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Andrew has over 18 years experience as a human factors consultant, predominately in the transport field. His many projects have included support for station refurbishments and control point design. He has led the latest UK research into good practice for the management of station and on-train crowds, and wayfinding for stations.

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More information about Davis Associates can be found at [www.davis-associates.co.uk](http://www.davis-associates.co.uk)

## People-centred design for rail station wayfinding

### Abstract

It seems obvious that wayfinding systems should be people-centred. Yet many are designed with little or no structured user research. Such systems might look great, and even win design awards, but they may result in confusion and delay for users. Staff resources are absorbed in giving directions and the reputation of the responsible organisation is damaged.

There are proven research methods which greatly increase the chances of getting the wayfinding strategy right first time. With the right methods, and a little experience, designers, planners and architects could adopt a more people-centred approach to their wayfinding work.

People-centred design is all about understanding the true needs of people in order to better inform design decisions. This needs more than designer's intuition: a true understanding of user needs requires a rigorous, evidence-based approach involving engagement with a range of end-users throughout the design process.

The best opportunity to capture the information cues used during the decision process is during, or very soon after, that decision. Journey shadowing is one way to get close to this. This technique has been used by Davis Associates for the UK's Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) to research passenger needs at rail stations. Journey shadowing uses verbal protocol analysis, or 'think aloud', to capture the wayfinding process as it happens. Like wayfinding itself, this is a continuous process as the user moves through the space.

This project was a UK rail industry first. The strength of the method has been shown by:

- Identification of more than just signage issues
- Repeated issues amongst a range of users
- The depth and detail of information obtained

Verbal protocol techniques have their limitations and questions must be timed with care. However, when applied by human factors specialists, this technique is one of several to extend the boundaries of wayfinding research, enabling better solutions as a result.