keep it short



- ★ Show the benefit first
- ★ Explain before the phone asks
- ★ Be clear about what happens

The pattern: Start small, explain why, and let people change their mind. Users already trust apps that work this way Circle K needed to catch up.

Iterations: from asking permission to offering a choice



I wrote for the system, **not the user**

"Fully automated" and "semi automated" are our words, not user's.

I **explained more**, instead of explaining better

Every details was on the screen, so nothing stood out. At the pump, people have seconds, not minutes.

Too much to compare

Two blocks of similar text side by side. People just wanted to fuel and go, not read and compare.

♦ **How I used AI** I used AI to generate more directions and wording ideas for this screen, then picked the best ones.

Five changes to turn fear into confidence

I didn't just redesign a screen.
I redesigned the moment
people decide.

01

Show the benefit

Tell people what they
get, not what we need.

03

Be open and clear

Say exactly when we use
location, and when we don't.

05

Keep it simple

One clear choice, not a
wall of text.

02

Make it easy to start

Offer an option for people
who aren't ready.

04

Give back control

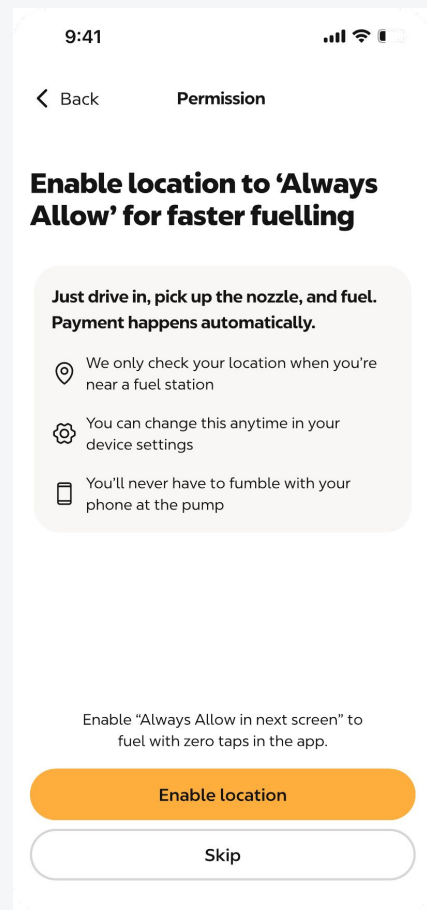
Tell people they can
change it anytime.

Now imagine the same moment, redesigned.

Sofie sees a new screen. It starts with what she gets: “Enable ‘Always Allow’ for faster fuelling.”

Three short lines tell her:
we only check location **near** a fuel station,
she can **change it anytime**, and
she **never needs** her phone at the pump.

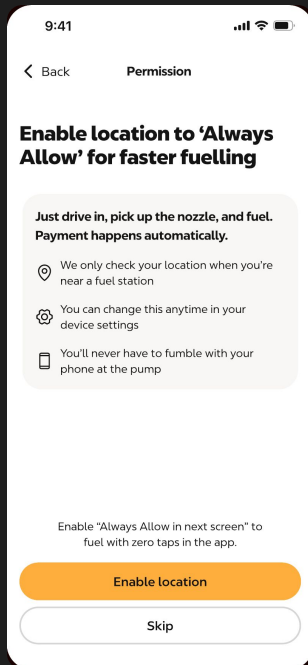
She understands why, so she feels safe saying yes.



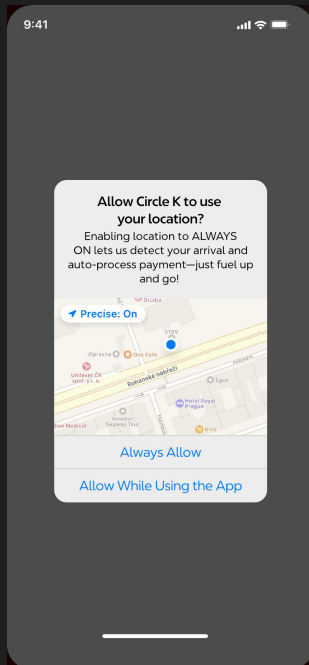
The new flow: every answer leads to success

Whatever Sofie picks, she can enroll. If she picks "While Using", the app explains what that means and how to switch later.

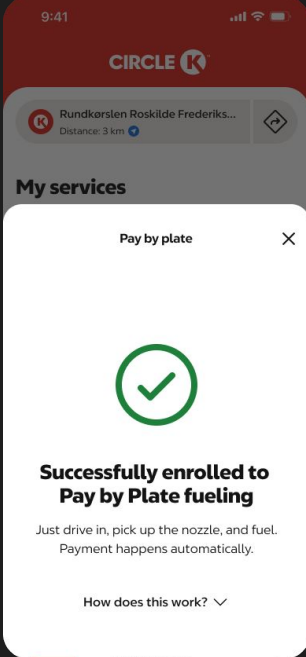
Location explanation



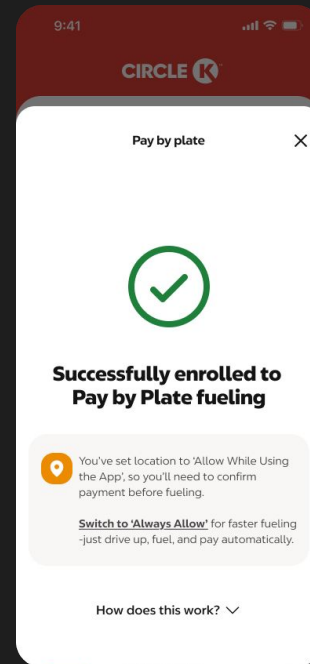
Phone's location pop-up



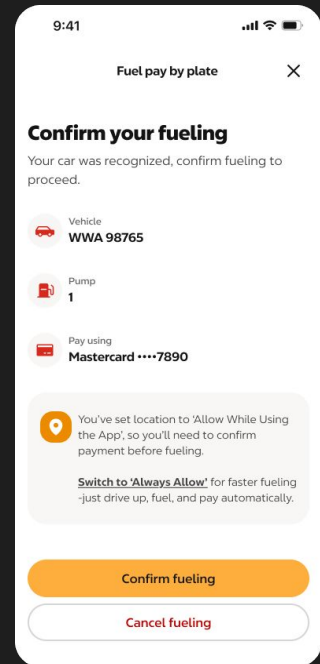
If "Always Allow"



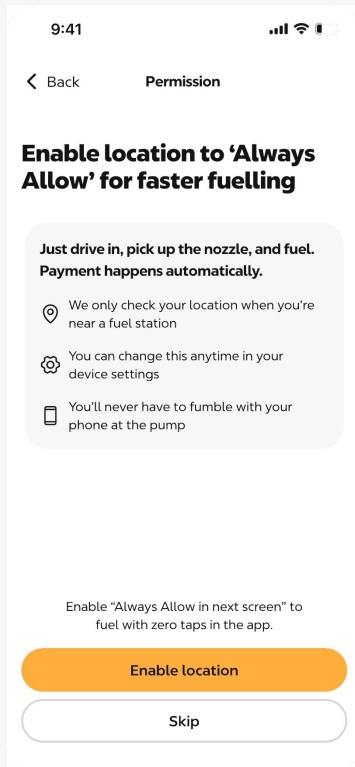
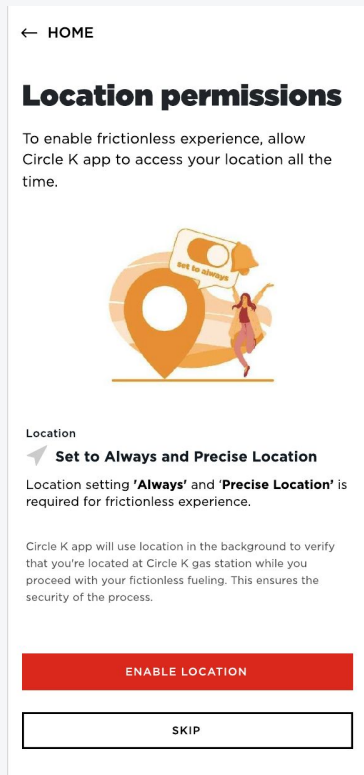
If "While Using"



Contextual switch



Same request. Clearer, kinder words.



Before

"Set to Always and Precise Location"

"...use location in the background to verify that you're located at a Circle K gas station..."

After

Enable location to "Always Allow" for faster fuelling

Just drive in, pick up the nozzle, and fuel.

We only check your location when you're near a fuel station

You can change this anytime in your device settings

Why the new design works?

Benefit first (framing effect)

The headline says what you get, not what we need.

Be specific (less uncertainty)

“Only near a fuel station” instead of “background”.

Right moment (progressive disclosure)

We suggest “Always” after people choose, not before.

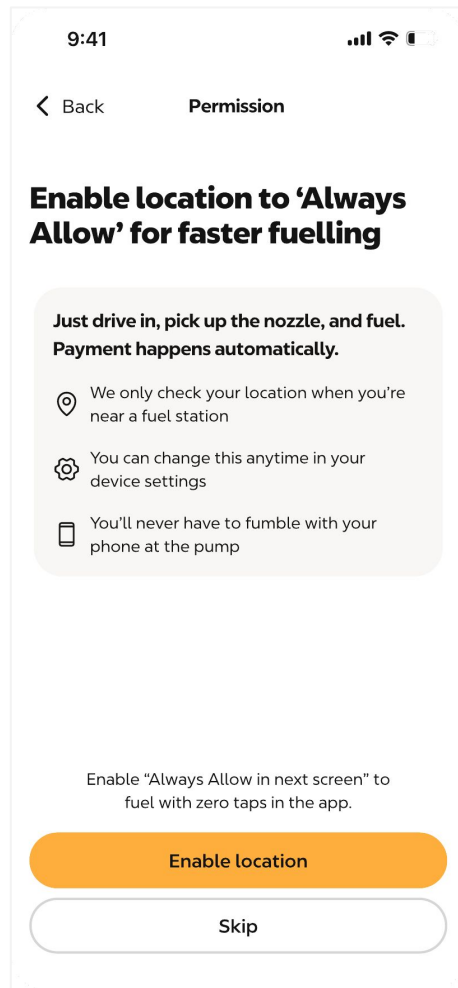
Less to read (cognitive load)

A long paragraph became three short lines.

Easy to undo (loss aversion)

“Change this anytime” makes feel safe.

♦ **How I used AI** Before testing with users, I used AI to review each design for clarity and UX principles.



What users said when we tested it

“

This version feels much clearer than the previous one. I understand why the app needs my location now.

They understood why

“

Knowing it only checks near the station makes me feel more comfortable. It doesn't feel like the app is tracking me all the time.

Knowing the limit removed the fear

“

This screen is easier to read. I don't feel overwhelmed by information like before.

Easier to read

Impact

*Tested the new redesigns
again with users*

78%

Choose “Always Allow”

2 in10

Hesitated at location request

88%

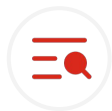
Comfortable sharing their
location

10%

asked why location was needed

How I used AI in this project

AI helped me work faster and explore more. The decisions and final designs were mine.



RESEARCH

Making sense of the data

Used AI to sort the Applause user testing findings into clear themes, so I could spot the big problems quickly.



IDEAS

Exploring more directions

Used AI to generate different ideas for the permission screen and its wording, then picked and shaped the best ones.



DESIGN REVIEW

Checking every iteration

Used AI to review my designs for clarity and UX principles before testing them with users.

♦ **AI as a partner, not a replacement.** Every insight was checked against real user data.

What I learned?

The app still needs "Always Allow".

By explaining why, I turned a scary request into an easy, confident yes.

- ★ **Iterate and collaborate:** Multiple design iterations and regular stakeholder reviews helped improve the final solution.
- ★ **Use AI as a design helper:** AI can help synthesize large amounts of research data and generate multiple concepts faster.
- ★ **Understand platform limitations:** Understanding iOS and Android limitations around location permissions is important when designing location-based experiences.

THANK YOU